

Mijbil the Otter

Oral Comprehension Check (Page 106)

Question 1:

What 'experiment' did Maxwell think Camusfearna would be suitable for?

Answer:

Maxwell had travelled to Southern Iraq in 1956 and he fancied the idea of keeping an otter as a pet instead of a dog. He thought Camusfearna was surrounded by water that was a stone's throw from its door, so it would be an eminently suitable spot for this 'experiment'.

Question 2:

Why does he go to Basra? How long does he wait there, and why?

Answer:

Maxwell went to Basra to the Consulate-General to collect and answer his mail from Europe. However, though his friend's mail had arrived, his had not. So he cabled to England and three days later, he even made a phone call which had to be booked 24 hours in advance. On the first day, the line was out of order; on the second day, the exchange was closed for a religious holiday. On the third day, there was another breakdown. His friend had left and the writer arranged to meet him in a week's time. Finally after five days, his mail arrived. Hence, Maxwell had to wait for five days for arrival of his mail.

Question 3:

How does he get the otter? Does he like it? Pick out the words that tell you this.

Answer:

When the writer's mail arrived, he took to his bedroom to read. He saw two Arabs squatting on the floor with a sack that squirmed from time to time. They handed him a note which was from his friend, which mentioned that he had sent him an otter.

Yes, Maxwell liked it. We know this from his words "An otter fixation" used to describe his feelings towards the otter. He felt the term was used to express his strong attachment towards otters like any other otter owner would feel.

Question 4:

Why was the otter named 'Maxwell's otter'?

Answer:

An otter was typically called by zoologists as "Lutrogale Perspicillata Maxwelli", so it was called Maxwell's otter in short.

Question 5:

Tick the right answer. In the beginning, the otter was

- aloof and indifferent

- friendly
- hostile

Answer:

In the beginning, the otter was aloof and indifferent.

Question 6:

What happened when Maxwell took Mijbil to the bathroom? What did it do two days after that?

Answer:

When Maxwell first took Mijbil to the bathroom, the otter first went wild with joy in the water for the first half an hour. He plunged and rolled in it, shooting up and down the length of the bathtub and making enough slosh and splash for a hippo.

After two days, the otter suddenly disappeared from Maxwell's bedroom and went to the bathroom to play in the water and he was up on the end of the bathtub and fumbling at the chromium taps with his paws. The author watched in amazement how the little creature had turned the tap to produce a trickle of water slowly and after a moment achieved the full flow.

Oral Comprehension Check (Page 108-109)

Question 1:

How was Mij to be transported to England?

Answer:

Maxwell booked a flight to Paris and from there he would fly to England as British airlines do not allow pets on board. The airline authorities insisted that Mijbil should be packed into an eighteen inches square box, to be carried on the floor near Maxwell's feet. Hence, he got a box made and an hour before they started and he put Mij into the box so that he would become accustomed to it. He then quickly rushed to get a meal.

Question 2:

What did Mij do to the box?

Answer:

The box was lined with a metal sheet, but Mij wasn't feeling comfortable inside the box and tried to escape from it. In his attempt to escape, Mijbil tore into the metal lining of the box, hurt himself and started bleeding.

Question 3:

Why did Maxwell put the otter back in the box? How do you think he felt when he did this?

Answer:

Maxwell knew that there was no other way he could carry Mij to London, so he put the otter back into the box. He was anxious and felt sorry by looking at the otter's condition as he hurt himself while trying to escape from the box.

Question 4:

Why does Maxwell say the airhostess was “the very queen of her kind”?

Answer:

The airhostess was very friendly and showed sympathy to Maxwell after listening to his story. She respected his feelings and concern about the incident with the box and gave him the permission to take the otter out of the box and keep his pet on his knee. Hearing this, the author developed a profound admiration for the kind lady and referred her as “the very queen of her kind”.

Question 5:

What happened when the box was opened?

Answer:

As soon as the box was opened, Mij jumped out of it. He disappeared in no time and ran all over the place scaring other passengers in the flight. The otter created a lot of chaos in the airplane and the co-passengers got scared looking at the little creature. Out of fear, a woman stood up on her seat as he went beneath the legs of a portly white-turbaned Indian. Maxwell tried to get hold of Mij, but failed. The airhostess assured Maxwell that she would find the otter for him. Soon enough, Mijbil returned to the author and bounded on to his knee and began to nuzzle his face and his neck.

Oral Comprehension Check (Page 110)

Question 1:

What game had Mij invented?

Answer:

Mij invented a game of playing with the ping-pong ball. One of the author’s suitcases was damaged and had a slope on the lid. Mij would put the ball on the high end of the sloping lid and run to catch the ball as it slid down towards the lower end.

Question 2:

What are ‘compulsive habits’? What does Maxwell say are the compulsive habits of (i) school children (ii) Mij?

Answer:

Compulsive habits usually refers to strange behavioural acts done by a person without clear reason. For example, a kid may jump over a fence, instead taking the normal passageway. Usually children express compulsive behaviour as they are mischievous by nature.

(i) As per the story, Maxwell expresses compulsive habits such the rituals of children who on their way to and from school must place their feet squarely on the centre of each paving block; must touch every seventh upright of the iron railings, or pass to the outside of every second lamp post.

