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**Understanding The Text**

**1. Comment on the indifference that meets Iona's attempts to share his grief with his few fellow human beings.**

**Answer:**

A week before, Iona Potapov had lost his son. He wanted to express his emotions, suffering and worry at the loss of his son. The people who passed by were not keen to listen to him. The people were busy or in a hurry or tired. So no one took notice of his words when he started every time. At last, he told his story to his horse.

**2. What impression of the character of Iona do you get from this story?**

**Answer:**

An old cab driver named Iona had lost his young son. Due to his loneliness, he was reduced to an apparition figure. He badly wanted to talk to someone and share all his sentiments. He was so broken that he tried to talk to everybody. While he mourned his loss, hopelessness and sorrow surrounded him. The thoughts of his son bothered him so badly that he was even unaware of the snow in his surroundings. He brandished his horse more than usual and drove his sledge rashly. He became emotionally weak and kept explaining his loss even to the people who would be uninterested in knowing. He tried talking to the policemen, his passengers and the three drunkards. He was scared as he was old and had lost his young son. He understood that it would be not easy for him to earn his living. He even confessed to his horse that if he had his son alive, they would not have suffered and would have had lots of food for their living. His position was that of an old man who lost his young son and felt helpless.

**3. How does the horse serve as a true friend and companion to Iona?**

**Answer:**

When Iona understood that there was no one to listen to his grievance at the loss of his son, he turned to his horse. He attempted to talk to the officers, his passengers, the young cab driver and the drunkards about his son and what he said before his death. This occurred about a week earlier, and the cab driver had no one to talk to so far. Eventually, he decided to look after his horse. It was very painful for him to think about his son when he was alone. So he chose to keep himself busy. As he had no corn, he fed the little horse with hay as that was all he could do, as his earnings was not sufficient as he had lost his young son. He described this to the horse. The driver explained the entire story of his young son to the horse while the horse calmly listened and breathed over his master's hand like a true companion.

**Talking About The Text**

**Discuss the following in pairs**

**1. Empathy and understanding are going out of modern society. The individual experiences intense alienation from the society around him or her.**

**Answer:**

We have stepped into an era which feeds on globalisation. A world which is driven by fast technology. The age-old sentiments and emotions are all antiquated. There is less time for understanding and empathy. The lifestyle of ordinary human beings has developed, which in turn, changes the ethics of our society. People are so busy with their own work, and the pressure which they undergo leaves no time to wonder or ponder. It is a state which makes humans mechanical, lacking in sensibility, and overtaken by practicality. This has altered the concept of society. An individual is separated from society. This makes humans contribute only to the technological advancement of society but not to cultural values. The concept of dependence and

sharing has vanished from our culture, and we have restricted ourselves by not expressing feelings of sorrow, joy, love or fear. Now humans have given up such emotions and are purposefully not giving in to them.

**2. Behind the public face of the people in various occupations is a whole saga of personal suffering and joy which they wish to share with others.**

**Answer:**

Every human being has a part of their heart unexplored, like Iona. They safeguard it from others and yet wait for it to be uncovered; by sharing it all with a friend, a companion, or a mate. A human has many facets, like a diamond. In public, what people wear is one of those facets. There is a kid inside everyone, a female inside every male and a male inside every female, hidden, unknown. People usually keep these facets safe inside and yet want to share them with others. In this current world, people, being more practical, wiser and busy, must spend a little time sharing their inner selves with someone. The real face behind all of us is protected consciously and needs more time to be understood. Our souls are repressed, yet we aspire to share our darkest secrets with others – our joys, our sufferings, our hidden selves, and our desires. In this developing world, few of them find their true companion with whom they can share their sufferings and joys, which are always locked in their hearts.

**Appreciation**

**1. The story begins with a description of the setting. How does this serve as a fitting prelude to the events described in the story?**

**Answer:**

In Iona Potapov's story, the setting explained at the beginning lays the mood for the reader, the environment is gloomy and dark as it is covered with snow. The author tried to inject sadness into the heart of readers through the atmosphere he described so that the readers' mind is in tune with the mood of the main character. The author narrates the appearance and position of Iona. He looks like a phantom who is not interested in the world, not aware of his surroundings and the snow that covers his horse's back and his eyelashes. This perfectly sets the mood for a story that is to expose the protagonist's loss at which he mourns.

