Chapter 1: A Letter to God

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Exercise 1.1 — Oral Comprehension Check 1 (Page 5)

Q1 What did Lencho hope for?

SOLUTION

Lencho's field of ripe corn needed rain to give a good harvest. The text says "The only thing the earth needed was a downpour or at least a shower."

So all through the morning Lencho watched the north-east sky, hoping for rain to fall on his crop.

Answer: Lencho hoped for a good downpour of rain to water his ripe cornfield.

Q2 Why did Lencho say the raindrops were like 'new coins'?

SOLUTION

When the big drops of rain began to fall, Lencho exclaimed, "These aren't raindrops falling from the sky, they are new coins."

The rain meant a good harvest, and a good harvest meant money for the family. He therefore compared the big drops to ten-cent pieces and the little ones to fives, because the rain was as valuable to him as money.

Answer: Because the rain promised a good harvest, which meant money, so the drops were as precious as new coins.

Q3 How did the rain change? What happened to Lencho's fields?

SOLUTION

Suddenly a strong wind began to blow and, along with the rain, very large hailstones began to fall, which resembled new silver coins.

For a full hour the hail rained on the whole valley. The field turned white, as if covered with salt. Not a leaf remained on the trees, the corn was totally destroyed and the flowers were gone from the plants.

Answer: The rain turned into a hailstorm that fell for an hour and completely destroyed Lencho's corn crop.

Q4 What were Lencho's feelings when the hail stopped?

SOLUTION

Seeing his ruined field, Lencho's soul was filled with sadness. He told his sons, "A plague of locusts would have left more than this. The hail has left nothing. This year we will have no corn."

That night was a sorrowful one, as the family feared they would go hungry, with no one to help them.

Answer: Lencho felt deep sadness and despair, fearing his family would go hungry with the crop gone.

Exercise 1.2 — Oral Comprehension Check 2 (Page 6)

Q1 Who or what did Lencho have faith in? What did he do?

SOLUTION

Lencho had complete faith in God, whose eyes, as he had been instructed, "see everything, even what is deep in one's conscience."

Believing God could help him, he wrote a letter to God asking for a hundred pesos to sow his field again and to live until the next crop came. He addressed it 'To God' and posted it at the town post office.

Answer: Lencho had faith in God, and he wrote a letter to God asking for a hundred pesos.

Q2 Who read the letter?

SOLUTION

One of the employees, who was a postman and also helped at the post office, first saw the letter and took it, laughing, to his boss.

The postmaster — "a fat, amiable fellow" — then read the letter addressed to God.

Answer: The postman first saw it, and then the postmaster read the letter.

Q3 What did the postmaster do then?

SOLUTION

The postmaster was moved by Lencho's faith and said, "What faith! I wish I had the faith of the man who wrote this letter." To keep that faith alive, he decided to answer the letter.

He collected money from his employees, gave part of his own salary, and got friends to contribute 'for an act of charity'. Unable to gather the full hundred pesos, he sent Lencho a little more than half in an envelope signed with a single word: God.

Answer: He collected money and sent Lencho a little over half the sum in an envelope signed 'God'.

Exercise 1.3 — Oral Comprehension Check 3 (Page 7)

Q1 Was Lencho surprised to find a letter for him with money in it?

SOLUTION

No, Lencho was not surprised at all. The text says he "showed not the slightest surprise on seeing the money; such was his confidence."

He was so certain that God would answer his prayer that receiving the money seemed only natural to him.

Answer: No, he was not surprised, because he had complete confidence that God would send the money.

Q2 What made him angry?

SOLUTION

Lencho became angry when he counted the money and found it was less than the hundred pesos he had asked for — only seventy pesos had reached him.

He was sure God could not have made a mistake or denied his request, so he concluded that the post office employees had stolen the rest of the money.

Answer: He was angry because only seventy of the hundred pesos reached him, and he thought the postal employees had stolen the rest.

Exercise 1.4 — Thinking about the Text

Q1 Who does Lencho have complete faith in? Which sentences in the story tell you this?

