

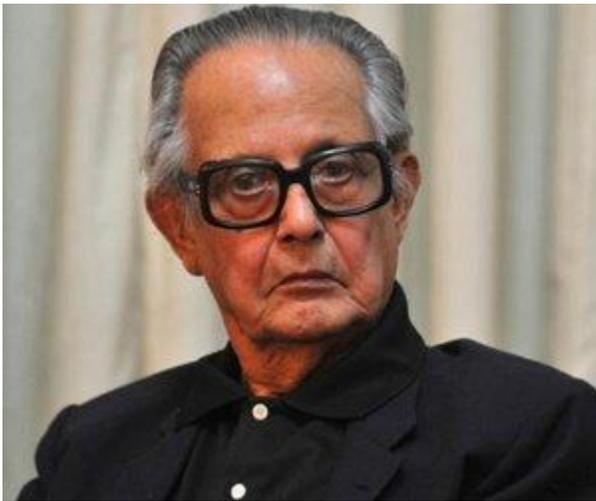
Class 9 - English (Moments)

Ch. 3 - Iswaran the Storyteller

By – R. K. Laxman

About the Author:

R.K. Laxman, in full **Rasipuram Krishnaswami Laxman**, (born October 24, 1921, Mysore [now Mysuru], India—died January 26, 2015, Pune), Indian cartoonist who created the daily comic strip *You Said It*, which chronicled Indian life and politics through the eyes of the “common man,” a bulbous-nosed bespectacled observer dressed in a dhoti and a distinctive checked coat who served as a silent point-of-view character for readers.



Laxman was the youngest of seven siblings, and he developed an affinity for drawing at an early age. While at Maharaja’s College in Mysore, he illustrated stories by his novelist brother, R.K. Narayan, in *The Hindu* newspaper. He subsequently turned to creating political cartoons for local newspapers. He worked at *The Free Press Journal* in Mumbai (Bombay) with Bal Thackeray, who was a cartoonist before founding the Shiv Sena political party. In 1951 Laxman moved to *The Times of India*, where he created *You Said It*, which adorned the newspaper’s front page into the 21st century. Laxman’s “common man” was witty and sarcastic but never venomous, and his outlook was said to represent that of countless average Indians. The comic strip also served as the basis for a comedy series on Indian TV, *R.K. Laxman Ki Duniya* (2011–13).

Laxman published numerous short stories, essays, and travel articles, some of which were collected in *The Distorted Mirror* (2003). He also wrote the novels *The Hotel Riviera* (1988) and *The Messenger* (1993) and an autobiography, *The Tunnel of Time* (1998). In addition, numerous collections of Laxman’s cartoons were published. In 2005 he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan, India’s second highest civilian honour.

Introduction to the lesson

The title of this chapter- “**Iswaran the storyteller**” tells us that this story is about Iswaran. He is called the storyteller because as storytelling is an art, he is good at it. Iswaran uses special effects, does voice modulation, uses his body language to make the story realistic so that the listener, i.e. Mahendra gets attracted and captivated in his story. The writer wants to highlight this quality of Iswaran - that he was so good at telling stories that they appeared to be real. His stories were a source of entertainment for Mahendra.

Summary of the Chapter:

Mahendra’s job -

Mahendra was a junior supervisor in a firm. The firm offered, on hire supervisors at construction sites, factories, bridges, dams, etc. Mahendra’s job was to keep an eye on the activities at the work site. He had to go from one place to another. He was a bachelor. He could adjust himself to all conditions.

Iswaran, Mahendra’s amazing cook -

Mahendra had a cook named Iswaran. Iswaran had an amazing capacity. He could produce vegetables and cooking things from nowhere. He would conjure up the most delicious dishes made with fresh vegetables within an hour or so. Mahendra would go to work early in the morning with some food.

Iswaran’s job -

After Mahendra’s departure, Iswaran would make up the shed. He washed the clothes. He would take a bath praying. He used to read a Tamil thriller to doze off after lunch. He had a strange method of narrating stories. His stories had the effect of the thriller.