**2. Comment on the graphic detail with which the various passengers who took Iona's cab are described.**

**Answer:**

The narrator chronicled the passengers who took Iona's cab by explaining the sketch of their character. The officer was the first one. It gives us an idea of the frustration that the policeman had. These characters illustrate the current society we are living in – how a police officer was nonchalant about someone's loss and how a drunkard might respond to someone's grief. Even the boy in the stable did not pay attention to Iona's story. Not even a single person had time to listen to what the poor cab driver wanted to say in this busy world.

**3. This short story revolves around a single important event. Discuss how the narrative is woven around this central fact.**

**Answer:**

This story revolves around a simple important event. Iona Potapov, a poor cab driver, lost his son the earlier week. Iona wants to share his sorrow with someone as a load that he carries weighs his heart. Hence, understanding that no friend or companion can share his grief, he attempts to share it with the people he comes across. Iona tries to convey his sorrow to the passengers that board his sledge to understand how unconcerned everyone is. His misery grows, and he sinks into sadness. In this story, there is only one thing

which remains constant, the loss that Iona is going through and his effort to come over it. So speechless is the father that he later decides to talk his heart out to his horse. The horse pays attention to Iona's story calmly while munching hay, which proves it is a true companion.

**4. The story begins and ends with Iona and his horse. Comment on the significance of this to the plot of the story.**

**Answer:**

This story is a caricature of how detached human beings are that one should discover a true companion in an animal. Iona is portrayed with his horse from the beginning of the story. When Iona is affected by his loss and is unhappy, his horse and himself stand unmoved at the beginning. It shows that both of them shared the same grief. They were unaware of the surroundings and heavy snow, Iona due to his grief and the horse for being a slave animal. The story explains how Iona shows his frustration by unnecessarily brandishing the horse, but still, the horse remains loyal to his master. In the end, Iona had no one to listen to him, and his heavy heart was unable to release the burden. He finds comfort in his horse's company. He walks towards the horse to feed him some hay. He speaks to the animal telling how his young son had died. He mourned that as he is poor and old, he would be facing trouble earning. The little horse munches, listens and breathes over its master's hand to prove its loyalty.

**Language Work**

**1. Look at the following set of words and mention what is common to them in form and meaning.**

Snuffle	Snort	Sniffle	Snore
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**Answer:**

The set of words given are the different ways of breathing.

Snuffle – To breathe noisily due to cold or crying

Snort – To breathe noisily through the nose to express anger

Sniffle – To breathe air through the nose by making sound, especially while having a cold or crying

Snore – To breathe noisily through nose and mouth while asleep

**2. Look at the words given in the box below**

snigger	wriggle	sneak	squeak
squawk	titter	pant	chuckle
giggle	jeer	chortle	guffaw
sigh	sidle	boo	shriek
scramble	croak	straggle	plod
gasp			

Now classify them according to their closeness in meaning to the words given below

A	B	C	D	E
snigger	wriggle	squeak	jeer	sigh

**Answer:**

snigger – chuckle, titter, chuckle, giggle, chortle

wriggle – sneak, sidle, scramble, struggle, plod

squeak – squawk, guffaw, shriek, croak

jeer – boo

sigh – pant, gasp

**3. Explain the associations that the colour ‘white’ has in the story.**

**Answer:**

The colour of light is white. The irony in ‘The Lament’ is evident in the darkness portrayed in the story. At the beginning of the story, in order to convey the misery of Iona Potapov, the narrator explains that he is so white that it makes him look like a phantom. His horse is also white. The colour of snow is white. Snow here reflects the lethargy and despondency of the winter season and how the whole atmosphere and environment appear to be thrown into sadness. The evening sets in, making it look so withered and white. The light of the street lamps is white, which replaces the brighter rays. The whole setting, which lays stress on the surroundings, reflects the loneliness of the cab driver.

**4. What does the phrase ‘as if he were on needles’ mean? Can you think of another phrase with a similar meaning substituting the word ‘needles’?**

**Answer:**

The actual phrase is ‘on pins and needles,’ which means to be anxiously waiting to see what is going to occur.

Another phrase with a similar meaning is ‘on tenterhooks’.