



INDIAN SCHOOL MUSCAT
SENIOR SECTION
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
CLASS XII
VISTAS: ON THE FACE OF IT

SUSAN HILL

The Story-line:

Derry was a teenager, highly pessimistic and withdrawn from the mainstream society. - He developed this attitude after one side of his face was disfigured by acid. He avoided company of others and remained lonely lest he be noticed by other people. - He believed that no one loved him and his mother loved him because she was supposed to. - Well, Derry cannot be completely blamed for his pessimistic and aggressive attitude towards the world around him. - Once he heard two women commenting about his monstrous appearance. They said only a mother could love a face like his. - On another day Derry heard his parents conversing that he would not survive after their death because he was deformed. - The shock he received from these words was big. - On another occasion Derry heard his relatives saying that his being put in the hospital where he had been treated after the accident was good for him. In their opinion a deformed boy like Derry could accommodate himself with other deformed boys and girls. - Derry had his ears always open for such comments and used to respond to them in his silent way. - He concluded that the world altogether didn't need a boy like him. - One day Derry accidentally met a man called Mr. Lamb. - Mr. Lamb was an old man with a lame leg. After he became lame, Mr. Lamb began to develop a positive attitude with his deformity. - He worked hard to defeat this impairment and learnt to walk and climb ladders. - He was happy to be alive and ignored his lameness. - He made everyone his friend and had a house with no curtains and open doors. He welcomed anyone who came to him. - While Mr. Lamb took his impairment as a challenge and tried to overcome it, Derry believed that he was unwanted and lost. - His pain was physical and mental. Being a child he was not as strong as Mr. Lamb about suffering. - He couldn't take the sneering and sympathizing world as taken by Mr. Lamb. - Mr. Lamb was able to sit smart and unaffected as long as he wore trousers and sat but Derry had no way to hide his face. - After meeting Mr. Lamb Derry realized how foolish he had been to believe his parents. - For him Lamb was a man who opened the doors of his closed world in an hour's time the same of which were shut on him by his parents and therefore believed that his company with Lamb would make him a perfect person. - At the end Derry goes back to his house where his mother cross questioned him. She had instructed him not to step out of the house. - Derry tried to convince his mother that Mr. Lamb was an extremely good man but she was not ready to listen. - Ignoring his mother's thoughtless restrictions, Derry left his home and ran to Mr. Lamb's garden. - On reaching, Derry found a motionless Mr. Lamb fallen from the ladder. - He had fallen while pulling the crab apples down from the tree.

Justification of the Title:

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, "On the Face of it" is an informal expression used to say that something seems to be good, true etc. An individual may be quite different from what we think of him or what he or she may apparently appear to be at first glance. There is the imperative need for us to view others by removing our glasses of prejudice, hatred, hearsay and dislike. On the face of it, Mr. Lamb appears to be mysterious, lonely, lame old fellow who lives in a neighborhood house with a huge garden, but in reality he is very kind, generous, loving and altruistic. Similarly, although Derek has an ugly looking scary face, he is a fine lad of fourteen with a deep longing for love. There is nothing wrong with Mr. Lamb and Derek. What is wrong is the way people in their lives and around them view and treat them. On the face of it, there is so much of diversity, so many differences and divisions between the people and other species of the

world but underneath is a oneness, a sameness – all of them are created by God and all of them need to live and grow together with love and mutual acceptance. As the play progresses the characters' views about each other and our impression of them changes for the better. Thus, Susan Hill has quite appropriately entitled her play "On the Face of It".

Theme: People who suffer from disabilities must always look at the bright side of things and adapt reality of life bravely. At the same time the actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person. The disabled needs support and acceptance and not our pity. The title 'On the Face of it' is used to mean that something seems to be good, true etc. but that needs to be changed when you know more about it. Appearances are deceptive and most often, we go on dealing with impressions and prejudices about others without caring to know about them actually. People know Mr. Lamb as a lonely eccentric lame old man but in reality he is a very kind and generous man who longs for company and he loves his fellow human beings along with all the other creations of God. Similarly Derek appears to be an abominable ugly boy with a huge scar on his face whom no one loves or likes or befriends. He is the object of other people's hateful stares ridicules and neglect. Even his mother does not dare to kiss him on the cheek with the scar. Yet this boy who is suffering from an acute inferiority complex has a tender and sensitive heart. He wants to love and be loved. Fortunately he meets Mr. Lamb who transforms him with his healing touch.

Short Answer Questions: Q1. Who is Derry? What self-opinion does he hold? Derek, also called Derry was a young boy of 14. He was a quiet, shy and defiant boy. One side of his face was totally burnt by acid. He was a victim of an inferiority complex.

Q2. Mr. Lamb says to Derry; 'it's all relative, beauty and the beast', what essentially does he mean by that? Mr. Lamb means to say that different people have different view pints to look at the same thing. Some find one thing beautiful, others find it ugly. It all depends on outlook and attitude. It is, therefore, important to adopt a positive attitude towards everything just like the Princess Beauty who loved the monstrous Beast in the fairy tale. The point is that what you look like, but what you are inside.

Q3. What does Derry know about the fairy tale 'Beauty and the Beast'? Why is he not convinced by its moral? -Derry had heard the tale; Beauty liked the monstrous Beast; when she kissed he turned into a handsome prince; moral was not how you look outside but how you look inside is important; Derry was not convinced as even if someone kissed he would never change and his mother always kissed him only on the other cheek.

Q4. Mr. Lamb has successfully learned to cope with his loneliness. How? He kept himself busy by gardening, rearing bees, making apple jam etc. Also, he kept the windows and doors open, to welcome all.

Q5. What did Derry's mothers think of Mr. Lamb?

OR

Why did Derry's mother stop him, going to Mr. Lamb? Derry's mother does not hold a good opinion about Mr. Lamb. She had heard many things about the old man, therefore stops Derry to visit Mr. Lamb.

Q6. How does Lamb try to remove the baseless fears of Derry? Mr. Lamb influences Derry – his optimistic philosophy – advised him not to give attention to other’s comments – try to be internally pure and strong – eliminate the negativity of life.

Q7. Comment on the moral value of the play: The moral of the play is very loud and clear. The physically disabled should focus on the brighter side of life and not to brood over the shortcomings. The society should accept them as they are and expand their social interactions. In this way they can fight out the loneliness, depression and disappointment.

Q8. “It’s got nothing to do with my face and what I look like.” What attitudinal change do Derry’s words to his mother indicate? Derry’s attitude is now positive & he looks forward to a better life, no longer hiding from others.

Long answer questions:

Q1. How did Mr. Lamb’s meeting with Derry become a turning point in Derry’s life? – Both Lamb and Derry handicapped, – Derry in the beginning withdrawn and defiant, – couldn’t stand people staring at him – Lamb open-minded and generous. - – kept garden gate open and welcomed all, – had a positive attitude, taught Derry not to indulge in self-pity/love life, – taught him the ways of dealing with people – Derry confessed to his mother that Lamb talked of things that nobody had ever talked of – things that gave him an optimistic outlook. – Even defied his mother. – Derry’s return to Lamb’s garden shows his appreciation for Lamb/ restored confidence.

Q2. How did Mr. Lamb try to give courage and confidence to Derry? Welcomed him and accepted him as he was. Told him its important to see how you are on the inside than how you look on the outside One cannot go through life being scared and alienated. Shouldn’t brood over limitations but count on his blessings-he had brain, legs, tongue, arms and thus was totally functional-this was a blessing. Enjoy simple joys of everyday living with people around and nature, ignoring the unpleasant-see beauty in bees buzzing or humming-weeds growing-flowers blooming. One’s attitude matters. Individuals make a difference to the problem. Extended unconditional love, inspired him with love for life and instilled confidence in him to look at life in an optimistic way. Embrace his burnt face and rise above it.

Q3. The lesson, ‘On The Face of It’, is an apt depiction of the loneliness and sense of alienation experienced by people on account of a disability. Explain. – Loneliness and sense of alienation experienced by Derry and Mr Lamb, - Derry: – loner / pessimistic / suffered from severe negative complexes / anger and frustration / withdrawn and introverted / low confidence / indulged in self-pity, / suspicious of the intent of others (any two). Mr Lamb:- – inwardly – lonely, craved for company and acceptance, – outwardly – jovial, optimistic, lover of nature, social, outgoing, tolerant (didn’t mind children calling him Lamey Lamb or picking the Crab apples) – helpful, sensitive, independent

Q4. Mr. Lamb inspite of his bravado is a lonely man. Comment. He lived alone in a huge house with a sprawling garden, - He left his gate open, hoping that people would just walk in, - He pretends to have hundreds of friends but in reality has none, - Welcomes Derry in his garden and keeps him engaged in conversation, He puts Derry’s fears to rest, - Doesn’t curtain his windows as he doesn’t want to be shut away from the world, - The open window gives him the feeling of space and part of the world, - When he narrates his routine to Derry he creates an image of the house being full of people, - He visualizes people walking and sitting in front of fire sharing food and time, - In the end he says “they never come back.” Indicating the

sadness he feels on alienation, - One almost can see through his bravado of being very busy with lots of friends.

Q5. The actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often much less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities. What is the kind of behavior that the person expects from others?

Actual pain or inconvenience caused by physical impairment is often less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities, - – Physical disabilities caused pain once in life time like during war when Mr. Lamb got hurt and sometimes when its rainy, - – But after it this physical disability – set chain for other actions – caused mental agony – called Lamely lamb, mothers were afraid of sending the children because of his tin leg, - -Derry –burnt face –everyone pities him-only a mother could love that face, - -Both Mr. Lamb and Derry have been the victims of verbal atrocities, - -Mr. Lamb takes comments lightly, - -But Derry does not have the attitude like Mr. Lamb – