

THE SNAKE AND THE MIRROR

Thinking about the Text

I. Discuss in pairs and answer each question below in a short paragraph (30–40 words).

Question 1. “The sound was a familiar one.” What sound did the doctor hear? What did he think it was? How many times did he hear it? (Find the places in the text.) When and why did the sounds stop?

Answer: The doctor heard some noise from above when he opened the door.
He thought that the sound was of rats.
He heard it four times, including the sound he heard when he opened the door:
“Again I heard that sound from above.”
“Again came that noise from above.”
“Suddenly there came a dull thud as if a rubber tube had fallen to the ground...”
The sounds stopped when the snake appeared in front of the doctor.

Question 2. What two “important” and “earth-shaking” decisions did the doctor take while he was looking into the mirror?

Answer: The two important and earth-shaking decisions that the doctor took while he was looking into the mirror are:
i. He would shave daily and grow a thin moustache to look more handsome.
ii. He would always keep that attractive smile on his face.

Question 3. “I looked into the mirror and smiled,” says the doctor. A little later he says, “I forgot my danger and smiled feebly at myself.”
What is the doctor’s opinion about himself when: (i) he first smiles, and (ii) he smiles again? In what way do his thoughts change in between, and why?

Answer: (i) When the doctor smiled first, he was thinking that his smile was very attractive.
(ii) When he smiled again, he was thinking that he was a poor and stupid doctor.
His thoughts changed from being a handsome doctor to being a stupid doctor between the two situations. His thoughts changed because his life was now in danger.

II. This story about a frightening incident is narrated in a humorous way. What makes it humorous? (Think of the contrasts it presents between dreams and reality. Some of them are listed below.)

Question 1. (i) The kind of person the doctor is (money, possessions)
(ii) The kind of person he wants to be (appearance, ambition)

Answer: (i) The doctor is a person whose earnings were meagre. His house was a small rented room. He only had 60 rupees, some shirts, dhotis and a black coat.

(ii) He believes in making himself look handsome. He decides that he would shave daily and grow a thin moustache.

Question 2. (i) The person he wants to marry
(ii) The person he actually marries

Answer: (i) He wants to marry a fat woman doctor who had plenty of money.
(ii) He marries to a thin reedy person with the gift of a sprinter.

Question 3. (i) His thoughts when he looks into the mirror
(ii) His thoughts when the snake is coiled around his arm
Write short paragraphs on each of these to get your answer.

Answer: (i) When he looks into the mirror, he thinks that he has a very attractive smile. He decides to put on that smile on his face always and to shave daily. He seems contented when he looks into the mirror.

(ii) When the snake is coiled around his arm, he keeps sitting there holding his breath. He thinks that he is a poor and stupid doctor. He is terrified by the snake's presence.

Thinking about Language

I. Here are some sentences from the text. Say which of them tell you, that the author: (a) was afraid of the snake, (b) was proud of his appearance, (c) had a sense of humour, (d) was no longer afraid of the snake.

1. I was turned to stone.
2. I was no mere image cut in granite.
3. The arm was beginning to be drained of strength.
4. I tried in my imagination to write in bright letters outside my little heart the words, 'O God'.
5. I didn't tremble. I didn't cry out.
6. I looked into the mirror and smiled. It was an attractive smile.
7. I was suddenly a man of flesh and blood.
8. I was after all a bachelor, and a doctor too on top of it!
9. The fellow had such a sense of cleanliness...! The rascal could have taken it and used it after washing it with soap and water.

10. Was it trying to make an important decision about growing a moustache or using eye shadow and mascara or wearing a vermilion spot on its forehead.

Answer:

- (a) Was afraid of the snake: Sentences 1, 3, 4, 5.
- (b) Was proud of his appearance: Sentences 6, 8.
- (c) Had a sense of humour: Sentences 9, 10.
- (d) Was no longer afraid of the snake: Sentence 2, 7.

II. Expressions used to show fear

Can you find the expressions in the story that tell you that the author was frightened? Read the story and complete the following sentences.

- 1. I was turned _____.
- 2. I sat there holding _____.
- 3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like _____.

Answer:

- 1. I was turned to stone.
- 2. I sat there holding my breath.
- 3. In the light of the lamp I sat there like a stone image in the flesh.

III. In the sentences given below some words and expressions are italicised. They are variously mean that one

- is very frightened.
- is too scared to move.
- is frightened by something that happens suddenly.
- makes another feel frightened.

Match the meanings with the words/expressions in italics, and write the appropriate meaning next to the sentence. The first one has been done for you.

- 1. I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits. (very frightened)
- 2. I *got a fright* when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge.
- 3. He *nearly jumped out of his skin* when he saw the bull coming towards him.
- 4. You really *gave me a fright* when you crept up behind me like that.
- 5. Wait until I tell his story — it will *make your hair stand on end*.
- 6. *Paralysed with fear*, the boy faced his abductors.
- 7. The boy hid behind the door, *not moving a muscle*.

