

**CBSE Class 12 English Core**  
**NCERT Solutions**  
**CHAPTER 1**  
**The Last Lesson**

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**1. Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meanings from the context.**

**In great dread of:** Fearful of anticipation of something/very much worried

**Counted on:** To rely or trust on somebody / something

**Thumbed at the edges:** Worn or soiled edges caused by frequent handling

**In unison:** Something happening or being done at the same time

**A great bustle:** An excited (and often noisy) activity or a rapid, active commotion

**Reproach ourselves with:** To feel guilty about something

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**Page No: 7 Think As you Read**

**1. What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?**

**Answer:** Franz was expected to be prepared with questions on participles that day as Mr. Hamel had told the class that he would question them on the topic that day.

**2. What did Franz notice that was unusual about the school that day?**

**Answer:** Usually when the school began there would be a lot of commotion. But that day everything was quiet. It appeared to be like a Sunday without any noise or activity in the school. However, the students were at their places and Mr. Hamel was walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm.

**3. What had been put up on the bulletin-board?**

**Answer:** The bulletin-board notified the general public about an order from Berlin. It stated that only German was to be taught to students in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine.

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**1. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?**

**Answer:** The order from Berlin brought all the routine hustle and bustle of the school life to a stand-still. M. Hamel, the teacher, became more sympathetic to his students and taught his lessons with more patience. The students became more attentive to their classes. The back benches were no more empty as they used to be. The villagers had occupied those seats. They had come to show their respect and gratitude to M. Hamel. They regretted not attending the classes more than they did. The order also brought about a great change in the feelings of the people towards their country and their native language. There was a general sadness about not being able to utilise the opportunities of learning French when it was easily accessible.

## **2. How did Franz's feelings about M. Hamel and school change?**

**Answer:** Franz was shocked when M. Hamel told the students about the order from Berlin and that it was their last French lesson. He forgot about his teacher's ruler and cranky nature. He developed a fondness for M. Hamel at the troubling idea of being separated from him forever. He understood the pain and agony his teacher was undergoing. He became more sympathetic towards his teacher.

Now his school carried a different meaning for him. His books and lessons were like his old friends whom he could not give up. He realised with pain how much French meant to him and regretted not being attentive to his classes earlier. Suddenly, he felt that the 'difficult concepts' had actually never been difficult.

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## **1. The people in this story suddenly realize how precious their language is to them.**

**What shows you this? Why does this happen?**

**Answer:** M. Hamel told the students and villagers that henceforth only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. Those who called themselves Frenchmen would neither be able to speak nor write it. He praised French as the most beautiful, the clearest and most logical language in the world. He said that for the enslaved people, their language was the key to their prison. Then the people realised how precious their language was to them. This shows people's love for their own culture, traditions and country. Pride in one's language reflects pride in motherland.

**2. Franz thinks, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons ?” What could this means?**

**Answer:** Alphonse Daudet’s ‘The Last Lesson’ very prominently raises the question of linguistic and cultural hegemony of the colonial and imperial powers and their lust for controlling the world and influencing their cultures and identities. Prussians acquired the districts of Alsace and Lorraine in Franco-Prussian War , but they were not satisfied with mere political domination ,they desired to enforce their own language on the people of the defeated nation. They released the order that from now German would be taught in schools rather than French. Franz wondered whether they would make even pigeons sing in German. It means that they had grown up using French as their language and now snatching away their language from them would be unfair and unkind. The language was as natural to them as cooing is to the pigeon. So, compulsion to speak another language is like dominating the force of nature and enslaving it. As it is next to impossible to alter the way pigeons sing, in the same way it is difficult for people to accept a language which is forcibly imposed on them. Adopting a new language causes pain and discomfort.

Or

This sentence could possibly mean that however hard the authorities had tried to embed German language in the culture of Alsace and Lorraine, the natural status of French, for them, would remain unchanged. French flew in the air and the entire place was imbued with its effect. Even though they trained students in German, the basic mode of communication would remain unchanged like the cooing of the pigeons.

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### **Talking about the Text**

**1. “When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison. ”**

**Can you think of examples in history where a conquered people had their language taken away from them or had a language imposed on them?**

**Answer:** Some examples of the native language taken away from its people and/or imposition of the language of the conqueror are:

- (a) Portuguese becoming the lingua franca of Angola.
- (b) English imposed on the various Celtic peoples.

(c) Spanish imposed on the Basques and the Catalans.

(d) Turkish imposed on the Kurds.

