

## Chapter 6: On Science Fiction

NCERT · Class 12 · English · Kaleidoscope · Non Fiction

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### Questions

#### Question 1

**What makes for the distinction between the various genres of fiction—‘a sports story’, ‘a Western story’, ‘a jungle story’ and science fiction?**

#### Solution

Answer. In this article, the author has identified different types of novels: sports history, westerns, jungle history, and science fiction. He elaborates that “science fiction is a considerable literary world because science fiction is its essence, not its content, but its background.” The author accurately lists the characteristics of each type of novel, thus showing their differences. The story “must have some competitive activities, usually sports”. A ‘western story’ revolves around the nomadic life of American western cowboys in the second half of the 19th century. The jungle story includes the dangers associated with tropical forests and deserts. Science fiction has parts of interstellar travel and alien creatures. The author continues to argue that when another type of content is placed in a social context that is significantly different from ours, it becomes science fiction.

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#### Question 2

**How does Asimov establish that John Campbell was wrong in his opinion that it is not possible for a science fiction mystery to be fair to a reader in the same way as a classical mystery is?**

#### Solution

Answer. Asimov established that John Campbell was wrong that a science fiction mystery can't be fair to a reader in the same way as a classic mystery is. He said that John misinterpreted science fiction and imagined it was impossible to write a science fiction mystery in a moment of failure. He provides the example of a classic mystery of Sherlock Holmes, where the detective was given exceptional capabilities of sight to traverse the plot. Yet, it remained fair to the readers. He argues that if such stories were appropriate in classic mysteries, then using the latest scientific findings that the reader is

unaware of can be used by the author in penning down a science fiction mystery. They do not need to adhere to the rules of classic mystery, and still, it would be fair to the readers.

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### Question 3

**What are the pitfalls that the writer of science fiction mystery must guard against?**

### Solution

Answer. Writing a scientific mystery has its extraordinary pitfalls and difficulties. In writing a science-fiction mystery, the writer must be aware of his content and rationalise how to modify or conclude that science topic. John Campbell thought writing science fiction is difficult but not impossible. Ideally, it is possible to adhere to the game's rules in science fiction mysteries as in ordinary ones.

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## Talking about the Text

### Question 1

**Imagination and fantasy help human beings to speculate upon the possible explanations for the complexity and unpredictability of the phenomena in the universe.**

### Solution

Answer. In this chapter, Isaac Asimov tries to reveal the importance of science fiction. Science does not promise that any scientific process can control everything in the universe. Science does not guarantee absolute truth, nor does it believe that such a thing exists. The author believes that fantasy and imagination play an essential role in achieving possible results for a person. Imagination guides us in experiments and tests and helps us explain previously unexplainable phenomena. And the unpredictability of cosmic phenomena because these things do not exist, and no one can accept them.

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### Question 2

**The difference that science and technology have made to everyday life today was visualised in science fiction fifty years ago.**

### Solution

Answer. Fifty years ago, science fiction connected modern science with science. Fifty years ago, science was considered unusual, unimaginable, and sometimes associated with the energy of

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superstition. But in this generation, science and technology have become part of life. It has grown significantly and represents a clear vision for everyone. The modern contribution of science to our lives was visualised in science fiction novels centuries ago. For example, the crystal ball that allows us to gaze into the future or the magic shells that help us hear human whisperings from a distance are nothing but modern-day inventions like televisions and mobile phones. The magic carpet or wing horse is the image of a modern aeroplane or jet plane. So, the science and technology surrounding us today have been presented and exhibited to the public decades ago through science fiction.

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## Appreciation

### Question 1

**Discuss the author's attitude towards the pre-scientific imagination and the tone he adopts while talking about it.**

### Solution

Answer. The author's attitude towards the pre-scientific imagination and the tone he adopts while talking about it can be summarised as follows:

- Isaac Asimov talks about the time when science did not hold much predominance in human society. Science fiction is the creation of the last two centuries. It cannot be seen as the future unless and until people get the idea that science and technology produce the future. The author's tone towards pre-scientific imagination is sceptical in the beginning since he talks about magic, flying carpets, and winged horses.
  - A notion prevailed that the universe is full of superstitious things and beliefs in mythical creatures, and some energy or superhuman was the leader of the universe.
  - No one could get that idea until the rate of scientific change became significant enough to be noticed by people over the course of their lifetimes.
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### Question 2

**Observe how the paragraph, as a form, has been used in the essay. Some paragraphs consist of just one sentence. What purpose do you think the author had in putting them in this Manner?**

### Solution

Answer. Paragraphs that consist of just one sentence are:

- 1) "The goals of these ancient stories are the same as those of modern science fiction – they depict life as we don't know it".
- 2) "Science fiction is a literary universe of no mean size because science fiction is what it is, not through its content but its background".

In the first paragraph, the author talks about ancient and modern science fiction. In the second paragraph, the author throws light on the science fiction background and its genres.

The author tries to put these paragraphs in one line to emphasise a strong plot by explaining what science fiction entails in different forms.

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### Question 3

Mark the linkers used by the author to connect the point he makes in one paragraph with that in the next. For example, let me explain the difference that makes in the last line of para 1 of Section II. These are called discourse markers or discourse signalers.

### Solution

Answer. Linkers used by the author to connect the point he makes in one paragraph with that in the next are:

1. "There must have been tales of the strange and different.... **Let's consider** – The respect that people have.... manipulate that key."
2. "Science fiction is a literary universe of no mean size because science fiction is what it is, not through its content but through its background: **Let me explain** the difference that makes."

### Language Work

#### Literary Allusions

Look up a literary dictionary or encyclopaedia or the internet to understand the references to the following mythical creatures.

Centaur    Satyr        Sphinx        Harpy

Gryphon    Gorgon        Pegasus

Find out parallel creatures in Indian mythology.

- 1) Centaur: Kinnaras (half-man half-horse)

- 2) Satyr: Half man half goat
  - 3) Sphinx: Devdutt
  - 4) Harpy: Garuda
  - 5) Gryphon: Garuda same as Harpy
  - 6) Gorgon: Kali
  - 7) Pegasus: Kalki
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