

Comprehension Passages

Passage 1

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

An old man with steel rimmed spectacles and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road. There was a pontoon bridge across the river and carts, trucks, and men, women and children were crossing it. The mule-drawn carts staggered up the steep bank from the bridge with soldiers helping push against the spokes of the wheels. The trucks ground up and away heading out of it all and the peasants plodded along in the ankle deep dust. But the old man sat there without moving. He was too tired to go any farther.

Question 1.

Who was sitting by the side of the road?

Answer:

An old man wearing steel rimmed glasses and very dusty clothes was sitting by the side of the road.

Question 2.

What does the term “pontoon bridge” mean?

Answer:

A pontoon bridge also known as a floating bridge, uses floats or shallow-draft boats to support a continuous deck for pedestrian and vehicle travel. The buoyancy of the supports limits the maximum load they can carry. Most pontoon bridges are temporary, used in wartime and civil emergencies.

Question 3.

Why were the soldiers “helping to push against the spokes of the wheels”?

Answer:

The soldiers were “helping to push against the spokes of the wheels” because there was a steep elevation.

Question 4.

What does the reference to the old man in the beginning and the end of the passage indicate?

Answer:

The author through the reference to the old man in the beginning and the end of the passage intends to bring the figure of the old man under a sharp focus.

Question 5.

Why did the old man continue to sit without moving with the other villagers?

Answer:

The old man continued to sit because he was too tired to walk further.

Passage 2

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridge head 3 beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.”Where do you come from?” I asked him.

"From San Carlos," he said, and smiled.

That was his native town and so it gave him pleasure to mention it and he smiled.

"I was taking care of animals," he explained.

"Oh," I said, not quite understanding.

"Yes," he said, "I stayed, you see, taking care of animals. I was the last one to leave the town of San Carlos."

He did not look like a shepherd nor a herdsman and I looked at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel rimmed spectacles and said, "What animals were they?"

"Various animals," he said, and shook his head. "I had to leave them."

Question 1.

What was the name of the old man's native town?

Answer:

The name of the name of the old man's native town was San Carlos.

Question 2.

What is the narrator's job?

Answer:

The narrator's job was to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced.

Question 3.

Why did the old man leave his hometown? Why did he leave it reluctantly?

Answer:

The old man had to leave his hometown due to the war as the town was being evacuated. He left it reluctantly because he had to take care of his animals and he did not want to abandon them.

Question 4.

What did the narrator see on the bridge when he returned?

Answer:

When the narrator returned he saw that there were only a few carts and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.

Question 5.

What gave the old man pleasure?

Answer:

When he said the name of his hometown aloud, it gave the old man pleasure.

Passage 3

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

"There were three animals altogether," he explained. "There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons."

"And you had to leave them?" I asked.

"Yes. Because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery." "And you have no family?" I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.

"No," he said, "only the animals I stated. The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others."

"What politics have you?" I asked.

"I am without politics," he said. "I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers now and I think now I can go no further."

"This is not a good place to stop," I said. "If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it

forks for Tortosa.”

“I will wait a while,” he said, “ and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?” “Towards Barcelona,” I told him.

“I know no one in that direction,” he said, “but thank you very much.

Question 1.

Why cannot the old man walk further?

Answer:

He could not walk further as he was seventy-six years old and he had come twelve kilometers. He was very tired.

Question 2.

Why did the old man have to leave his animals?

Answer:

The old man left the animals because the enemy artillery was advancing.

Question 3.

Does the old man have a family? What were the animals he was worried about?

Answer:

The old man had no family, only the animals. He had a cat which would “be all right as it could survive on its own, but he was worried about the goat.

Question 4.

Why did the soldier tell the old man that it was not a good place to stop?

Answer:

The soldier told the old man that it was not a good place to stop because the enemy was advancing and soon their planes would launch bombs on the bridge.

Question 5.

Where did the narrator want the old man to go?

Answer:

The narrator wanted the old man to go up the road to where it divided for Tortosa as there were trucks there which would take the old man to Barcelona.

Passage 4

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, and then said, having to share his worry with someone, “The cat will be all right, I am sure. There is no need to be unquiet about the cat. But the others. Now what do you think about the others?”

“Why they’ll probably come through it all right.”

“You think so?”

“Why not,” I said, watching the far bank where now there were no carts.

“But what will they do under the artillery when I was told to leave because of the artillery?”

“Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“Then they’ll fly.”

“Yes, certainly they’ll fly. But the others. It’s better not to think about the others,” he said.

Question 1.

What does the old man worry about? Why?

Answer:

The old man is worried not about the cat or the doves but about the goat because they would come under artillery fire and they could not escape like the cat or fly away like the doves.

Question 2.

How does the soldier console the old man? Does it affect the old man in a positive way?

Answer:

The soldier tells the old man that the animals would survive and the doves would fly away. But the old man is not consoled as he continues to worry about the others, the goats.

Question 3.

Which animal is the old man least concerned about?

Answer:

The old man is least concerned about the cat as it is said the cat has nine lives and is a survivor.

Question 4.

Why is the old man not worried about the birds?

Answer:

He is not worried about the birds as he had left the cage door open and they would fly off.

Question 5.

Why is the old man worried about the goats?

Answer:

The old man is about the goats because they would come under artillery fire as they would not be able to escape.

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Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

"If you are rested I would go," I urged. "Get up and try to walk now."

"Thank you," he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.

"I was taking care of animals," he said dully, but no longer to me. "I was only taking care of animals."

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was a grey overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that the old man would ever have.

Question 1.

When the narrator spoke to the old man about the pigeon cage, what does this reveal about him?

Answer:

When the narrator speaks to the old man about the pigeon cage it reveals that he cares for the old man.

Question 2.

Why might the old man need good luck at the end of the story?

Answer:

The old man needs good luck at the end of the story because he is not moving away from the war zone and could die from artillery.

Question 3.

What is the theme of the story?

Answer:

The theme of the story is that we should make sacrifices for those things we love and that war is destructive and dangerous.

Question 4.

Explain the line, 'There was nothing to do about him.'

Answer:

This line expresses the sadness and pity that the soldier feels for the old man as he realises that if the old man sits on the bridge he would surely die. He is loyal to the military system and has to obey orders and do his duty. He can do nothing for the old man and knows that inevitable death is in his fate.

Question 5.

Why could the Fascists planes not fly?

Answer:

The planes could not fly because the sky was overcast and weather was bad.

Assignment

Question 1.

How does the seemingly small incident described in the story reveal a significant truth about life?

Answer:

The short story, "The Old Man at the Bridge" is set during the Spanish Civil War—the old man is a civilian in loyalist territory; the narrator is a loyalist sympathizer, and it is only a matter of time before the fascists advance on the town from across the bridge. The old man is weak and weary; at the beginning of the story all the peasants in the area are migrating to safety, away from the war, but the old man cannot make it. He is sitting in the dust by the side of the road, despairing, clinging to the memory of his home and his animals. He was taking care of animals—specifically, two goats, a cat, and four pigeons, in his hometown of San Carlos, before the town was evacuated due to artillery fire. The old man had no family beyond these animals, and he could not bear to leave them, so much so that he was the very last person to leave San Carlos. When asked about his loyalties, the old man replies, "I have no politics ... I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers now and I think now I can go no further."

The old man refuses to get on a truck, because the trucks are headed towards Barcelona and he knows no one in that direction. He no longer has the will to move on. This reveals a fact of life: if a person has no will to live, too often he will not live. The animals were all the man had, and now that he had abandoned them, he has nothing. Life is defined by our relationships, by what we value, and once those things are gone, once we have nothing to live for, it takes rigid determination to push on. For the old man, his remaining years will prove to be lonely and harsh. And so he chooses rather to stay and face his fate. It is not cowardly, it is not weak—it is reason.

In short, the old man has come to terms with his death, and with the fact that he cannot now control what happens to his animals. He comes constantly back to this point, fretting over the fate of his animals—over his surrogate family, as it were. Even as he resigns himself to death, his mind is on the only things that gave his life meaning. "I was only taking care of animals," the man repeats several times. He was living a simple life, and a contented one, and yet the war disrupted this contentment and will lead ultimately to the man's demise. War is an interruption; war separates people from all they know and love, and often these individuals cannot bounce back from the trauma. War destroys in more sectors than the battlefield. After all that he has given up, after all that he has lost, the old man is lucky, according to the narrator, only in that the weather has prevented the fascists from sending out their planes that day—"That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves," a comforting thought for the old man in his last days.

Question 2.

Discuss the conflict in the story, "Old Man at the Bridge"?

Answer:

In Old Man on the Bridge, the conflict is not between the principal characters but between much larger forces whose struggle affects the lives of the little people unavoidably involved. On the one side of the great conflict is the army of the Loyalists. They are fighting to preserve the legally elected Spanish government. On the other side is the army of the Fascists. The little people, such as the weary old man at the bridge, are forced to scramble to keep from getting crushed between the opposing juggernauts. The old man symbolizes the Spanish people in general. He is not concerned about the greater issues involved in the conflict. He isn't capable of understanding them. The Spanish Civil War was considered to be a prelude to World War II, which covered the entire globe and resulted in the deaths of some seventy million people, half of whom were civilians. The old man is only concerned about a few animals—a cat, two goats, and eight pigeons—which he had to leave behind when he fled the advancing Fascists. The narrator presents this slice-of-life as a picture of the face of war. The advancing Fascist army might be said to symbolize the great conflict which seems to be threatening much of the entire world. Hemingway's story was published in 1938. Britain and France declared war on Germany in 1939. America was drawn into the international conflict when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor in Hawaii in 1941.

Question 3.

Why is the old man at the bridge?

Answer:

The old man sat down beside the road because he is too tired to go any farther. He is one of the many civilians fleeing before the advancing forces of the Fascists. The Fascists, or Nationalists, were killing peasants and workers as a means of spreading terror and also under the assumption that these impoverished people must be supporters of the lawfully elected Loyalist government.

The narrator, a nameless soldier, is standing there because he is watching for the approach of the enemy. He is evidently an American and one of the many foreigners who volunteered to help the Loyalist cause against the fascist rebels. The dialogue in "Old Man at the Bridge" is in English, but it is simple and lucid. Hemingway was very good at writing dialogue and used dialogue to characterize the speakers as well as to provide exposition.

The narrator is primarily concerned about the advancing army, but he is also concerned about the old man.

"This is not a good place to stop," I said. "If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa."

When the narrator again advises him more urgently to get up and go on, "Thank you," he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.

It is pretty obvious that this old man is going to get killed when the Fascists cross the bridge. He is too old and too worn out to flee any farther, and he doesn't really have anything left to live for. He might be said to symbolize the Liberal government and its Loyalist supporters, gradually being overwhelmed by the Fascists who were backed by Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy.

This little story, or slice-of-life, is intended to represent the big picture of the war. Hemingway was a foreign correspondent and was accustomed to sending brief dispatches because of time and communication constraints. Foreign correspondents were fond of finding little scenes that symbolized great historical events. Hemingway wrote this story as a dispatch and then decided to publish it as a short story instead.

Question 4.

What does the old man's moral dilemma reveal in Hemingway's short story, "The Old Man at the Bridge"?

Answer:

The old man has already walked twelve kilometers away from his home town San Carlos. He is sitting in dust on the road side close to a bridge on the River Ebro. He is worried about his animals that include a cat, two goats and four pairs of pigeons; they also constitute his family.

The troops have forced him along with others to vacate his home town as the enemy was approaching fast to carry out a massive attack.

The "trucks up the road" would take him towards Barcelona, if he boards one. Several of them have been deployed to take the civilians to safe places. But the old man doesn't want to go further. When the narrator urges him to leave the place, the old man says, "Thank you," and gets to his feet but instead of going along with him, he "...swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust."

The old man's dilemma is about making a decision about whether to proceed towards Barcelona where he knows "no one in that direction" or to await his fate sitting alone in the dust and thinking about his mute family members, his animals.

