



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS IX
BEST SELLER
WORKSHEET

TITLE:

“Bestseller” is an interesting title for a story of an ordinary seller of plate-glass who wins the love of the beautiful daughter of a belted colonel. The title is not only a tribute to his exceptional salesmanship and personal charm but also an intriguing achievement of a critic who wins the beautiful girl’s hand in marriage much above his socio-economic status. The best seller “The Rose Lady and Trevelyan” is all about a commoner in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, winning the hand of a beautiful princess, much above his socio-economic status. Pescud’s own story is so improbable, that the narrator likens him to the hero of the best seller, he had discarded, during the course of their journey. Pescud, the protagonist hated the predictability, monotony and improbability of the novel’s story line, One wonders if he was narrating his own love story or pushing the story of the best seller he was reading as his own story.

THEME:

“Best Seller” is an account of a plate – glass seller, who although a commoner, falls in love with the beautiful daughter of a belted colonel and succeeds in winning her hand in marriage. Thus, O.Henry gives the theme of an incongruent love, a refreshing treatment, by narrating a story within a story. The story has the undercurrents of the theme of class differences and conflict of values between cultures and nationalities as represented by the heroes and heroines of these best- selling popular fiction stories.

IRONY :

The element of irony in “Best Seller” makes it a very engrossing story. Pescud, the protagonist, who criticizes the plot of the best sellers narrating the romance and marriage, between people of different strata as unrealistic, successfully plots to win over a bride far above his own social status, much in the same way. While pursuing his romantic dreams, Pescud claims that he let his ‘plate-glass business go to a smash for a while.’ However, when he makes the colonel laugh, he wishes the colonel was his customer, whom he would be able to sell a large quantity of his goods. Towards the end, too, when Pescud gets down at Coketown, to fulfill a whimsical desire of his dear wife Jessie, irony surfaces once more. What Pescud projects as a devoted husband’s passion to delight his ‘princess’ by fulfilling even her most whimsical desires is obviously another gimmick to impress his lady.

1. Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow-

a) *“In two minutes we were faced, had shaken hands, and had finished with such topics as rain, prosperity, health, residence and destination. Politics might have followed next; but I was not so ill- fated.”*

- i) Who are ‘we’ here?
- ii) Who is speaking these lines? Where is he going at the present?
- iii) Explain the last line , ‘I was not so ill- fated.’

b) *“A tall old man , with a smooth face and white hair, looking as proud as Julius Caesar was there to meet her. His clothes were frazzled but I didn’t notice that till later”.*

- i) Who is this tall man here?.
- ii) How did he look?
- iii) When did the speaker see him?

c) “*The relating of anecdotes and humorous occurrences has always seemed to me, Mr. Pescud, to be a particularly agreeable way of promoting and perpetuating amenities between friends.*”

i) Who is speaking these lines here?

ii) What according to the speaker, can promote friendship among the people?

iii) What does the speaker do immediately after this?

d) “She reminds him of the difference in their stations and that gives him a chance to ring in three solid pages about America’s uncrowned sovereigns.”

i) Why does the novelist devote three pages to America’s uncrowned sovereigns?

ii) What is pointed out by the protagonist of the novel? Why?

iii) Why did Pescud feel that the bestsellers were unrealistic?

2. Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)

a) What was John . A. Pescud’s opinion about best sellers? Why?

b) Explain the sentence “ *Life has no geographical bounds*”

c) What fault, according to Pescud, did ‘The Rose Lady and Trevelyan’ suffer from?

d) Give two reasons to show that Jessie was very proud of her family?

e) What were John A. Pescud’s views on life and ethics?

3. Long answer question (100-120 words)

a) What estimate do you form of John A . Pescud on the basis of your reading the story, ‘Bestseller’?

b) Bring out the element of irony in the story, ‘Bestseller’.

ANSWER KEY- BEST SELLER

1 A. i) 'We' here refers to the narrator and Mr. Pescud.

ii) The narrator is travelling to Pittsburgh on a business trip.

iii) The last line states that the narrator was lucky indeed, as he had no interest in politics.

B. i) The tall man here is Colonel Allyn.

ii) He was a tall old man with a smooth face and white hair, looking as proud as Julius Caesar.

iii) The narrator saw him at the Virginia station when he came to the station to pick his daughter,

C. i) Colonel Allyn is the speaker.

ii) He feels that the relating of anecdotes and humorous occurrences seemed to be a particularly agreeable way of promoting and perpetuating amenities between friends.

iii) Colonel Allyn then related to the narrator a fox-hunting story with which he was personally connected.

Short Answers

A) i. The stories of these bestsellers were similar. The similarity robbed these novels of surprise and anticipation which could sustain interest and arouse eagerness or curiosity. There's a wide gap between the social status of the hero and heroine and far from reality. One didn't see or hear of such capers in real life. People generally hunt up somebody from their own station and marry.

A) ii. Humans are the same everywhere. Their virtues, vices and weaknesses transcend all boundaries. Thus human behavior in any part of the globe is essentially the same.

A) iii. Apart from the high flattering language, the novel was inconsistent in scenes and characters. It gave an account of the travel in pursuit of the lady love. There's a wide gap between the social status of the hero and heroine and is far from reality.

A) iv. Jessie told Mr. Pescud that the Allyn had lived in Elmscroft a hundred years. They were a proud family and the huge white mansion had fifty rooms. It had a lot of pillars, porches and balconies. The ceilings in the reception rooms and the ball room were twenty eight feet high. Her father was the lineal descendant of a belt earl.

A) v. He believed that a man ought to be decent and law abiding when he's in his hometown. He also believed that their plate-glass was the most important commodity in the world. He called the Cambria Steel Works the best company.

Long Answers

A) i. At first John A. Pescud impresses us a successful travelling salesman of a reputed plate-glass company. He isn't particularly good looking. He's a small man with a wide smile. His eye seems to be focused on the companion's face and has a small black spotted head. His simple philosophy of behavior was that, a man in his home town, ought to be decent and law abiding. He's critical of the American best sellers as they don't depict reality. The rich Americans fall in love with the European princesses and court them. There's a wide gap in their socio strata and is far from reality. Pescud fails to notice the contradiction between

what he says and does. He's a hypocrite in this sense. He says that in real life men generally marry girls from their own society. The description of his own love story with the daughter of a belted earl sounds similar to the American protagonists in the bestsellers. His language too is no less flowery. eg. his first impression of his wife... for him she's the 'finest looking girl' he'd ever laid eyes on. 'Nothing spectacular... but just the sort you want for keeps.' His success in profession, love and life makes him a happy person.

A) ii. 'Irony' refers to the use of words to convey a meaning that's the opposite of the literal meaning. The title itself is ironic. Bestseller's a book which is bought by a large number of people. Pescud throws the novel, 'The Rose Lady and Trevelyan' aside after reading a few pages. The narrator admits that he hadn't read a bestseller for a long time, but his notions about them are similar to Pescud's. These present the hero and heroine in unusual and different social set up, yet get them infatuated.

Pescud makes a tall claim...when people marry in real life, unlike these protagonists, they generally hunt up somebody in their own station, a girl who went to the same high school and belonged to the same singing society that he did. This statement proves ironic when we apply it to Pescud's own love story. Jessie Allyn is the daughter of a colonel, who's a descendant of a belted Earl. She's a perfect stranger to him and belongs to an entirely different social milieu and station.

The name Trevelyan is also ironic. It suggests an eternal traveler. Pescud, the salesman is also a traveller. He meets his lady love during his travelling. He comes across the narrator and travels to a ragged hillside in search of petunias for his lady love.