

Questions & Answers about The Last Lesson

1. The usual atmosphere of the school was a stark contrast to the silence on the day of the last lesson. Elaborate on the differences described by Franz.

Franz notes that usually, when school began, there was a **great bustle** which could be heard **out in the street**, involving the **opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated in unison**, and the **teacher's great ruler rapping on the table**. On the day of the last lesson, however, **it was all so still!**, and everything **had to be as quiet as Sunday morning**, forcing Franz to go in **before everybody**.

2. Explain the significance of the village people attending the last lesson in M. Hamel's class.

The village people, including **old Hauser, with his three-cornered hat, the former mayor, the former postmaster, and several others besides**, were sitting quietly on the back benches. They were present because **they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more**. Franz realised that **It was their way of thanking our master for his forty years of faithful service and of showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more**.

3. Describe Franz's sudden transformation in attitude towards his books and M. Hamel after hearing the announcement.

After the news, Franz was filled with regret and noted **how sorry I was for not learning my lessons**. His books, which had **seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry**, suddenly became **old friends now that I couldn't give up**. Concerning M. Hamel, the idea that **he was going away, that I should never see him again**, made Franz **forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was**.

4. Why did M. Hamel call the procrastination of learning "the great trouble with Alsace"?

M. Hamel explained that the problem with Alsace was that **she puts off learning till tomorrow** by saying to themselves '**Bah! I've plenty of time. I'll learn it tomorrow**'. This tendency to delay education meant that **Now those fellows out there will have the right to say to you, 'How is it; you pretend to be Frenchmen, and yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?**', making them vulnerable to mockery by their conquerors.

5. Explain M. Hamel's strong belief that language acts as "the key to their prison" for an enslaved people.

M. Hamel spoke passionately of French as **the most beautiful language in the world — the clearest, the most logical**. He urged the students that **we must guard it among us and never forget it**. He explained that **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**, meaning their linguistic identity is vital for retaining their cultural freedom.

6. How did M. Hamel distribute the blame for the lack of learning among the villagers, including himself?

M. Hamel stated **We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with**. He assigned blame to the parents because **Your parents were not anxious enough to have you learn and preferred to put you to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money**. He also acknowledged his own fault, asking **Have I not often sent you to water my flowers instead of learning your lessons?** and adding that he sometimes gave them **a holiday when I wanted to go fishing**.

7. Describe the unusual appearance of M. Hamel and explain why he had dressed that way on the day of the last lesson.

M. Hamel had on **his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered**. These were clothes that he never wore except on inspection and prize days. Franz understood that **It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes**, signifying his respect and tribute to his service and to the importance of the French language.

8. What did Franz infer was the meaning behind the crowd gathered at the bulletin-board as he hurried to school?

Franz knew that **For the last two years all our bad news had come from there — the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer**, leading him to wonder **“What can be the matter now?”**. When M. Hamel made the devastating announcement, Franz realized that this order to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine was what **they had put up at the town-hall!**

9. How did Franz explain his sudden, improved understanding of the grammar lesson on that final day?

Franz was **amazed to see how well I understood it**. He concluded that he **had never listened so carefully, and M. Hamel had never explained everything with so much patience**. It felt almost as if the poor man wanted to give us all he knew before going away, and to put it all into our heads at one stroke.

10. Analyze the profound significance of Franz’s thought, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?”

Franz had this poignant thought when he noticed the **pigeons cooed very low on the roof**. This question reflects the pain that is inflicted on the people by the conquerors **by taking away the right to study or speak their own language**. Franz wonders if the imposition of German will be so complete that it attempts to control the very sounds of nature, highlighting the absolute authority the Prussians were imposing.

11. Describe the scene during the writing lesson and the atmosphere of concentration in the classroom.

For the writing lesson, M. Hamel gave them new copies written in a beautiful round hand—**France, Alsace, France, Alsace**, which looked like little flags floating everywhere in the school-room. The silence was absolute; **the only sound was the scratching of the pens over the paper**. The concentration was so intense that **nobody paid any attention to the beetles that flew in**.

12. How did M. Hamel show remarkable courage and restraint during his last moments in the classroom?

Despite hearing **his sister moving about in the room above, packing their trunks! For they must leave the country next day**, M. Hamel displayed great strength. He **had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last**, continuing with the history lesson and patiently listening while **the babies chanted their ba, be bi, bo, bu**.

13. What internal conflict did Franz face while reciting, and how did M. Hamel react to his failure?

Franz desperately wanted **to be able to say that dreadful rule for the participle all through, very loud and clear, and without one mistake**. However, **I got mixed up on the first words** and was left **not daring to look up**. M. Hamel did not scold him, but kindly said **I won’t scold you, little Franz**;

you must feel bad enough, choosing instead to reflect on the collective flaw of putting off learning till tomorrow.