Iswaran’s method of narrating stories -

Iswaran had a strange way of narrating even the smallest incident. He would work up in suspense. He would add a surprising end. This was because he was very imaginative. Mahendra would listen to him uncritically.

Iswaran narrates the story of a tusker -

One day Iswaran told a story of a tusker. One day a tusker escaped from the timber yard. It roamed here and there. It tore up creepers and broke branches. Iswaran would get so affected with the story that he would jump about here and there.

The tusker creates panic among the people -

The tusker reached a town. It smashed all the stalls of fruits. People ran here and there. The students hid themselves in the classrooms. The streets were empty. Iswaran was then a junior student. He didn’t know what happened to him. He got a cane and followed the elephant.

How Iswaran concludes the story -

The elephant grunted and stamped its feet. The people were hypnotised. Then Iswaran struck the elephant's toenail. It shivered from head to foot and fell down. A veterinary doctor was called. After two days the tusker was taken by the mahout. Iswaran was asked how he did that. He told that he did so with a Japanese art, karate or ju-jitsu etc.

Iswaran's other story of a ghost -

One day Iswaran told Mahendra something about the place. That factory area was once a burial ground. He himself once came across a human skull lying on the path. He also saw ghosts at night. He was not frightened as he was brave. But there appeared a horrible ghost of a woman. It had matted hair and dried-up face. It was ugly. It held a foetus in its arms.

Mahendra's reaction -

Hearing Iswaran, Mahendra shivered. He called Iswaran crazy. He told him that there were no ghosts. These were the product of the mind. He asked Iswaran to get himself medically examined. Mahendra then retired for the night.

Mahendra was affected -

From that time Mahendra had unease every night. Every night he peered into the darkness to see if there was any movement. He always liked to admire the sky on full-moon nights. But after Iswaran's story he avoided looking out of the window.

Mahendra sees a ghost -

One night Mahendra was awakened up from his sleep by a moan. It was near his window. He resisted to look out. But the wailing became louder. He looked out. He saw a dark cloudy form. It was clutching a bundle. He perspired and panted. Later, he thought that it might have been some trick from his sub-conscious mind.

Mahendra decides to leave the place -

Next morning, Mahendra was ready to go to office. The horror of the night had faded. But Iswaran came to him. He told him about the ghost. He told Mahendra that he also heard the moan the previous night. He saw him (Mahendra) see the ghost himself. A chill went down Mahendra's body. He went to office the next morning. He handed in his papers. He had determined to leave the haunted place the very next day.

Lesson and Explanation

THE story was narrated to Ganesh by a young man, Mahendra by name. He was a junior supervisor in a firm which offered on hire supervisors at various types of construction sites: factories, bridges, dams, and so on. Mahendra's job was to keep an eye on the activities at the work site. He had to keep moving from place to place every now and then as ordered by his head office: from a coal mining area to a railway bridge construction site, from there after a few months to a chemical plant which was coming up somewhere.



Supervisor: a person whose job is to check the work of all the other people

Mahendra narrated a story about his cook Iswaran to Ganesh. Mahendra worked as a junior supervisor in a company which provided junior supervisors to various construction companies on rent. He got posted at different sites like factories, bridges and dams which were under construction. Mahendra's work was to keep an eye on all the workers at the site. He had to change places often and worked at various places like a coal mine, railway bridge construction site and the construction site of a chemical plant.

He was a bachelor. His needs were simple and he was able to adjust himself to all kinds of odd conditions, whether it was an ill equipped circuit house or a makeshift canvas tent in the middle of a stone quarry. But one asset he had was his cook, Iswaran. The cook was quite attached to Mahendra and followed him uncomplainingly wherever he was posted. He cooked for Mahendra, washed his clothes and chatted away with his master at night. He could weave out endless stories and anecdotes on varied subjects.

Bachelor: a person who is unmarried

Make shift: temporary

Quarry: mine

Asset: advantage

Anecdote: A short amusing or interesting story about a real incident or person

As Mahendra was unmarried, he did not have a family, he was able to live in these temporary quarters provided at the construction sites. He adjusted well in the circuit houses which did not provide the basic amenities or even the tents which were temporary in nature. Mahendra had an advantage - he was accompanied by his cook Iswaran. Iswaran was very close to Mahendra and accompanied him everywhere. He did not complain about the tough conditions in which he had to live. He cooked food for him, washed his clothes and gave him company by talking to him at night. Iswaran had a quality- that he was good at telling stories and he entertained Mahendra with his stories which were based on different subjects.