**2. What happens to a linguistic minority in a state? How do you think they can keep their language alive? For example:**

Punjabis in Bangalore

Tamilians in Mumbai

Kannadigas in Delhi

Gujaratis in Kolkata

**Answer:** A linguistic minority in a state does not have as much liberty to exercise linguistic skills as the natives of the state. They initially try to learn the jargons in order to cope with the day-to-day life activities and finally begin to understand the native language with regular interaction. At the workplace and educational organizations, English or the link language helps a lot to cope up with the work and learning process. But, when it comes to understanding the basic norms of the society in order to socialize, one does face a sort of linguistic barrier during communication.

To keep their language alive, the linguistic minorities can form small communities where they can celebrate their festivals as per their traditions. Moreover, they can continue to speak their native language at their homes in order to make their children learn the language. People must, even, try to visit their native places at regular intervals in order to stay close to their roots.

**3. Is it possible to carry pride in one's language too far?**

**Do you know what 'linguistic chauvinism' means?**

**Answer:** Yes, it is possible to carry pride in one's language too far if one is fond of one's own language at the cost of others. Indifference towards other languages is not healthy for any democracy like India.

When the sense of belonging to one's own language crosses the thin line between 'pride' and 'proud', it becomes linguistic chauvinism. If people feel good about their languages and traditions, they must have tolerance for other languages too. Everybody has the right to follow the religion as well as speak the language as per his/her desire. In fact, it is disparaging to distort the names of communities, for example, Bongs for Bengalis, Gujju for Gujaratis, etc.

## Working with Words

1. English is a language that contains words from many other languages. This inclusiveness is one of the reasons it is now a world language, for example:

Petite – French

Kindergarten – German

Capital – Latin

Democracy – Greek

Bazaar – Hindi

Find out the origin of the following words.

Tycoon, Tulip, Logo, Bandicoot, Barbecue, Veranda, Robot, Zero, Ski, Trek

**Answer:** Tycoon – Japanese

Tulip – French

Logo – Greek

Bandicoot – Telugu

Barbecue – Spanish

Veranda – Hindi

Robot – Czech

Zero – Babylonians, Mayans and Indians

Ski – Norwegian

Trek – Dutch

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2. Notice the underlined words in these sentences and tick the option that best explains their meanings.

(a) “What a thunderclap these words were to me!”

The words were \_\_\_\_\_

(i) loud and clear.

(ii) startling and unexpected.

(iii) pleasant and welcome.

(b) “When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison. ”

It is as if they have the key to the prison as long as they \_\_\_\_\_

- (i) do not lose their language.
- (ii) are attached to their language.
- (iii) quickly learn the conqueror's language.

(c) Don't go so fast, you will get to your school in plenty of time.

You will get to your school \_\_\_\_\_

- (i) very late.
- (ii) too early.
- (iii) early enough.

(d) I never saw him look so tall.

M. Hamel \_\_\_\_\_

- (a) had grown physically taller.
- (b) seemed very confident.
- (c) stood on the chair.

**Answer:** (a) startling and unexpected.

(b) are attached to their language.

(c) early enough.

(d) seemed very confident.

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## Noticing Form

### 1. Read this sentence.

M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles.

In the sentence above, the verb form "had said" in the first part is used to indicate an "earlier past." The whole story is narrated in the past. M. Hamel's "saying" happened earlier than the events in this story. This form of the verb is called the past perfect.

Pick out five sentences from the story with this form of verb and say why this form has been used.

**Answer:** In the following sentences, two activities of past, occurring at two different points of time in the past, are indicated. The one that happens earlier takes the "had" + past form of verb (V3), while the one that follows it takes the simple past form of verb (V2).

Sentences in past perfect form	Reason/ Explanation
I <b>had counted</b> on the commotion to get to my desk without being seen; but, of course, that day everything had to be as quiet as Sunday morning.	The protagonist decided to depend on the commotion to sneak into the classroom before he encountered the quietness at the school.
Not till then, when I <b>had got</b> a little over my fright, did I see that our teacher had on his beautiful green coat ... prize days.	Getting over the fright happened before he noticed his teacher's green coat.
...Hauser <b>had brought</b> an old primer, thumbed at the edge, and he held it open on his knees with his great spectacles lying across the Pages.	Of the two actions, Hauser's bringing of the old primer happened before he held it open on his knees.
It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more.	The feeling of regret came after they had realised that they did not go to school more than what they did.
My books, that <b>had seemed</b> such a nuisance ... were old friends now that I couldn't give up.	The books were a nuisance earlier. It was only later that the protagonist talked about them in a different light.