Answer:

- 1. I knew a man was following me, I was scared out of my wits. (very frightened)

2. I *got a fright* when I realised how close I was to the cliff edge. (too scared to move)
3. He *nearly jumped out of his skin* when he saw the bull coming towards him. (to be suddenly surprised or frightened by something)
4. You really *gave me a fright* when you crept up behind me like that. (too scared/ frightened)
5. Wait until I tell his story — it will *make your hair stand on end*. (feel shocked or scared)
6. *Paralysed with fear*, the boy faced his abductors. (too horrified to move)
7. The boy hid behind the door, *not moving a muscle*. (too frightened to move)

IV. Reported questions

Report these questions using if/whether or why/when/where/how/which/what.
Remember the italicised verbs change into the past tense.

1. Meena asked her friend, “Do you think your teacher will come today?”
2. David asked his colleague, “Where will you go this summer?”
3. He asked the little boy, “Why are you studying English?”
4. She asked me, “When are we going to leave?”
5. Pran asked me, “Have you finished reading the newspaper?”
6. Seema asked her, “How long have you lived here?”
7. Sheila asked the children, “Are you ready to do the work?”

Answer:

1. Meena asked her friend if he/she thought his/her teacher would come that day.
2. David asked his colleague where he would go that summer.
3. He asked the little boy why he was studying English.
4. She asked me when we were going to leave.
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7. Sheila asked the children if they were ready to do the work.

Speaking

Using some of the expressions given above in exercise III, talk about an incident when you were very scared. You may have a competition to decide whose story was the most frightening.

Answer: Students are advised to try answering this question themselves.

Dictation

The following paragraph is about the Indian cobra. Read it twice and close your book. Your teacher will then dictate the paragraph to you. Write it down with appropriate punctuation marks.

The Indian cobra is the common name for members of the family of venomous snakes, known for their intimidating looks and deadly bite. Cobras are recognised by the hoods that they flare when angry or disturbed; the hoods are created by the extension of the ribs behind the cobras' heads. Obviously the best prevention is to avoid getting bitten. This is facilitated by the fact that humans are not the natural prey of any venomous snake. We are a bit large for them to swallow whole and they have no means of chopping us up into bite-size pieces. Nearly all snakebites in humans are the result of a snake defending itself when it feels threatened. In general snakes are shy and will simply leave if you give them a chance.

Answer: Do it yourself.

Writing

Question 1: Try to rewrite the story without its humour, merely as a frightening incident. What details or parts of the story would you leave out?

Answer: Do it yourself.

Question 2: Read the description given alongside this sketch from a photograph in a newspaper (Times of India, 4 September 1999). Make up a story about what the monkey is thinking, or why it is looking into a mirror. Write a paragraph about it.

Answer: THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL

On a bright day, a monkey was having fun climbing and switching trees. Suddenly he saw a shining piece of mirror on the ground. He jumped down and had a close look at the mirror. At first, he could not understand what it was. After some time, he realised that the thing in his hand showed him his reflection. He looked at his face in the mirror. He removed twigs and dust that was stuck to his face. He made several faces and kept looking at his reflection. He touched his head and rubbed his hair. He preened himself for long. Then he threw the mirror back on the ground and took a leap onto the next tree.

Translation

Question 1: The text you read is a translation of a story by a well-known Malayalam writer, Vaikom Muhammad Basheer.

In translating a story from one language to another, a translator must keep the content intact. However, the language and the style differ in different translations of the same text.

Here are two translations of the opening paragraphs of a novel by the Japanese writer, Haruki Murakami. Read them and answer the questions given below.

A	B
When the phone rang I was in the kitchen, boiling a potful of spaghetti and whistling along with an FM broadcast of the overture to Rossini's <i>The Thieving Magpie</i> , which has to be the perfect music for cooking pasta.	I'm in the kitchen cooking spaghetti when the woman calls. Another moment until the spaghetti is done; there I am, whistling the prelude to Rossini's <i>La Gazza Ladra</i> along with the FM radio. Perfect spaghetti-cooking music!
I wanted to ignore the phone, not only because the spaghetti was nearly done, but because Claudio Abbado was bringing the London Symphony to its musical climax.	I hear the telephone ring but tell myself, Ignore it. Let the spaghetti finish cooking. It's almost done, and besides, Claudio Abbado and the London Symphony Orchestra are coming to a crescendo.

Compare the two translations on the basis of the following points.

- the tense of narration (past and present tense)
- short, incomplete sentences
- sentence length

Which of these translations do you like? Give reasons for your choice.

Answer:

Tense of narration:

In translation A, the narration is in past tense.

In translation B, the narration is in simple present tense.

Short, incomplete sentences:

Sentences in translation A are long and there are no incomplete sentences.

Sentences in translation B are short and we find some incomplete sentences too.

Sentence Length:

Sentence length is more in translation A as compared to the translation B.

I like the translation B more as compared to the translation A. This is because translation B is in present tense and thus gives a clearer understanding to the reader. Sentences are crisp and short.