Poetry

UNIT 7

P.1 The Frog And The Nightingale

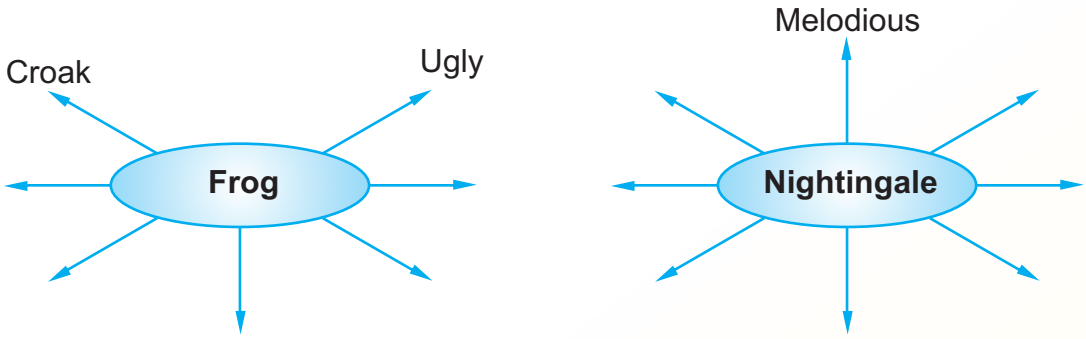
by Vikram Seth

1. Listed below are a few character traits of people. Some are positive qualities, while others are not. Tick mark the ones you feel are desirable qualities in a person.

Characteristic	Tick Mark	Characteristic	Tick Mark	Characteristic	Tick Mark
Insensitive		High - headed		Manipulative	
Humorous		Egoistic		Patronizing	
Naïve		Humble		Submissive	
Opportunistic		Foolish		Arrogant	
Creative		Original		Conniving	
Disapproving		Helpful		Innocent	
Commanding		Calculative		Condescending	
Benevolent		Crafty		Scheming	
Simple		Wise		Rude	
Overbearing		Generous		Boastful	
Sly		Gentle		Proud	
Territorial		Aggressive		Servile	

2. Have you come across people who are not what they seem to be - like someone who is extremely friendly and helpful yet you are not very comfortable with him / her as you feel it is a put-on? Have a class discussion about such people and why you feel as you do.

3. Before you read the poem complete the word - web with the words that we associate with a Frog and a Nightingale.



4. Read Vikram Seth's poem : The Frog and the Nightingale.

Once upon a time a frog
Croaked away in Bingle **Bog**[1]
Every night from dusk to dawn
He croaked **awn**[2] and awn and awn.

Other creatures **loathed**[3] his voice,
But, alas, they had no choice.
And the crass **cacophony**[4]
Blared out from the sumac tree
At whose foot the frog each night
Minstrelled[5] on till morning night.

Neither stones nor prayers nor sticks,
Insults or complaints or bricks
Stilled the frog's determination
To display his heart's **elation**[6].
But one night a nightingale
In the moonlight cold and pale
Perched upon the sumac tree
Casting forth her melody.
Dumbstruck sat the gaping frog.



1 **bog :** an area of land that is very wet and muddy
2 **awn :** *on* misspelt and mispronounced so that it rhymes with *dawn*
3 **loathed :** hated
4 **cacophony :** a very loud and unpleasant noise
5 **minstrelled :** sang
6 **elation :** great pride and joy

And the whole admiring bog
Stared towards the sumac, **rapt**[7]**,**
And, when she had ended, clapped,
Ducks had swum and herons waded
To her as she **serenaded**[8]
And a solitary **loon**[9]
Wept, beneath the summer moon.
Toads and **teals**[10] and tiddlers, captured
By her voice, cheered on, **enraptured:**[11]
"Bravo!" "Too divine!" **"Encore!"**[12]
So the nightingale once more,
Quite unused to such applause,
Sang till dawn without a pause.