(ii) Similarly, even Mijbil while on his way home would jump over the boundary wall railing and gallop the full length of its thirty yards, to the hopeless distraction both of pupils and of staff within.

Question 3:

What group of animals do otters belong to?

Answer:

Otters belong to a relatively small group of animals known as Mustellines. The other animals of this group are badger, mongoose, weasel, stoat, mink and others.

Question 4:

What guesses did the Londoners make about what Mij was?

Answer:

According to Maxwell, Londoners do not recognize otters easily as they are not found in England. Hence, they made the wildest possible guesses about Mijbil. Some people guesses ranged from a baby seal, a squirrel, a walrus, a beaver, a bear cub, a leopard, a hippo to a brontosaurus.

Thinking about the Text (Page 110-111)**Question 1:**

What things does Mij do which tell you that he is an intelligent, friendly and fun-loving animal who needs love?

Answer:

Mij proved his intelligence when he invented his own game of ping-pong ball on a worn-out suitcase of Maxwell. Another instance of his intelligence was when he opened the tap in the bathroom and got into the tub and played with water. Although initially he was aloof and indifferent towards Maxwell, he gradually exhibited his friendly nature towards his owner. This is evident from the fact that he clung to Maxwell's feet in the flight. He developed a close bond with the author in due course of time and proved to be a fun-loving animal when he developed games on his own and exhibited certain compulsive habits on his walks with Maxwell in the streets of London.

Question 2:

What are some of the things we come to know about otters from this text?

Answer:

Otters belong to a relatively small group of animals called Mustellines that is shared by badger, mongoose, weasel, stoat, mink and others. They are mostly found in large numbers in marshy areas. Arabs tame them as pets. Otters love to play with water and splash in it. Maxwell's otter was of an unknown race to science and was at length named by zoologists as *Lutrogale Perspicillata Maxwelli*, hence, it is also known as Maxwell's otter in short. We also came to know that otters are intelligent and fun-loving animals who invent and love to play their own games and have a friendly nature towards human beings.

Question 3:

Why is Mij's species now known to the world as Maxwell's otter?

Answer:

Maxwell's otter was of an unknown race to science and was at length named by zoologists as *Lutrogale Perspicillata Maxwelli*, hence, it is also known as Maxwell's otter in short.

Question 4:

Maxwell in the story speaks for the otter, Mij. He tells us what the otter feels and thinks on different occasions. Given below are some things the otter does. Complete the column on the right to say what Maxwell says about what Mij feels and thinks.

What Mij does	How Mij feels or thinks
plunges, rolls in the water and makes the water splosh and splash	
Screws the tap in the wrong way	
Nuzzles Maxwell's face and neck in the aeroplane	

Answer:

What Mij does	How Mij feels or thinks
plunges, rolls in the water and makes the water splosh and splash	Went wild with joy
Screws the tap in the wrong way	Irritated and disappointed at the tap's failure to cooperate
Nuzzles Maxwell's face and neck in the aeroplane	a distressed chitter of recognition and welcome

Question 5:

Read the story and find the sentences where Maxwell describes his pet otter. Then choose and arrange your sentences to illustrate those statements below that you think are true.

Maxwell's description

- (i) makes Mij seem almost human, like a small boy.
- (ii) shows that he is often irritated with what Mij does.
- (iii) shows that he is often surprised by what Mij does.
- (iv) of Mij's antics is comical.
- (v) shows that he observes the antics of Mij very carefully.
- (vi) shows that he thinks Mij is a very ordinary otter.
- (vii) shows that he thinks the otter is very unusual.

Answer:

- (i) True. The statement – "He spent most of his time in play."
- (ii) False
- (iii) True. The statement – "I watched, amazed; in less than a minute he had turned the tap far enough to produce a trickle of water, and after a moment or two achieved the full flow."

(iv) True. The statement – “Marbles were Mij’s favourite toys for this pastime: he would lie on his back rolling two or more of them up and down his wide, flat belly without ever dropping one to the floor.

(v) True. The statement – “A suitcase that I had taken to Iraq had become damaged on the journey home, so that the lid, when closed, remained at a slope from one end to the other. Mij discovered that if he placed the ball on the high end it would run down the length of the suitcase. He would dash around to the other end to ambush its arrival, hide from it, crouching, to spring up and take it by surprise, grab it and trot off with it to the high end once more.”

(vi) False

(vii) True. The statement – “It is not, I suppose, in any way strange that the average Londoner should not recognise an otter, but the variety of guesses as to what kind of animal this might be came as a surprise to me.”

Thinking about Language (Page 111-114)

Question I: Describing a Repeated Action in the Past

From the table below, make as many correct sentences as you can using would and/or used to, as appropriate. (Hint: First decide whether the words in *italics* show an action, or a state or situation, in the past.) Then add two or three sentences of your own to it.

Emperor Akbar	would used to	<i>be fond of musical evenings.</i>
Every evening we		<i>take long walks on the beach.</i>
Fifty years ago, very few people		<i>own cars.</i>
Till the 1980s, Shanghai		<i>have very dirty streets.</i>
My uncle		<i>spend his holidays by the sea.</i>

Answer:

- Emperor Akbar used to be fond of musical evenings.
- Every evening we would take long walks on the beach.
- Fifty years ago, very few people used to own cars.
- Till the 1980s, Shanghai used to have very dirty streets.
- My uncle used to spend his holidays by the sea.
- My uncle used to be fond of musical evenings.
- My uncle would take long walks on the beach.

Question II: Noun Modifiers

- Look at these examples from the text, and say whether the modifiers (in *italics*) are nouns, proper nouns, or adjective plus noun.

(i) An *otter* fixation

(ii) The *iron* railings

(iii) The *Tigris* marshes

(iv) The *London* streets

(v) *soft velvet* fur

(vi) A *four-footed soccer* player

Answer:

(i) Noun

(ii) Noun

(iii) Proper Noun

(iv) Proper Noun

(v) Adjective plus noun

(vi) Adjective plus noun

2. Given below are some nouns, and a set of modifiers (in the box). Combine the nouns and modifiers to make as many appropriate phrases as you can. (Hint: The nouns and modifiers are all from the texts in this book.)

temple	girls	triangle	dresses
person	thoughts	boys	roar
gifts	scream	farewell	expression
time	subject	landscape	handkerchief
crossing	flight	chatterbox	profession
physique	coffee	view	celebration

college	rough	hundred	stone	ordinary
love	uncomfortable	white	slang	slack
bare	railroad	tremendous	family	marriage
plump	invigorating	panoramic	heartbreaking	birthday
incorrigible	ridiculous	loud	first	three

Answer:

1.	Temple	White temple, Stone temple
2.	Gifts	Ordinary gift, birthday gift.
3.	Time	First time, family time, college time, rough time

4.	Crossing	Railroad crossing, first crossing
5.	Physique	Plump physique, ordinary physique
6.	Girls	Plump girls, college girls
7.	Thoughts	Uncomfortable thoughts, ridiculous thoughts, ordinary thoughts, good thoughts, invigorating thoughts, heartbreaking
8.	Scream	Loud scream, heartbreaking scream
9.	Subject	Ordinary subject, college subject
10.	Flight	First flight, ordinary flight, rough flight, uncomfortable flight
11.	Coffee	Black coffee, ordinary coffee, invigorating coffee
12.	Farewell	College farewell, heartbreaking farewell
13.	Landscape	Rough landscape, bare landscape
14.	Chatterbox	Incorrigible chatterbox, ridiculous chatterbox
15.	View	Panoramic view, ordinary view, tremendous view
16.	Dresses	Ordinary dresses, birthday dresses, marriage dresses, hundred dresses
17.	Handkerchief	White handkerchief, clean handkerchief, ordinary handkerchief
18.	Profession	Family profession, first profession, ordinary profession
19.	Celebration	Birthday celebration, tremendous celebration, family celebration
20.	Roar	Loud roar, tremendous roar

Question III:

1. Match the words on the left with a word on the right. Some words on the left can go with more than one word on the right.

(i) a portion of	– blood
(ii) a pool of	– cotton
(iii) flakes of	– stones
(iv) a huge heap of	– gold
(v) a gust of	– fried fish
(vi) little drops of	– snow
(vii) a piece of	– water
(viii) a pot of	– wind

Answer:

(i) a portion of	– fried fish
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(ii) a pool of	– blood
(iii) flakes of	– snow
(iv) a huge heap of	– stones
(v) a gust of	– wind
(vi) little drops of	– water
(vii) a piece of	– cotton
(viii) a pot of	– gold

2. Use *a bit of/a piece of/a bunch of/a cloud of/a lump of* with the italicised nouns in the following sentences. The first has been done for you as an example.

- (i) My teacher gave me *some advice*. My teacher gave me a bit of advice.
- (ii) Can you give me *some clay*, please. _____
- (iii) The *information* you gave was very useful. _____
- (iv) Because of these factories *smoke* hangs over the city. _____
- (v) Two *stones* rubbed together can produce sparks of fire. _____
- (vi) He gave me some *flowers* on my birthday. _____

Answer:

- (i) My teacher gave me **a bit of** advice.
- (ii) Can you give me **a lump of** clay please?
- (iii) The **piece of** information you gave was very useful.
- (iv) Because of, these factories, **a cloud of** smoke hangs over the city.
- (v) Two **pieces of** stone rubbed together can produce sparks of fire.
- (vi) He gave me **a bunch of** flowers on my birthday.

Speaking (Page 114)

Question 1:

You have seen how Maxwell describes Mij the otter's feelings and thoughts by watching him. Play the game of dumb charades. Take turns to express a feeling or thought silently, through gestures. Let the class speak out their guesses about the feelings or thoughts you are trying to express.

Answer:

Activity to be done by yourself.

Writing (Page 114)

Question 1:

Write a description of a person or an animal (such as a pet) that you know very well and love very much. Questions (4) and (5) in 'Thinking about the Text' will have given you some idea about how to do this. Mention some things the person or animal does, what you think the person or animal feels, etc.

Answer:

Activity to be done by yourself.