

Comprehension Passages

Passage 1

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

Most terribly cold it was; it snowed, and was nearly quite dark, and evening—the last evening of the year. In this cold and darkness there went along the street a poor little girl, bareheaded, and with naked feet. When she left home she had slippers on, it is true; but what was the good of that? They were very large slippers, which her mother had hitherto worn; so large were they; and the poor little thing lost them as she scuffled away across the street, because of two carriages that rolled by dreadfully fast.

One slipper was nowhere to be found; the other had been laid hold of by an urchin, and off he ran with it; he thought it would do capitally for a cradle when he some day or other should have children himself. So the little maiden walked on with her tiny naked feet, that were quite red and blue from cold. She carried a quantity of matches in an old apron, and she held a bundle of them in her hand. Nobody had bought anything of her the whole livelong day; no one had given her a single farthing. She crept along trembling with cold and hunger—a very picture of sorrow, the poor little thing!

Question 1.

Which day of the year was it in the story?

Answer:

It was terribly cold. It snowed, and it was nearly quite dark. It was New Year's eve and the night was freezing cold.

Question 2.

Describe the condition of the girl.

Answer:

The little girl was bare headed and barefoot in the freezing cold as she had lost the slippers she had worn which belonged to her mother and were too large for her. Her feet were quite red and blue from cold.

Question 3.

What did the girl carry in her pocket?

Answer:

The little girl carried a quantity of matches in an old apron, and she held a bundle of them in her hand.

Question 4.

Had she managed to sell any matches?

Answer:

Nobody had bought anything of her the whole livelong day; no one had given her a single farthing.

Question 5.

Does the author give us a glimpse into the Victorian society?

Answer:

Yes, we get a glimpse into the society in which parents were cruel enough to make their * small children work in the freezing cold. Begging was a menace and child abuse was common.

Passage 2

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

Lights were shining from every window, and there was a savoury smell of roast goose, for it was New-year's eve—yes, she remembered that. In a corner, between two houses, one of which projected beyond the other, she sank down and huddled herself together. She had drawn her little feet under her, but she could not keep off the cold; and

she dared not go home, for she had sold no matches, and could not take home even a penny of money. Her father would certainly beat her; besides, it was almost as cold at home as here, for they had only the roof to cover them, through which the wind howled, although the largest holes had been stopped up with straw and rags. Her little hands were almost frozen with the cold. Ah! perhaps a burning match might be some good, if she could draw it from the bundle and strike it against the wall, just to warm her fingers. She drew one out—"scratch!" how it sputtered as it burnt! It gave a warm, bright light, like a little candle, as she held her hand over it. It was really a wonderful light. It seemed to the little girl that she was sitting by a large iron stove, with polished brass feet and a brass ornament. How the fire burned! and seemed so beautifully warm that the child stretched out her feet as if to warm them, when, lo! the flame of the match went out, the stove vanished, and she had only the remains of the half-burnt match in her hand.

Question 1.

Where did the girl seek some shelter from the cold?

Answer:

The girl in order to escape the freezing cold huddled in a corner, between two houses, one of which projected beyond the other. She had drawn her little feet under her, but she could not keep off the cold.

Question 2.

Why could the girl not go home?

Answer:

The little girl did not dare to go home, for she had sold no matches, and could not take home even a penny of money. Her father would certainly beat her for earning no money.

Question 3.

Describe her home.

Answer:

Her house was in as poor a condition as her. It was almost as cold at home as on the street because they had only the roof to cover them. They lacked adequate woollens to keep them warm. There also the wind howled through the cracks, although the largest holes had been stopped up with straw and rags.

Question 4.

How did she try to keep herself warm?

Answer:

She thought of lighting her matches to keep herself warm .

Question 5.

What did she imagine when she lighted the first match?

Answer:

When she lighted the first match it seemed to give a warm, bright light, like a little candle. It was really a wonderful light. It seemed to the little girl that she was sitting by a large iron stove, with polished brass feet and a brass ornament. How the fire burned! and it seemed so beautifully warm that the child stretched out her feet as if to warm them.

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

She lighted another match, and then she found herself sitting under a beautiful Christmas-tree. It was larger and more beautifully decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door at the rich merchant's. Thousands of tapers were burning upon the green branches, and colored pictures, like those she had seen in the show- windows, looked down upon it all. The little one stretched out her hand towards them, and the match went out.

The Christmas lights rose higher and higher, till they looked to her like the stars in the sky. Then she saw a star fall, leaving behind it a bright streak of fire. "Someone is dying," thought the little girl, for her old grandmother, the only one who had ever loved her, and who was now dead, had told her that when a star falls, a soul was going up to God.

Question 1.

What did she see when she lighted another match?

Answer:

When the girl lighted another match she saw herself sitting under a beautiful Christmas- tree. It was larger and more beautifully decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door at the rich merchant's.

Question 2.

Describe the Christmas tree.

Answer:

The Christmas tree was beautifully decorated. There were thousands of tapers were burning upon the green branches, and coloured pictures, like those she had seen in the show-windows, looked down upon it all.

Question 3.

What happened when she stretched her hand to touch?

Answer:

As soon as she stretched her hand to touch the match went out and the tree disappeared.

Question 4.

How did the Christmas lights appear when the match went out?

Answer:

When the match went out the Christmas lights rose higher and higher, till they looked to her like the stars in the sky. Then she saw a star fall, leaving behind it a bright streak of fire.

Question 5.

Why did the girl think that "Someone is dying" ?

Answer:

The girl thought that "Someone is dying" because her old grandmother, the only one who had ever loved her, and who was now dead, had told her that when a star falls, a soul was going up to God.

Passage 4

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

She again rubbed a match on the wall, and the light shone round her; in the brightness stood her old grandmother, clear and shining, yet mild and loving in her appearance. "Grandmother," cried the little one, "O take me with you; I know you will go away when the match burns out; you will vanish like the warm stove, the roast goose, and the large, glorious Christmas-tree." And she made haste to light the whole bundle of matches, for she wished to keep her grandmother there. And the

matches glowed with a light that was brighter than the noon-day, and her grandmother had never appeared so large or so beautiful. She took the little girl in her arms, and they both flew upwards in brightness and joy far above the earth, where there was neither cold nor hunger nor pain, for they were with God.

In the dawn of morning there lay the poor little one, with pale cheeks and smiling mouth, leaning against the wall; she had been frozen to death on the last evening of the year; and the New-year's sun rose and shone upon a little corpse! The child still sat, in the stiffness of death, holding the matches in her hand, one bundle of which was burnt. "She tried to warm herself," said some. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, nor into what glory she had entered with her grandmother, on New-year's day.

Question 1.

What happened when she lighted another match?

Answer:

When she lighted another match the light shone round her and in the brightness stood her old grandmother, clear and shining, yet mild and loving in her appearance.

Question 2.

What did the girl say to her grandmother? Why?

Answer:

The girl pleaded with her grandmother to take her along with her because she was the only one in the world who loved her.

Question 3.

Why did the girl make haste to light the whole bundle of matches?

Answer:

The girl made haste to light the whole bundle of matches, for she wished to keep her grandmother there. And the matches glowed with a light that was brighter than the noon day, and her grandmother had never appeared so large or so beautiful. She took the little girl in her arms, and they both flew upwards in brightness and joy far above the earth, where there was neither cold nor hunger nor pain, for they were with God.

Question 4.

What happened to the little girl? What did the people think?

Answer:

The little girl died and the people saw that one bundle of matches was burnt. They said she had tried to warm herself.

Question 5.

Why was there a smile on the girl's lips? Did the people understand?

Answer:

The girl had a smile on her face when she died because she was relinquishing a world of pain and suffering and was reunited with the person she loved the most, her grandmother and God. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, nor into what glory she had entered with her grandmother, on New-year's day. They had no idea about the beautiful pictures she had seen.

Assignment

Question 1.

The author shows death as a relief from a harsh life. Justify with reference to the story.

Answer:

In the snowy streets of the city a pitiable young girl is selling matches on New Years Eve in a desperate attempt to appease her father's violent anger. Alone with her matches and their

accompanying visions the girl passes on and is found later the next day, dead and with a smile playing across her face. The plot of *The Little Match Girl* by Hans Christian

Anderson is meant to inspire a charity of tears for this young girl and her untimely death. However not in all instances should such a death be so unfortunate. In the little match girl's case death would not be the worst of all evils but an alleviation to mortals who are worn out with sufferings. Thus death can come as a relief to those whose toils and cares overcome the will to live and when a better life can only be satisfied by fate. Firstly, for some, peace and comfort can only be obtained in death. The little match girl seeks such comfort in the streets but obviously finds none in the bitter bleak night. Once she is quite numb with cold, she thinks that a little match would be a comfort. So light here represents the comfort of heat. For example when she does light the match it blazes into a clear warm flame, which transforms with a little help from her imagination into a warm friendly fire. When the match goes out the stove vanishes and she is left again to suffer the icy night. So peace and contentment cannot always be found in this life but the one after death. Therefore death need not be viewed as the ultimate evil as for many it can be a release into a better life.

Question 2.

Anderson through the story *The Little Match Girl* gives an idea about the Victorian society of his times?

Answer:

Andersen portrays in this tale not only a realistic and crude view of society in Victorian times, but also a deep criticism of social class differentiation. During those times, children were not regarded the same way people regard them nowadays. Instead, they were viewed as 'miniature adults' and were usually used for cheap labour.

Andersen takes advantage of these strong social differences to leave a moral teaching at the end of his tale, this consists of the idea that children should be considered as creative people, able to transcend difficult situations through the power of imagination.

The girl, suffering from the cold and the ignorance of the people around her and maybe as a result of these, is still capable of imagining certain things that would make her feel better about her situation- huge Christmas trees, a table full of Christmas food and her grandmother's loving face.

Andersen describes the social stratification of Victorian times in just a few sentences. During this historical period, while the 'middle class' emerged and took over an important percentage of work places, the 'under class' grew resentful of both aristocracy and middle class, remaining unemployed and living in poverty. Although Andersen does not explain the girl's background, he denotes social differentiation by opposing the extremes. The reader understands that the girl and her family stand on the less fortunate side, and it also gives him/her an idea of their social impediments. Nevertheless, it can only be assumed that the story is set during Victorian times, mainly because Andersen lived during this period.

Question 3.

The Little Match Girl can be viewed as a work of opposites. Justify.

Answer:

The Little Match Girl can be viewed as a work of opposites can be analysed as a work of opposites. Andersen plays with the interaction between violence and love, poverty and wealth, struggle and redemption, life and death. These constant relationships are displayed in such a manner that keeps us entertained during the reading process, and we are later left with a moral learning.

The author talks about segregation, religious faith and human relationships. Instead of getting love and care from her father, the girl only got blows for not selling matches. The girl sees only her old grandmother as the only loving relationship and views her, 'bright and radiant, so mild, and with such an expression of love.'

The family situation of the little girl and her experiences daily show that parents of such poor children did not care if it was cold outside. They send their daughter out to sell matches anyway. The girl does not have the appropriate clothing to shelter herself from the winter cold. She is not capable of selling any matches and scared to return home because her father would beat her for her poor work. Instead of going back, the girl prefers to sit in the snow and imagine her grandmother's face, full of tenderness and love. The reminder of her grandmother's love helps her to keep warm and get through this painful moment, as passers-by remain oblivious to her suffering, just like her parents.

She is now dead in the cold winter, but with a smile on her face because she is with her grandmother and God. This can be seen as an allegory for Christian faith, in regards to the notion that good people go to heaven to enter heaven. This explains the fact that the little girl suffered during her lifetime which denotes a more significant sense of purpose to the girl's struggle and the tale's ending.

Question 4.

The story propagates the idea that dreams are necessary to remain happy, even if for a short while.

Answer:

The little match girl didn't have any desire to go home since it was a cold attic where her violent father would hit her often. The wind that was blowing from all sides of that attic didn't leave any room for a happy family. She thought how to get warm so she decided to light up one match. After she lit up another match she dreamt. And in her dream saw a beautiful set table with a lot of food. The turkey on the table started moving and went towards her but she never came to the girl because the match burned out. She decided to light up another one and she saw a decorated Christmas tree and many candles around it. When she reached her hands to touch it the light went out.

All of the candles started to rise towards the sky and one star fell down, leaving behind a mark. The girl thought that it meant somebody died and that it was their soul. In that moment she saw her grandma and in order to keep her near she lit up all of the matches. Her grandma took her with her to a place where hunger and coldness were gone.

The next morning she was found frozen with a smile on her face. Everybody commented on her attempts to keep herself warm but nobody knew she waited for New Year with the prettiest pictures and dreams in her mind. Her dreams made her happy and she could no longer feel the cold or the harshness of the world around her. She was at peace.

Question 5.

Anderson's story shows the young girl having visions. Through them Anderson gives didactic and moralistic lessons. Discuss.

Answer:

This story is said to have taken place in a town around the early 20th Century. The story consists of a small girl no older than eleven, sent out to sell matches, which during that time was considered a form of begging. It is the dead of winter and she has little to keep her warm. Her ill fitting shoes had been taken from her, and with the fear of going home only to be beaten for her unsuccessful sales, she curls up in the cold. As she is struggling to keep warm all she can contemplate is the thought of lighting one small match. Then, as she does so, she is filled with feelings of warmth and safety as she sits beneath a large iron stove. She continues to light matches and get extraordinary visions, each one better than before.

During the early 20th century many people paid no mind to the poor "[since] begging was illegal during Andersen's time the poor would make matches and sell them on the street as a front for their actual begging" Child abuse, was also common during this time.

As the girl lights her first match, she sees a vision of a large warm iron stove. But soon the stove disappears. All that is left are the gray/black remains of a burnt-out match. "Like black, gray is used as a colour of mourning as well as a colour of formality". This shows that before the little girl has reached her fate the signs of mourning are already presenting themselves.

During the Second vision Hans Christian Anderson wrote of a magical New Years Eve Feast that any poor hungry child would be overjoyed to partake in, he said, "where the light fell on the wall, there the wall became transparent like a veil, so that she could see into the room. On the table was spread a snow-white tablecloth; upon it was a splendid porcelain service, and the roast goose was steaming famously with its stuffing of apple and dried plums. And what was still more capital to behold was, the goose hopped down from the dish, reeled about on the floor with knife and fork in its breast, till it came up to the poor little girl; when—the match went out and nothing but the thick, cold, damp wall was left behind." It is a vision about Thanksgiving feast, a Christian belief that we must feed the hungry on such days.

During this time the poor could only dream of partaking in such an extravagant meal. Salaries were small and for some, times were very hard. This vision addresses how hungry the small girl truly is, and if she doesn't freeze she shall surely starve.

The Third Vision of the night, only to be seen after the striking of another match, is a magnificent Christmas tree. It is brightly light and beautifully decorated. It was the sort of tree only to be found in a very wealthy home. As the colors and lights rise, and the tree disappears, the stars become visible, and it seems as though the lights from the tree have become the stars. The little girl then sees a star fall and claims "Someone is just dead!" "For her old grandmother, the only person who had loved her, and who was now no more, had told her, that when a star falls, a soul ascends to God". A Creole superstition states: 'Shooting-stars are souls escaping from purgatory: if you can make a good wish three times before the star disappears, the wish will be granted'. This is almost as if the three visions before were wishes, but it is also thought, that it is either the young girl's soul ascending into heaven, or yet the cause for the final vision.

The small girl drew another match, and there her loving grandmother stood before her in the dark of the night, with no reservations, only kindness. The little girl knew that if the match were to run out her grandmother would disappear just like all her other wonderful visions, so in turn she struck the entire rest of the bundle on the wall. "Many near-death experiences around the world, regardless of religious belief, involve the visitation of dead loved-ones, usually family members and close friends" The little girl pleads with her grandmother to take her back to heaven so "she took the little maiden, on her arm, and both flew in brightness and in joy so high, so very high, and then above was neither cold, nor hunger, nor anxiety—they were with God".

Nearly 1,876 patients were treated in American hospitals for hypothermia in 2010/ 11. This hits close to home with The Little Match Girl, seeing as how she froze to death on an icy New Years Eve. The next morning the townspeople found the girl frozen in a corner, matches in hand, smile on her face, and all they can think of is how she must have tried to warm herself. Not one person stops and thinks of the beautiful splendour the girl saw. Hans Christian Anderson believed this was a happy ending in his book to relinquish the suffering of a little girl only to be joined with her one true relative and God. Anderson's story serves a good purpose "reminding people to be charitable and help the poor during the holidays, ...id hopefully year round, to keep young children from suffering with poverty and death." This isn't much of a fairy tale, more so a "folk tale for adults. These tales were often told orally during the times when the peasants could not read. They passed them down through the generations, and the folk tales were eventually illustrated and sold as fairy tales for children. In conclusion, Anderson's short tale is not only a sad holiday story reminding us to give during the season, but a reality check.