Next night when the Nightingale
Shook her head and twitched her tail,
Closed an eye and fluffed a wing
And had cleared her throat to sing
She was startled by a croak.
"Sorry - was that you who spoke?"
She enquired when the frog
Hopped towards her from the bog.
"Yes," the frog replied. "You see,
I'm the frog who owns this tree.
In this bog I've long been known
For my splendid **baritone**[13]
And, of course, I wield my pen
For Bog Trumpet now and then".
"Did you… did you like my song?"

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7 **rapt :** totally interested, so that you cannot think of anything else
8 **serenaded :** sang beautifully
9 **loon :** a large water bird
10 **teal :** a small duck
11 **enraptured :** filled with fascination and delight
12 **encore :** 'sing some more'
13 **baritone :** a male singing voice, fairly deep

"Not too bad - but far too long.
The **technique**[14] was fine of course,
But it lacked a certain force".
"Oh!" the nightingale confessed.
Greatly flattered and impressed
That a critic of such note
Had discussed her art and throat:
"I don't think the song's divine.
But - oh, well - at least it's mine".

"That's not much to boast about".
Said the heartless frog. "Without
Proper training such as I
- And few others - can supply.
You'll remain a mere beginner.
But with me you'll be a winner".
"Dearest frog", the nightingale
Breathed: "This is a fairy tale -
And you're Mozart in disguise
Come to earth before my eyes".
"Well I charge a modest fee.
Oh!... But it won't hurt, you'll see"

Now the nightingale inspired,
Flushed[15] with confidence, and fired
With both art and adoration,
Sang - and was a huge sensation.
Animals for miles around
Flocked towards the magic sound,
And the frog with great precision
Counted heads and charged admission.



14 **technique :** a method of doing something
15 **flushed :** very excited and pleased

Though next morning it was raining,
He began her vocal training.
"But I can't sing in this weather".
"Come my dear - we'll sing together.
Just put on your scarf and **sash**[16],
Koo-oh-ah! ko-ash! ko-ash!"
So the frog and nightingale
Journeyed up and down the **scale**[17]
For six hours, till she was shivering
and her voice was **hoarse**[18] and **quivering**[19].
Though **subdued**[20] and sleep deprived,
In the night her throat revived,
And the sumac tree was bowed,
With a breathless, titled crowd:
Owl of Sandwich, Duck of Kent,
Mallard and Milady Trent,
Martin Cardinal Mephisto,
And the Coot of Monte Cristo,
Ladies with **tiaras**[21] glittering
In the interval sat twittering -
And the frog observed them glitter
With a joy both sweet and bitter.

Every day the frog who'd sold her
Songs for silver tried to scold her:
"You must practice even longer
Till your voice, like mine grows stronger.
In the second song last night
You got nervous in mid-flight.

16 **sash** : a long piece of cloth that you wear round the waist or over the shoulder, usually as a badge of honour
17 **scale :** a sequence of musical notes that go up and down, one after the other
18 **hoarse :** rough and unclear
19 **quivering :** shaking, trembling
20 **subdued :** quiet, with little energy
21 **tiara :** a semicircular metal band decorated with jewels and worn by wealthy women on formal social occasions

And, my dear, lay on more **trills**[22]**:**
Audiences enjoy such frills.
You must make your public happier:
Give them something sharper, snappier.
We must aim for better **billings**[23].
You still owe me sixty shillings."

Day by day the nightingale
Grew more sorrowful and pale.
Night on night her tired song
Zipped[24] and trilled and bounced along,
Till the birds and beasts grew tired
At a voice so uninspired
And the ticket office gross
Crashed, and she grew more **morose**[25] -
For her ears were now addicted
To applause quite unrestricted,
And to sing into the night
All alone gave no delight.

Now the frog puffed up with rage.
"Brainless bird - you're on the stage -
Use your wits and follow fashion.
Puff your lungs out with your passion."
Trembling, terrified to fail,
Blind with tears, the nightingale
Heard him out in silence, tried,
Puffed up, burst a vein, and died.
Said the frog: "I tried to teach her,
But she was a stupid creature -
Far too nervous, far too tense.
Far too prone to influence.

22 trills : singing two musical notes one after the other, repeatedly and very quickly
23 billings : publicity for a concert, show etc.
24 zipped : sang quickly
25 morose : miserable, bad-lempered

Well, poor bird - she should have known
That your song must be your own.
That's why I sing with **panache**[26]:
"Koo-oh-ah! ko-ash! ko-ash!"
And the **foghorn**[27] of the frog
Blared unrivalled through the bog.

5. The following is a summary of the poem but it is jumbled up. Write out the events in their correct order to form a continuous paragraph.

a) As a result, her voice lost its beauty, and the other creatures stopped coming to hear her sing.

b) Soon the nightingale became famous, and creatures from miles around came to hear her sing.

c) All the creatures in the bog cheered and clapped at her beautiful song.

d) He offered to train the nightingale, so that she could sing even more beautifully.

e) So the frog could sing unrivalled in the bog once more.

f) The next night the frog introduced himself.

g) The frog charged an admission fee, and earned a lot of money from these concerts.

h) A frog croaked all night in a bog, in an unpleasant voice.

i) But the frog made the nightingale rehearse continuously in the rain.

j) One night a nightingale began to sing in a melodious voice.

k) Finally the nightingale burst a vein and died.

6. Now that you have read the poem, add more personality traits to the word-web of the frog and the nightingale as depicted in the poem. Then complete the table given below. (Some of the words in the box below may help you. You may also use the words given in Q. 1.)

26 panache : a very confident, elegant style
27 foghorn : a very loud, unpleasant noise

Character	Extract	Personality traits
Nightingale	Sorry - was that you who spoke?	Polite, Timorous
Frog	Yes,… you see, I'm the frog who owns this tree In this bog I've long been known For my splendid baritone.	
Nightingale	Did you…did you like my song?	
Frog	Not too bad - but far too long The technique was fine, of course, But it lacked a certain force.	
Frog	Without proper training such as I And a few others can supply You'll remain a mere beginner, But with me you'll be a winner.	
Nightingale	But I can't sing in this weather.	
Nightingale	…This is a fairy tale - And you're Mozart in disguise Come to earth before my eyes.	
Frog	Come, my dear - we'll sing together.	
Frog	We must aim for better billing You still owe me sixty shillings.	
Frog	Brainless bird - you're on the stage Use your wits and follow fashion. Puff your lungs out with your passion.	
Frog	…I tried to teach her, But she was a stupid creature.	

Dismissive	Nervous	Timid	Presumptuous
Superior	Fawning	Shy	Polite
Meek	Possessive	Dominating	Mercenery

7. Divide yourselves into groups of four or five and brainstorm on any one of the given situations in order to create an imaginary dialogue or a comic strip. Keep in mind the characters and situations while doing so. Representatives from each group could then present the dialogues / read them to the class.

Situations

a. The efforts made by the other creatures of the bog to still the frog's determination 'to display his heart's elation'.

b. The first time the Nightingale sings.

c. The nightingale is awestruck when the frog introduces himself.

d. The practice session when it is raining.

e. The nightingale is reprimanded by the frog when the box office crashes.

8. On the basis of your understanding of the poem, complete the sentences given below by choosing the appropriate option.

1. The frog's aim was to

   a. make the nightingale a sensation

   b. make the nightingale as good a singer as him

   c. maintain his supremacy in the bog

   d. make a lot of money

2. The animals reacted to the nightingale's song with

   a. hatred

   b. admiration

   c. indifference

   d. suggestions for improvement

3. The nightingale accepted the frog's tutelage as she

   a. was not confident of herself

   b. wanted to become as good a singer as the frog

   c. wanted to become a professional singer

   d. was not a resident of Bingle Bog

9. Read the stanza given below and complete the sentences by choosing the appropriate option.

Day by day the nightingale
Grew more sorrowful and pale.
Night on night her tired song
Zipped and trilled and bounced along,
Till the birds and beasts grew tired
At a voice so uninspired
And the ticket office gross
Crashed, and she grew more morose -
For her ears were now addicted
To applause quite unrestricted,
And to sing into the night
All alone gave no delight.

i. The nightingale was sorrowful and pale because

1. she had been practicing in the rain
2. she had been performing all night
3. she was losing confidence in herself
4. she was falling ill

ii. The audience was tired of her song because

1. they had heard it many times
2. it had become mechanical
3. she looked tired
4. she had added trill to her song

iii. She no longer enjoyed singing alone as

1. she wanted to sing only for titled crowd
2. she was now used to the appreciation she got
3. the frog was no longer with her
4. she had become proud of herself

10. Answer the following questions briefly.

a. How did the creatures of Bingle bog react to the nightingale's singing?

b. Which are the different ways in which the frog asserts his importance?

c. Why is the frog's joy both sweet and bitter?

d. Why was the frog angry?

e. How did the frog become the unrivalled king of the bog again?

11. Discuss the following questions and write the answers in your note-books.

a. Bring out the irony in the frog's statement - 'Your song must be your own'.

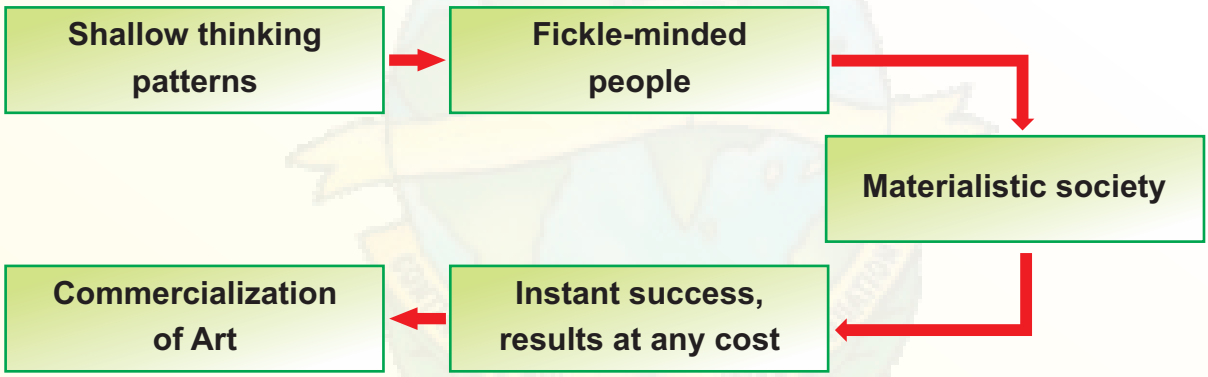
b. Do you think the end is justified?

c. Do you think the nightingale is 'brainless'? Give reasons for your answer.

d. Inspite of having a melodious voice and being a crowd puller, the nightingale turns out to be a loser and dies. How far is she responsible for her own downfall?

e. Do you agree with the Frog's inference of the Nightingale's character? Give reasons for your answer.

12. The Frog and the nightingale is a spoof on the present society. Study the Mind Map given below. Divide yourselves into groups, select a box and discuss the statement given. Then present your views to the class.



CLASS DISCUSSION

How a person tries to put down another when that perosn is succeeding in his or her life.

Our self-image is often based on what others make us believe we are. A poor self-image can do irrepairable damage to us. Do you agree with this statement? Elaborate with suitable reasons and exmples.

WRITING TASK

13. The nightingale has scaled the heights of success. But now the audience is dwindling, the frog is unhappy and reprimands her all the time. She is mentally and physically exhausted and fears failure. As the nightingale, write a diary entry highlighting her fears and analyzing the reasons for her failure.

14. Write an obituary for the nightingale. You may begin like this: May the kind soul…… (or you may make use of your own beginning)

LISTENING TASK

15. Listen to a poem on a similar theme by Mary Howitt and compare the Fly to Vikram Seth's Nightingale.

NIGHTINGALE

FLY