Iswaran also had an amazing capacity to produce vegetables and cooking ingredients, seemingly out of nowhere, in the middle of a desolate landscape with no shops visible for miles around. He would miraculously conjure up the most delicious dishes made with fresh vegetables within an hour of arriving at the zinc sheet shelter at the new workplace.

Desolate: uninhabited, empty

Conjure up: to gather or create with magic

Zinc sheet shelter: a temporary place to live with the roof made of metallic sheets

Mahendra tells Ganesh that Iswaran was a great cook. Whenever they shifted to a new location, he would gather all the vegetables and other ingredients required by him to cook in no time. As they lived at places which was not inhabited by many people, in temporary shelters with roofs made of metallic sheets, it seemed as if he would do some magic and gather all the ingredients out of nowhere.

Mahendra would be up early in the morning and leave for work after breakfast, carrying some prepared food with him. Meanwhile Iswaran would tidy up the shed, wash the clothes, and

have a leisurely bath, pouring several buckets of water over his head, muttering a prayer all the while. It would be lunchtime by then. After eating, he would read for a while before dozing off. The book was usually some popular Tamil thriller running to hundreds of pages. Its imaginative descriptions and narrative flourishes would hold Iswaran in thrall.

Muttering: speaking in a low voice

Dozing off: falling asleep

Narrative flourishes: detailed descriptions

In thrall: The state of being in someone's power

Mahendra would wake up early in the morning, get ready and leave for work after eating his breakfast. He would carry his lunch along with him. After he left, Iswaran would clean their living place, wash Mahendra's clothes and have a nice bath. He would take many buckets of water and pour water on his head while mumbling a prayer. After that he would eat his lunch and read his favourite book in Tamil language. Iswaran would get carried away with the details and descriptions given in the books that he read. Then, he would go off to sleep.

His own descriptions were greatly influenced by the Tamil authors that he read. When he was narrating even the smallest of incidents, he would try to work in suspense and a surprise ending into the account. For example, instead of saying that he had come across an uprooted tree on the highway, he would say, with eyebrows suitably arched and hands held out in a dramatic gesture, "The road was deserted and I was all alone. Suddenly I spotted something that looked like an enormous bushy beast lying sprawled across the road. I was half inclined to turn and go back. But as I came closer I saw that it was a fallen tree, with its dry branches spread out." Mahendra would stretch himself back in his canvas chair and listen to Iswaran's tales uncritically.

Arched: curved

Gesture: A movement of hands for head to indicate something

Deserted: empty

Enormous: huge

As Iswaran read stories with detailed descriptions, he narrated them in the same way. Mahendra recollects that he would narrate even a small incident with a lot of suspense and surprise which made it very interesting for the listener. Then he gives an example that instead of saying that he was walking down the highway and he came across a tree which had broken and had fallen on the road, Iswaran would use his facial expressions and bodily gestures to narrate it. He would say that the road was empty and he was all alone. This would create suspense in the listener's mind. Then he would say that all of a sudden he saw that a huge beast was lying across the road. As he walked ahead, his mind was telling him to turn and go back. As he reached closer, he saw that it was a tree that had fallen and was lying on the road. The branches of the tree had spread out and seemed as if it was a huge beast. Mahendra says that this talent of Iswaran made the simple story very interesting and it captivated him. Although he knew that some of the stories were not true, but the way in which

Iswaran narrated them was so interesting that Mahendra would not say anything and listened to him quietly.

“The place I come from is famous for timber,” Iswaran would begin. “There is a richly wooded forest all around. The logs are hauled on to the lorries by elephants. They are huge well fed beasts. When they turn wild even the most experienced mahout is not able to control them.” After this prologue Iswaran would launch into an elaborate anecdote involving an elephant.