SOLUTION

Lencho has complete, unshakeable faith in God.

Several sentences show this: "All through the night, Lencho thought only of his one hope: the help of God." His letter reads, "God, if you don't help me, my family and I will go hungry this year." When the money came, "Lencho showed not the slightest surprise on seeing the money; such was his confidence." And later he was sure "God could not have made a mistake, nor could he have denied Lencho what he had requested."

Answer: Lencho has complete faith in God, shown by his letter and his total lack of surprise on receiving the money.

Q2 Why does the postmaster send money to Lencho? Why does he sign the letter 'God'?

SOLUTION

The postmaster is deeply impressed by Lencho's simple, strong faith and does not want to shake it. He says, "What faith! I wish I had the faith of the man who wrote this letter."

To keep that faith alive, he decides to answer the letter himself. He signs it 'God' so that Lencho will believe the money truly came from God, and his faith will remain unbroken.

Answer: He sends money so as not to shake Lencho's faith, and signs it 'God' so Lencho believes God answered him.

Q3 Did Lencho try to find out who had sent the money to him? Why/Why not?

SOLUTION

No, Lencho did not try to find out who had really sent the money.

He was firmly convinced that the money had come directly from God in answer to his letter. Because his faith was absolute, it never occurred to him that a human being might have sent it, so he felt no need to investigate.

Answer: No, because he was fully convinced the money had come straight from God.

Q4 Who does Lencho think has taken the rest of the money? What is the irony in the situation? (Remember that the irony of a situation is an unexpected aspect of it. An ironic situation is strange or amusing because it is the opposite of what is expected.)

SOLUTION

Lencho thinks the post office employees have taken the rest of the money. In his second letter he writes, "the post office employees are a bunch of crooks."

The irony is that these very employees, along with the postmaster, are the ones who kindly collected the money and sent it to him out of charity. The people Lencho accuses of being crooks are actually the good-hearted people who helped him — the opposite of what he believes.

Answer: Lencho blames the post office employees, though they are the very people who kindly collected and sent the money to him.

Q5 Are there people like Lencho in the real world? What kind of a person would you say he is? You may select appropriate words from the box to answer the question. (greedy, naive, stupid, ungrateful, selfish, comical, unquestioning)

SOLUTION

Yes, there are people like Lencho in the real world — simple, deeply religious people whose faith in God is complete and unquestioning.

From the box, the most fitting words are naive and unquestioning: he is naive because he believes God will literally post him money, and unquestioning because he never doubts his faith. He can also seem comical when he calls the honest employees crooks. He is, however, hard-working and a firm believer rather than truly greedy or selfish.

Answer: Yes; Lencho is a naive, unquestioning and firmly faithful person, at times comical in his blind trust.

Q6 There are two kinds of conflict in the story: between humans and nature, and between humans themselves. How are these conflicts illustrated?

SOLUTION

The conflict between humans and nature is shown through Lencho's struggle against the weather. He depends on the rain for his harvest, but the same rain turns into a destructive hailstorm that flattens his field white "as if covered with salt" and destroys his entire corn crop, leaving his family facing hunger.

The conflict between humans themselves is shown through Lencho's distrust of other people. Even though the postmaster and employees generously collect money and send it to him, Lencho suspects them of dishonesty and calls them "a bunch of crooks", setting his faith in God against his suspicion of fellow human beings.

Answer: Nature's hailstorm destroys Lencho's crop (human vs nature), while his distrust of the honest, helpful employees shows conflict between humans.

Exercise 1.5 — Thinking about Language — Storm names, 'hope', Relative clauses, Neg

Q1 I. Match the storm names in the box (gale, whirlwind, cyclone, hurricane, tornado, typhoon) with their descriptions and fill in the blanks.

SOLUTION

1. A violent tropical storm in which strong winds move in a circle: cyclone
2. An extremely strong wind: gale
3. A violent tropical storm with very strong winds: typhoon
4. A violent storm whose centre is a cloud in the shape of a funnel: tornado
5. A violent storm with very strong winds, especially in the western Atlantic Ocean: hurricane
6. A very strong wind that moves very fast in a spinning movement and causes a lot of damage: whirlwind

Answer: 1. cyclone, 2. gale, 3. typhoon, 4. tornado, 5. hurricane, 6. whirlwind.