14. Detail the events that signaled the very end of M. Hamel's last lesson.

The end was signaled **All at once** when the church-clock struck twelve, followed immediately by the **Angelus**. At the same moment, the **trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under our windows**. M. Hamel stood up, **very pale**, and after being choked, he turned to the blackboard and wrote "**Vive La France!**" as large as he could.

15. Explain how the description of the worn schoolroom highlights M. Hamel's dedication and the passage of time.

Franz observed M. Hamel gazing intently around the room as if he wanted **to fix in his mind just how everything looked in that little school-room**. M. Hamel had been there **For forty years** in the same place. The passage of time was evident as the **desks and benches had been worn smooth**, the **walnut-trees in the garden were taller**, and the **hopvine that he had planted himself twined about the windows to the roof**.

16. Why did Franz initially think the blacksmith Wachter was making fun of him as he rushed past the town hall?

Franz was starting for school **very late that morning** and was **in great dread of a scolding** for not knowing his participles. When the blacksmith Wachter called out, "**Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!**", Franz, failing to grasp the gravity of the news on the bulletin-board, **thought he was making fun of me**.

17. Describe the emotions shared by the elderly villagers and young Franz during the history lesson at the very end of the class.

During the history lesson, **the babies chanted their ba, be bi, bo, bu**. Old Hauser, holding his primer, was spelling the letters with them, and **his voice trembled with emotion**. It was an overwhelming moment because it was **so funny to hear him that we all wanted to laugh and cry**, capturing the deep, conflicting emotions of sorrow and heartbreak over that last lesson.

18. What were the major historical events that placed the story in the context of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871)?

The story is set in the days of the **Franco-Prussian War** in which **France was defeated by Prussia led by Bismarck**. As a consequence of the defeat, the **French districts of Alsace and Lorraine have passed into Prussian hands**. This historical context resulted directly in the **order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine**.

19. Explain the meaning of the expressions "in great dread of a scolding" and "thunderclap" as used in the text.

Franz was **in great dread of a scolding** primarily because he did not know **the first word about** participles, signifying that he was intensely frightened of being punished. When M. Hamel announced the last French lesson, Franz exclaimed **What a thunderclap these words were to me!**. The expression "thunderclap" here means the words were **startling and unexpected**.

20. How did the solemnity of the class contrast with the description of M. Hamel's usual behaviour?

M. Hamel was normally strict, walking up and down **with his terrible iron ruler under his arm**, leading Franz to often note **how cranky he was** and fear a scolding. However, on the day of the last lesson, M. Hamel spoke **very kindly** to Franz, and the whole school seemed **strange and solemn**, which was unusual as M. Hamel showed patience and avoided scolding him for getting **mixed up on the first words**.

Reflective Questions

1. Franz realized he had put off learning because he thought, 'Bah! I've plenty of time. I'll learn it tomorrow.' How does the pain of losing the French language suddenly make his books, which were "such a nuisance," become "old friends"?

Franz's sudden regret highlights the universal experience of taking things for granted. When M. Hamel announced the order from Berlin, Franz realised he would **never learn any more French**. The realisation that he **must stop there** made him feel **how sorry I was for not learning my lessons**. His grammar and history books, which had **seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry**, instantly became **old friends now that I couldn't give up**. This shift shows how the sudden removal of a right makes one value the lost opportunity.

2. M. Hamel tells the villagers that they must "guard" their language because "as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison". How does this statement encourage a sense of national identity and cultural resistance?

M. Hamel describes French as the **most beautiful language in the world — the clearest, the most logical**. By urging them to **guard it among us and never forget it**, he elevates the language from a mere school subject to the core of their identity. If a people are enslaved, maintaining their native tongue means they **do not lose their language** and retain the means of future liberation and a distinct social consciousness, acting as a crucial safeguard against total conquest.

Analytical Questions

1. Analyze the contrast between the school's normal atmosphere, characterized by "a great bustle", and the unusual stillness on the day of the last lesson. What does this change signify about the impact of the Prussian order?

The school was usually noisy with **the opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated in unison**, and the **teacher's great ruler rapping on the table**. This day, however, everything **had to be as quiet as Sunday morning**. This stillness signifies the solemnity and grief that the order from Berlin had imposed. The loss of the French language brought an immediate halt to the normal rhythm of life, making the atmosphere **strange and solemn** and forcing the students and villagers into painful realization.

2. M. Hamel includes himself when sharing the blame, asking, "Have I not often sent you to water my flowers...?". What is the purpose of this self-reproach, and how does it strengthen his message about the community's failure?

M. Hamel states, **We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with**. By admitting his own fault—such as sending students to **water my flowers instead of learning your lessons** or giving a **holiday** when he wanted **to go fishing**—he prevents the students from feeling they are the **worst**. This inclusive approach validates the communal guilt he identifies, proving that the collective habit of **puts off learning till tomorrow** has been shared by everyone, from teacher to parents, making the community vulnerable.

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