Timber: wood that has been processed for commercial purposes

Hauled: transported

Prologue: an introductory speech

Elaborate: detailed



Mahendra recollects another story told by Iswaran. Iswaran said that his native village was surrounded by a huge forest which was full of trees. The huge logs of timber were sold for commercial purposes. They were transported onto the vehicles by elephants. They were huge elephants and if they became mad, they would get out of control and the mahout would not be able to tame them. This introductory session was followed by a detailed story involving an elephant.

“One day a tusker escaped from the timber yard and began to roam about, stamping on bushes, tearing up wild creepers and breaking branches at will. You know, sir, how an elephant behaves when it goes mad.” Iswaran would get so caught up in the excitement of his own story that he would get up from the floor and jump about, stamping his feet in emulation of the mad elephant.

Tusker: an elephant

roam about: move around

Stamping: hitting with force

Emulation: Effort to match or surpass a person by imitation or copying

The story was narrated as follows. One day, an elephant escaped from the timber yard and roamed around the forest. It stepped on the bushes and crushed them, tore the creeper plants and broke branches of trees which came in its way. Iswaran asked Mahendra whether he knew how a mad elephant behaved. In order to make his story more effective, Iswaran stood up and jumped around the place, hitting his foot on the ground in order to copy the actions of the mad elephant.

“The elephant reached the outskirts of our town; breaking the fences down like matchsticks,” he would continue. “It came into the main road and smashed all the stalls selling fruits, mud pots and clothes. People ran helter skelter in panic! The elephant now entered a school ground where children were playing, breaking through the brick wall. All the boys ran into the classrooms and shut the doors tight. The beast grunted and wandered about, pulling out the football goal post, tearing down the volleyball net, kicking and flattening the drum kept for water, and uprooting the shrubs. Meanwhile all the teachers had climbed up to the terrace of the school building; from there they helplessly watched the depredations of the elephant. There was not a soul below on the ground. The streets were empty as if the inhabitants of the entire town had suddenly disappeared.

Outskirts: outer area

helter skelter: here and there

Panic: sudden fear causing unthinkable behaviour

Grunted: Made a loud sound

Depredations: Attacks which are made to destroy something

As the elephant reached the outer boundary of their town, it broke the fences. The fences seemed as if they were like matchsticks for the huge elephant. The elephant reached the main road and broke all the stalls selling different things like fruits, mud pots and clothes. The people were taken unaware and so, they ran here and there. Then it broke the wall of a school and entered the ground where the students were playing. All the students ran back into their classrooms and closed the doors. The elephant made loud noises and roamed around in the school ground. It broke the goal post in the football ground, tore the net that had been put up in the volleyball court, stepped on the water drum and broke it and tore many plants as well. The teachers had climbed onto the roof of the school building and watched helplessly as the elephant destroyed the school property. There was not even a single person to be seen around. All the streets of the town were empty as all the people was scared of the mad elephant.



“I was studying in the junior class at that time, and was watching the whole drama from the rooftop. I don’t know what came over me suddenly. I grabbed a cane from the hands of one of the teachers and ran down the stairs and into the open. The elephant grunted and menacingly swung a branch of a tree which it held in its trunk. It stamped its feet, kicking up a lot of mud and dust. It looked frightening. But I moved slowly towards it, stick in hand. People were watching the scene hypnotised from nearby housetops. The elephant looked at me redevyed, ready to rush towards me. It lifted its trunk and trumpeted loudly. At that moment I moved forward and, mustering all my force, whacked its third toenail on the quick. The beast looked stunned for a moment; then it shivered from head to foot — and collapsed.”

Hypnotize: to influence, control or direct completely as by personal charm, words or domination

Mastering: putting together

whacked: hit noisily

Collapsed: fell

At the time of the incident, Iswaran was studying in one of the junior classes in the school. He was watching the elephant from the rooftop. Suddenly, he took the stick from one of the teachers and ran downstairs towards the school ground. The elephant made a loud noise when he saw a small boy approaching it. It lifted a branch of a tree in its trunk, hit its foot on the ground which threw a lot of mud and dust in the air. The elephant was threatening Iswaran but the boy was not afraid of it. With the stick in his hand, he moved towards the elephant, slowly. Many people had climbed on to the rooftops of their houses and were watching the incident. They were standing still and were awestruck, waiting to see what happened next. Iswaran saw that the elephant had red - coloured eyes which were full of anger. It again lifted its trunk and made a loud trumpet sound as it was about to attack Iswaran. Just then, Iswaran gathered all his force, and hit the elephant’s third toenail, quickly. The elephant was stunned at what had happened, then it reacted by shivering all over, fainted and fell on the ground, unconscious.