His dilemma shows how deep his attachment is to his animals. The fact that he is putting his life in danger by not moving further doesn't seem to bother him much. Although he has come miles away from his animals, he is simply unable to move ahead without them.

Besides, his dilemma makes him a foil to the remorseless and cruel enemy who won't hesitate to open indiscriminate firing on the civilians, soldiers and even animals and birds alike.

Question 5.

Who was talking to the old man?

Answer:

The narrator of this brief story does not identify himself, but there are indications that he is one of the many foreigners who volunteered to help the Loyalist cause during the Spanish Civil War, which broke out in 1937 and ended with the victory of the Fascist forces, aided and abetted by fascist Germany and fascist Italy in what is generally considered a prelude or rehearsal for World War II.

The narrator tells us: 'It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many cars now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.'

It is evident that although the dialogue is in English, the two men are really speaking Spanish. The old peasant certainly would not know English. It is clear that the narrator's Spanish/English is somewhat constrained because he does not know the language well because he speaks to the old man in short sentences using a limited vocabulary. However, his explication to the reader is in proper English, as in the long sentence: 'It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced.'

He would not have tried to say this to the old man in Spanish/English because he wouldn't have known how to say it in Spanish, and the old man would never have understood anyway. An example of the narrator's stilted Spanish is the following: 'What politics have you?' This is the way the question would be translated from Spanish into English if it were a literal translation. Hemingway used dialogues effectively to convey what the characters think and speak.

So it would not be incorrect to assume that the narrator is an American volunteer working for the Loyalist cause and trying to carry on a conversation with a aged native Spanish speaker while his attention is mainly focused on the area on the other side of the bridge, where he expects to see the Fascist army appear momentarily. The narrator has obviously been in Spain for some time and has

seen fighting, air raids, artillery shelling, fleeing civilians, countless corpses, and other grim aspects of the Spanish Civil War.

He says, 'I was watching the bridge and the African looking country of the Ebro Delta and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.'

Question 6.

What thoughts are uppermost in the soldier's mind as he talks with the old man?

Answer:

The incident described in "Old Man at the Bridge" takes place during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). The narrator appears to be one of the many foreigners who volunteered to aid the Loyalists against the fascist reactionaries. The narrator seems to be an American soldier or volunteer. The unnamed narrator of "Old Man at the Bridge" has been given the assignment of watching enemy movements on the other side of the bridge and reporting back.

He says, 'It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge.'

The thought uppermost in the narrator's mind as he talks with the old man is the approaching enemy troops. He is just making conversation with the old man because he has nothing to do but wait. He explains, 'I was watching the bridge and the African looking country of the Ebro Delta and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.'

The words used by the author that the narrator is 'wondering' and 'listening' show clearly that the advancing enemy is uppermost in his mind, which is certainly understandable. The old man does not seem in the least concerned about the advancing enemy or about his own possible danger. He is only concerned about the animals he had to leave behind. There were two goats, a cat, and four pairs of pigeons. It was the old man's responsibility to take care of them, and he feels sad about having to leave them behind. Without his animals, the old man has nothing to live for. They are his family. He is seventy-six years old and worn out from the ordeal of retreating before the advancing enemy. Hemingway is using the old man to symbolize the plight of the Spanish peasantry, who suffered the most from the war.

Question 7.

What does the reader learn about the characters of the narrator and the old man, in Ernest Hemingway "Old Man and the Bridge"?

Answer:

The narrator seems to be with the army that is anticipating the attack of the enemy from somewhere beyond the bridge. The narrator may be a scout of some kind. He tells us * that his job is to cross over the bridge, assess how close the enemy is and return. He notices the old man as he crosses the bridge to do his job, and when he returns, although most of the peasant traffic has gone, he finds the old man still there. He strikes up a conversation with the elderly gentleman and tries to encourage him to move on to a safer location.

The old man has left San Carlos, his home town and he reports that he was the last to leave, departing only because of the danger of artillery fire. The elderly man reports that he has no politics, taking neither side in the war raging around him. He also says that he has no family. The old man says that he was in San Carlos caring for animals: two goats, a cat, and four pairs of pigeons. The soldier tells the old man that he really had to leave because of the danger he faced due to the advancing enemy. The old man is exhausted and having a hard time finding the energy

to move on. He tells the soldier (narrator) about the animals. He is worried about what would happen to them; if it was dangerous for him, would it not also be dangerous for the animals?

The soldier tries to comfort the man, and once again encourages him to leave, but the old man becomes more mentally unfocused; and when he rises, he sways and sits back down.

Finally, when the soldier leaves, the old man is still seated next to the bridge.

Question 8.

What is the significance of Easter Sunday in “Old Man at the Bridge”?

Answer:

“The Old Man at the Bridge” is one of Hemingway’s shortest tales. It is based upon an Easter Sunday stopover at the Ebro River during his coverage of the Spanish Civil War in April 1938. Although employed by the North American Newspaper Association (NANA), Hemingway apparently decided to submit it to Ken Magazine as a short story instead of using it as a news article.

Hemingway reports an incident that took place on an Easter Sunday. It might have just been a coincidence that this incident took place on Easter Sunday.

On the other hand, Hemingway might have wanted to emphasize the irony of the situation that the ‘old man’s’ life is in danger on the very same day that Jesus Christ rose from the dead.

A soldier (who is also the narrator) sees an old man resting on the side of a road near a pontoon bridge. Other civilians are crossing this bridge, but the old man is too tired to proceed any further. The old man tells the soldier that he is a native of San Carlos where he worked as a caretaker of animals.

The old man seems more concerned for the safety of his animals than for his own safety. He has some relief in knowing that the cat will be able to fend for itself, and that since he has unlocked the cage, the birds can fly away, but the fate of the other animals is uncertain and the man is distraught by this.

The soldier tries to encourage the old man to move a little farther along, for he knows the bridge is likely to be bombed. The old man, however, is simply too exhausted to proceed.

Question 9.

What does Hemingway want to convey about the affects of war through the story?

Answer:

The Old Man on the Bridge is a short story which clearly depicts the true destruction caused by war. Hemingway uses an old man and some animals to make us realize where the true destruction of war lies.

In most literary compositions regarding war, in order to heighten the pathos, stories revolve around young people. Very often it’s a young soldier corresponding with his lover or family, or a young wife mourning the loss of her lover who was a soldier, or it’s a retired soldier returning home only to find that his parents and loved ones have already died. But in this short story Ernest Hemingway has uniquely used an old man and his pets to convey the destruction caused by war in a deeper context. This short story brings us the experience of an individual and how war has affected him. It also makes us realize that old people too have similar needs and requirements as any other.

This story revolves around an old man who was forced to leave his hometown due to war. He didn’t have anyone to consider as family except a few pets. He was very attached to them. His whole

world centred on them and his whole existence purely depended on them. Infact, he lived because of those animals.

But then came the war and he was asked to leave his hometown because of heavy artillery. The most difficult thing for him was leaving his animals. He was not that worried about his cat because he believed that cats could look after themselves. But he was constantly worried about the other animals. Since he was forced to leave and the other people were evacuating the city, he too had to leave the city. He walked twelve kilometres and stopped just before the bridge which carried them to the other side of the river which was considered as the safe area. But the old man refused to cross the bridge claiming to be tired. Crossing the bridge promised a physically safe life. But it failed to give him psychological happiness. Those who were with their families crossed because they had hope to keep their families safe and to live with them. But the old man was deprived of any hope.

He lost his hope the very moment he left his animals. Therefore we can say that he, psychologically and symbolically, died at the moment he left his animals. That is because he lost his hope and his whole reason for existence. In this respect Hemingway defines life as living with your loved ones and implies that a man can be considered as living only if he carries hope. The old man constantly mentions the symbolic death when he says that he's tired.

Thus Hemingway subtly criticizes war and makes us realize that the least destruction that war can cause is destruction of physical property. But the maximum destruction is where people lose their hope as in the case of the old man. It also shows that even an old man can lose hope due to war.