Q2 II. Match the sentences in Column A with the meanings of 'hope' in Column B.

SOLUTION

1. Will you get the subjects you want to study in college? I hope so. — wanting something to happen (and thinking it quite possible).
2. I hope you don't mind my saying this... — showing concern that what you say should not offend or disturb the other person: a way of being polite.
3. This discovery will give new hope to HIV/AIDS sufferers. — a feeling that something good will probably happen.
4. We were hoping against hope that the judges would not notice our mistakes. — wishing for something to happen, although this is very unlikely.
5. I called early in the hope of speaking to her before she went to school. — thinking that this would happen (it may or may not have happened).
6. Just when everybody had given up hope, the fishermen came back... — stopped believing that this good thing would happen.

Answer: 1-wanting; 2-being polite; 3-feeling it will probably happen; 4-wishing though unlikely; 5-thinking it would happen; 6-stopped believing (gave up hope).

Q3 III. Relative Clauses. Join the sentences given below using who, whom, whose, which, as suggested.

SOLUTION

1. (which) I often go to Mumbai, which is the commercial capital of India.
2. (who) My mother, who cooks very well, is going to host a TV show on cooking.
3. (whose) These sportspersons, whose performance has been excellent, are going to meet the President.
4. (whose) Lencho prayed to God, whose eyes see into our minds.
5. (whom) This man, whom I trusted, cheated me.

Answer: 1. ...Mumbai, which is...; 2. ...mother, who cooks well,...; 3. ...sportspersons, whose performance...; 4. ...God, whose eyes...; 5. ...man, whom I trusted, cheated me.

Q4 IV. Using Negatives for Emphasis. Find sentences in the story with negative words which express the following ideas emphatically. (1) The trees lost all their leaves. (2) The letter was addressed to God himself. (3) The postman saw this address for the first time in his career.

SOLUTION

1. The trees lost all their leaves: "Not a leaf remained on the trees."
2. The letter was addressed to God himself: "It was nothing less than a letter to God."
3. The postman saw this address for the first time in his career: "Never in his career as a postman had he known that address."

Answer: 1. "Not a leaf remained on the trees." 2. "It was nothing less than a letter to God." 3. "Never in his career as a postman had he known that address."

Q5 V. Metaphors. Find metaphors from the story to complete the table (Cloud, Raindrops, Hailstones, Locusts, An ox of a man) and say what qualities are being compared.

SOLUTION

Cloud — "huge mountains of clouds" — the mass or 'hugeness' of mountains.
Raindrops — "new coins" (ten-cent pieces and fives) — the value or worth of coins, since the rain was as precious as money.

Hailstones — "new silver coins" / "frozen pearls" — the round, shining, silvery appearance and value of coins and pearls.

Locusts — "a plague of locusts" — an epidemic (a disease) that spreads very rapidly and leaves destruction behind.

An ox of a man — describes Lencho — the great physical strength and tireless, animal-like capacity for hard work of an ox.

Answer: Cloud=mountains (hugeness); Raindrops/Hailstones=new coins/silver coins/pearls (value & shine); Locusts=a plague (rapid destruction); 'ox of a man'=strength and hard work.

Exercise 1.6 — Thinking about the Poem — Dust of Snow

Q1 What is a "dust of snow"? What does the poet say has changed his mood? How has the poet's mood changed?

SOLUTION

A "dust of snow" is the fine particles or tiny flakes of snow that a crow shook down on the poet from a hemlock tree.

This small, simple act of nature — the crow shaking the dust of snow onto him — is what changed the poet's mood.

His mood changed from sadness to relief. The falling snow "has given my heart a change of mood and saved some part of a day I had rued", turning a day he had been regretting into a better one.

Answer: The fine snow a crow shook off a hemlock tree changed his mood, lifting him from regret and saving part of a day he had rued.

Q2 How does Frost present nature in this poem? (i) What are the birds usually named in poems? Do you think a crow is often mentioned? What images come to mind with a crow? (ii) What is a 'hemlock tree'? Why doesn't the poet write about a more 'beautiful' tree such as a maple, oak or pine? (iii) What do the 'crow' and 'hemlock' represent — joy or sorrow? What does the dust of snow that the crow shakes off a hemlock tree stand for?

SOLUTION

(i) Poets usually name beautiful, sweet-singing birds such as the nightingale, cuckoo, skylark or parrot. A crow is rarely mentioned in poems. A crow brings to mind dark, gloomy and unpleasant images — a black bird with a harsh cry, often linked with sorrow.

(ii) A 'hemlock tree' is a poisonous plant (tree) with small white flowers. The poet deliberately chooses this ordinary, unpleasant tree instead of a beautiful maple, oak or pine to show that even sad, dark surroundings can bring about a happy change of mood.

(iii) The 'crow' and 'hemlock' both represent sorrow, gloom and depression. The dust of snow that the crow shakes off the hemlock tree stands for joy and a change of mood — a moment of natural beauty that lifts the poet out of his sadness.

Answer: The gloomy crow and poisonous hemlock stand for sorrow, while the dust of snow they release stands for joy — showing beauty and hope hidden even in dark, ordinary nature.

Q3 Have there been times when you felt depressed or hopeless? Have you experienced a similar moment that changed your mood that day?

SOLUTION

Yes, everyone feels depressed or hopeless at times — for example, after failing a test or quarrelling with a friend.

Like the poet, a small, simple thing can change such a mood: a kind word from someone, a favourite song, a walk in the fresh air, or watching birds and flowers can suddenly lift the heart and turn a bad day into a better one.

Answer: Yes; like the poet, a small, simple moment of natural beauty or kindness can suddenly lift a low mood and brighten the day.

Exercise 1.7 — Thinking about the Poem — Fire and Ice

Q1 There are many ideas about how the world will 'end'. Do you think the world will end some day? Have you ever thought what would happen if the sun got so hot that it 'burst', or grew colder and colder?

SOLUTION

Yes, scientists believe that the world may end one day. One idea is that the sun could grow so hot that it bursts, burning everything to ashes; another is that it could grow colder and colder, freezing all life.

The poet uses these two possibilities — fire and ice — not only as physical ends but as symbols of the destructive human emotions that could destroy the world.

Answer: Yes; the world may end either by extreme heat (the sun bursting) or by extreme cold — the two ends Frost calls fire and ice.

Q2 For Frost, what do 'fire' and 'ice' stand for? Here are some ideas: greed, avarice, cruelty, lust, conflict, fury, intolerance, rigidity, insensitivity, coldness, indifference, hatred.

SOLUTION

For Frost, 'fire' stands for burning, passionate emotions such as desire, greed, avarice, lust and fury. He says, "From what I've tasted of desire I hold with those who favour fire" — these hot emotions can destroy the world.

'Ice' stands for cold, hard emotions such as hatred, cruelty, intolerance, rigidity, coldness, insensitivity and indifference. He adds that "for destruction ice is also great and would suffice" — these cold feelings are just as destructive as fire.

Answer: 'Fire' stands for hot emotions like desire, greed and fury; 'ice' stands for cold emotions like hatred, cruelty and indifference — both destructive.

Q3 What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? How does it help in bringing out the contrasting ideas in the poem?

SOLUTION

The rhyme scheme of the poem is abaa bcbcb.

The interlocking rhymes tie together the words 'fire', 'desire' and 'ice', 'twice'. By binding these opposite ideas within the same repeated rhyme sounds, the

scheme highlights the contrast between fire (desire) and ice (hatred), showing how two opposite forces can equally destroy the world.

Answer: The rhyme scheme is abaa bcbcb; its interlocking rhymes bind the opposites 'fire/desire' and 'ice', sharpening the contrast between the two destructive forces.