

Chapter 6: The Story

NCERT · Class 11 · English · Woven Words · Essay

Understanding The Text

Question 1

What do you understand of the three voices in response to the question ‘What does a novel do’?

Solution

The three voices represent the three various types of novel readers. The first voice shows a good-tempered person engaged in some activity and is aware of the advantages of literature. He does not have the attitude and time to analyse the novel but only knows that a novel only deals with a story. The second voice shows the attitude of other types of novel readers. These types of readers are brisk and aggressive and treat novels casually. They do not analyse the novels but only want a story to pass their time. The third voice is of the novelists like the author, to whom the story is the soul of the novel. All three voices are consistent in that a novel tells a story.

Question 2

What would you say are ‘the finer growths’ that the story supports in a novel?

Solution

The finer growths that the story supports in a novel are the narrative techniques, the art of characterisation and thematic plot structures. The story is a basic structure, a backbone without which the remaining structures and technicalities are meaningless. The storyline is the one which determines the features that are present in a novel. The story has the DNA of the novel.

Question 3

How does Forster trace the human interest in the story to primitive times?

Solution

In this story, human interest has been traced by Forster to primitive times by explaining that storytelling is an art which is old. One is taken back to Neolithic times, maybe to palaeolithic times. The liking of stories by Neanderthal men is indicated by referring to the anthropological evidence of the skull shape. To further prove this point, the primitive audience picture is conjectured by Forster as an 'audience of shock-heads, gaping round the campfire, fatigued with contending against the mammoth or the woolly rhinoceros, and only kept awake by suspense'. The author drones on, and when the audience figures out what occurred next, they kill him or fall asleep. Forster refers to a Scheherazade character who would tell stories to avoid the danger of being killed by her husband. He mentions that the talent of Scheherazade to tell stories with suspense made her live. Forster traces the human interest in the story to primitive times in this way.

Question 4

Discuss the importance of time in the narration of a story.

Solution

The importance of time is brought out in the story narration by Forster. He explains that in a story, an essential part is time. Even if it looks dull, according to the author, he asks us to consider it first in connection with daily life. He says that daily life is full of time sense. One can think about any situation in daily life, even by going beyond the time sequence. A person can think of situations from the past or from the future without going by sequence or strict order. One does this based on the value one attaches to a situation in particular. According to Forster, in other words, daily life has two lives – life by values and life in time. A strong connection is revealed by this conduct. The story recites life in time, according to the author. One can contradict the existence of time and act correspondingly in our daily life. In the case of the story, the denial of time sense is not possible or becomes unintelligible. Many experiments done by the novelists and storytellers in which they narrated the events without following the time sequence are mentioned by the essayist. Anyhow, these experiments did not sway the readers. A story is the basis of a novel, according to the essayist, and is a narrative of events in time sequence.

Discuss in pairs or in small groups

Question 1

What does a novel do?

Solution

A novel shows human conditions with respect to a narrative including characters. It tells a story which entertains and gives us a message. A novel is realistic based on fiction or incidents of real life.

Question 2

'Our daily life reflects a double allegiance to 'the life in time' and 'the life by values'.

Solution

A double allegiance is owed by us to the life in time and the life by values. Life in time implies the exact sequence of events that occur in our lives. Usually, we think of our experiences and life in a proper sequence. We may think about events in a sequence of our choice in our thinking. We may select events or experiences, or impressions from any point in time based on their importance or value. This ability highlights that we can lead our life by values as well.

Question 3

The description of novels as organisms.

Solution

Novels are organisms which possess a definite structure. In the story line, it consists of a solid base. The backbone of a novel is a story. Similar to organisms that give birth, grow and decay, a novel does too. It is like a system.

Appreciation

Question 1

How does Forster use the analogy of Scheherazade to establish his point?

Solution

The analogy of Scheherazade is used by Forster to establish his point that storytelling, having a surprise element, is the main aspect of a novel. The story of Scheherazade is referred to by him to make it clear that her survival is based on her ability to recite stories one by one to her husband. The art of novels is based on the storyline and the suspense and surprise it creates. A novel cannot exist or survive without this element.