At this point Iswaran would leave the story unfinished, and get up mumbling, “I will be back after lighting the gas and warming up the dinner.” Mahendra who had been listening with rapt attention would be left hanging. When he returned, Iswaran would not pick up the thread of the story right away. Mahendra would have to remind him that the conclusion was pending. “Well, a veterinary doctor was summoned to revive the animal,” Iswaran would shrug casually. “Two days later it was led away by its mahout to the jungle.”

rapt attention: completely fascinated or absorbed by what one is seeing or hearing

pick up the thread of the story: would not restart the story from where he left in order to arouse curiosity

veterinary doctor: a doctor who specializes in treating animals

Summoned: called

Shrug: to raise one's shoulders slightly and momentarily to express doubt, ignorance, or indifference

After this, Iswaran would leave the story incomplete. In a low voice he would say that he would return after lighting the gas stove to warm the dinner as they were getting late for the meal. Mahendra would be curious to know what happened next and would feel disappointed that Iswaran had left the story unfinished. On returning, he would not continue with story as he wanted to arouse curiosity in Mahendra. Mahendra who would be eager to know the ending, would ask Iswaran to conclude the story. Iswaran would just say casually that a veterinary doctor was called to bring the elephant back to consciousness and after two days, the mahout would take the elephant back to the jungle.

“Well, how did you manage to do it, Iswaran — how did you bring down the beast?”

Mahendra was curious to know that how did the young Iswaran manage to overpower the huge elephant.

“It has something to do with a Japanese art, I think, sir. Karate or jujitsu it is called. I had read about it somewhere. It temporarily paralyses the nervous system, you see.”

Iswaran said that he performed a Japanese martial art. He said it was either Karate or jujitsu. He had read about it somewhere that the martial art rendered a person unconscious by disrupting the nervous system.



Not a day passed without Iswaran recounting some story packed with adventure, horror and suspense. Whether the story was credible or not, Mahendra enjoyed listening to it because of the inimitable way in which it was told. Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters.

Credible: able to be believed; convincing

Inimitable: Unique

Everyday Iswaran would narrate one or the other story full of adventure, horror and thrill. Sometimes Mahendra felt that the story was a fiction but still, he enjoyed listening to it because of the unique way in which it was narrated by Iswaran. As there was no television set at the place where they lived, these stories were a source of entertainment for Mahendra.

One morning when Mahendra was having breakfast Iswaran asked, "Can I make something special for dinner tonight, sir? After all today is an auspicious day — according to tradition we prepare various delicacies to feed the spirits of our ancestors today, sir."

Auspicious: good

Delicacies: tasty food

Spirits: souls of the dead

Ancestors: elders of the family

One morning, Mahendra was having his breakfast. Iswaran asked him if he could prepare a special meal for dinner as it was a good day. He added that on that day, they prepared special food for the souls of the dead elders of the family.

That night Mahendra enjoyed the most delicious dinner and complimented Iswaran on his culinary skills. He seemed very pleased but, unexpectedly, launched into a most garish account involving the supernatural.

culinary skills: related to cooking

Garish: something which is too colourful and fancy that it is disliked

Supernatural: related to ghosts and spirits

Iswaran had preparing a delicious dinner and Mahendra praised his cooking skills. Iswaran was happy on being praised but all of a sudden started narrating a detailed story relating to ghosts and supernatural powers which was disliked by Mahendra.

"You know, sir, this entire factory area we are occupying was once a burial ground," he started. Mahendra was jerked out of the pleasant reverie he had drifted into after the satisfying meal. "I knew on the first day itself when I saw a human skull lying on the path. Even now I come across a number of skulls and bones," Iswaran continued.



Reverie: a state of being pleasantly lost in one's thoughts; a daydream

Iswaran said to Mahendra that the site of the factory was earlier a place where the dead were buried. Mahendra jerked out of the pleasant thought after the tasty meal. Iswaran continued that on the first day itself, he had seen a human skull lying on the ground when he was returning after buying vegetables. Even later, he had come across a number of skulls and bones lying around the place.

He went on to narrate how he sometimes saw ghosts at night. "I am not easily frightened by these things, sir. I am a brave fellow. But one horrible ghost of a woman which appears off and on at midnight during the full moon... It is an ugly creature with matted hair and a shrivelled face, like a skeleton holding a foetus in its arms."

Shrivelled: wrinkled and shrunken

Foetus: unborn baby

Iswaran added that sometimes he saw ghosts at night. Although he was not scared of them as he was a brave person but once, he saw a very horrible ghost of a woman. It appeared on a full moon night at 12 o'clock. It was very ugly, had matted hair and a shrunken withered face. It looked like a skeleton holding an unborn baby in its arms.

Mahendra shivered at the description and interrupted rather sharply, "You are crazy, Iswaran. There are no such things as ghosts or spirits. It is all a figment of your imagination. Get your digestive system examined — and maybe your head as well. You are talking nonsense."

Figment: production

Mahendra disliked the story and interrupted sharply. He scolded Iswaran and said that he had gone mad. Mahendra said that ghosts did not exist. He added that it was Iswaran's

imagination. He ordered Iswaran to get himself checked up - to get his digestive system and his brain examined as he was speaking nonsense. (Mahendra asked him to get his digestive system checked up because when a person is suffering from constipation, he gets nightmares and dreams of ghosts and supernatural powers).

He left the room and retired for the night, expecting Iswaran to sulk for a couple of days. But the next morning he was surprised to find the cook as cheerful and talkative as ever.

Sulk: be silent, morose, and bad-tempered out of annoyance or disappointment

Mahendra had thought that Iswaran would remain quiet for a few days as he had scolded him the previous night. He was astonished to see a cheerful and talkative Iswaran the next morning.



From that day on Mahendra, for all his brave talk, went to bed with a certain unease. Every night he peered into the darkness outside through the window next to his bed, trying to make sure that there was no movement of dark shapes in the vicinity. But he could only see a sea of darkness with the twinkling lights of the factory miles away.

Vicinity: nearby area

Mahendra showed that he was very brave but on the contrary, he was uneasy because of the story Iswaran had narrated. Every night before going to bed he peeped out of the window next to his bed to assure himself that there was no ghost around. He did not see any ghost but only saw darkness and the twinkling lights of the factory.

He had always liked to admire the milk - white landscape on full moon nights. But after hearing Iswaran's story of the female ghost he avoided looking out of his window altogether when the moon was full.

Before listening to insurance story Mahendra light watching the White coloured landscape on a full moon night as easwaran had told me that on a full moon night a female ghost haunted place, he stopped looking out on that night as he was afraid bumping into the Ugly ghost



One night, Mahendra was woken up from his sleep by a low moan close to his window. At first he put it down to a cat prowling around for mice. But the sound was too guttural for a cat. He resisted the curiosity to look out lest he should behold a sight which would stop his heart. But the wailing became louder and less feline. He could not resist the temptation any more. Lowering himself to the level of the windowsill he looked out at the white sheet of moonlight outside. There, not too far away, was a dark cloudy form clutching a bundle. Mahendra broke into a cold sweat and fell back on the pillow, panting. As he gradually recovered from the ghastly experience he began to reason with himself, and finally concluded that it must have been some sort of auto suggestion, some trick that his subconscious had played on him.

Moan: crying sound

Prowling: searching

guttural: sound produced in the throat; harsh sounding

Wailing: crying sound

Feline: relating to cats or other members of the cat family

Panting: breathing heavily

Ghastly: causing horror and fear

auto suggestion: subconscious adoption of an idea which one has originated oneself

One night as Mahendra was asleep, he was awakened by the sound of someone crying. He thought that it could be a cat looking for mice and tried to go back to sleep. The sound became more harsh and seemed to be a human sound. Mahendra wanted to peep out of the window but stopped himself as he was afraid that if he saw a ghost he could even die. The crying sound became louder and it did not appear to be the sound of a cat. Mahendra could not stop himself and so, he bent down and lifted his head slightly in order to peep out. In the White coloured moonlight, Mahendra saw the ghost. It was holding a bundle in one hand. Mahendra panicked, he was breathing heavily and fell back on the bed. After sometime, he recovered from the scary experience and thought that probably his subconscious mind was showing him the ghost as he had been thinking of it. He assured himself that actually there was no ghost and his mind was playing a trick on him.

By the time he had got up in the morning, had a bath and come out to have his breakfast, the horror of the previous night had faded from his memory. Iswaran greeted him at the door with his lunch packet and his bag. Just as Mahendra was stepping out Iswaran grinned and said,

“Sir, remember the other day when I was telling you about the female ghost with a foetus in its arms, you were so angry with me for imagining things? Well, you saw her yourself last night. I came running hearing the sound of moaning that was coming from your room...”

Grinned: smiled broadly

Resolving: deciding

haunted place: visited by ghosts

By the time Mahendra woke up, took his bath and came out for breakfast, he had forgotten the ghostly experience of the previous night. Iswaran greeted him, gave him his lunch and his bag. As Mahendra was about to leave, Iswaran smiled and said that the other day, Mahendra had scolded him for discussing the ugly ghost but last night, Mahendra himself saw it. Iswaran had heard Mahendra's cries the previous night..

A chill went down Mahendra's spine. He did not wait for Iswaran to complete his sentence. He hurried away to his office and handed in his papers, resolving to leave the haunted place the very next day!

Spine: back bone

Resolving: deciding

Handed his papers: resigned

Iswaran's comment scared Mahendra once again. He did not hear him further and hurried off to his office. He decided to resign from the job and leave the haunted place. He could not live there any longer.

Question and Answers

(Think about It)

1. In what way is Iswaran an asset to Mahendra?

A. Iswaran is an asset to Mahendra as he accompanies him everywhere. He cooks food for him, washes his clothes, cleans the living place and entertains him with his unique stories.

2. How does Iswaran describe the uprooted tree on the highway? What effect does he want to create in his listeners?

A. Iswaran would raise his eyebrows in a curve and raise his arms in a dramatic gesture. He would say that once he was walking down the empty highway all alone. He saw a huge beast lying on the road. He thought of going back but as he got closer, he saw that it was a tree that had broken and had fallen on the road. Its branches appeared to be the beast's limbs that had spread out on to the road.

He wanted to create a scene in the listener's mind so that he would get captivated in the story. Iswaran wanted to create curiosity in the mind of the listener as to what happened next in the story.

3. How does he narrate the story of the tusker? Does it appear to be plausible?

A. Firstly, he gave an introduction that his village was surrounded by a dense forest. The wood was processed at the timber yards and the logs of timber were transported onto the lorries by elephants. He added that the beasts were huge and in case one of them went mad, it could not be controlled even by an experienced mahout. He would get so caught up in the excitement of his own story that he would get up from the floor and jump about, stamping his feet in emulation of the mad elephant. Iswaran's talent of narrating a story was praise - worthy. He put in a lot of effort to make it engrossing for the listener.

4. Why does the author say that Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters?

A. Iswaran seemed to more than make up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living quarters because his stories were so entertaining that every night they made up for the absence of a TV in Mahendra's living place. He would enjoy the unique way in which Iswaran narrated a story which was full of adventure, suspense and horror.

5. Mahendra calls ghosts or spirits a figment of the imagination. What happens to him on a fullmoon night?

A. Mahendra scolds Iswaran and says that ghosts do not exist. On a full moon night, he woke up from his sleep as he heard someone crying. At first, he thought that it was a cat which was hunting mice but as the sound grew louder and harsher, he was tempted to peep out of the window. In the white moonlight, he saw a dark, shady figure holding a bundle in its arms. Initially, he got scared but overcame it as he felt that his subconscious mind had played a trick on him. The next day, the presence of the ghost was confirmed by Iswaran and Mahendra realized that he actually saw a ghost the previous night. He did not want to live at a haunted place and so, resigned from the job.

6. Can you think of some other ending for the story?

A. Students can use their imagination to write some other ending for the story.

Talk about it

Question 1.

Is Iswaran a fascinating storyteller? Discuss with your friends the qualities of a good storyteller. Try to use these qualities and tell a story.

Answer:

Undoubtedly, Iswaran is a fascinating storyteller. He is well-versed in story telling. Telling stories is an art. It is not everybody's cup of tea. He has the quality of making others realise the true spirit of story. He makes use of gestures and dramatic skills to give sound effect.

A good story-teller should be an epitome of the qualities below mentioned:

1. should have vivid imagination.
2. should have good oratorical skills.
3. should be able to act during narration.
4. should use punctuation properly during narration.
5. should have the ability to vary the tone according to the situation.
6. should have amusing personality.
7. should be capable of creating and maintaining interest of the listeners.

Extra Short Answer Questions (2 marks each)
(About 30-40 words each)

Question 1:

What impact did Iswaran's story of a female ghost have on Mahendra ?

Answer:

Mahendra avoided looking out of the window when the moon was full. He went to bed with a certain unease and peered into the darkness to make sure that there was no movement of dark shapes outside.

Question 2:

Why did Mahendra become fond of Iswaran ?

Answer:

Mahendra became fond of Iswaran because he was a very resourceful person and took very good care of him. He was a trained cook and could also arrange for things at a desolate place. In addition to this he took very good care of Mahendra.

Question 3:

Why did Mahendra decide to leave the haunted place ?

Answer:

He was afraid of the haunted place after hearing and watching a ghastly experience at night. He found that he often dreamt of that woman ghost. Therefore, he wanted to leave the place.

Question 4:

What sets Iswaran apart from other domestic helps ?

Answer:

Iswaran was a class in himself. He was highly resourceful and a big help to Mahendra. He was a trained cook and to top it he narrated captivating and interesting stories to Mahendra at night.

Question 5:

How did Iswaran tackle the elephant ?

Answer:

The elephant had caused much terror, children and teachers ran here and there to save their lives.

Iswaran dared it and hit it on the third toe with a rod. Thus, the mad elephant was controlled.

Long Answer Type Questions (4 marks each) (About 80-100 words)

Question 1:

What are qualities of a good listener ? Express your views in reference to Mahendra who a would listen to Iswaran's tales uncritically.

Answer:

Listening is an essential part of any story telling. Being a good and a patient listener helps you achieve not only meaning of the story but also the expressions and the intentions of the story teller. Iswaran was an amazing story teller but Mahendra was an equally good listener, Iswaran used to create such a magnificent aura around the story that Mahendra used to listen to him with rapt attention he used to make eye contacts with Iswaran to either depict awe or horror depending upon the story. Mahendra would let his own mind and imaginations see the story in reality. For example, during the narration of tusker story, Mahendra could actually feel the tension and fear in his mind. Mahendra never spoke during the entire story telling session, he would never interfere in Iswaran's story, he would occasionally nod his head and only towards the end of the story show his compressions. Mahendra would listen to Iswaran as incritically.

Question 2:

Iswaran was a fascinating storyteller. What other skills he had ? How was he an asset to Mahendra?

Answer:

Iswaran was a very fascinating and a drama story teller. He gave imaginative descriptions of various events. He used dramatic language and gestures to describe events and changed a simple event in suspense. His stories had surprise endings and unexpected narrations. He was influenced by thrilling novels and stories of Tamil authors. All stories had adventure, horror and suspense. All these elements made him a fascinating story teller and he could captivate any audience with his stories.

Iswaran, the cook, was very attached to Mahindra. He followed Mahendra whenever Mahendra got a posting. He not only washed his clothes but also chatted with him at night. He was a trained cook and could cook delicious meals really fast. He could tidy the sheds as well as narrate unbelieving accounts with utmost conviction and mostly were true accounts.
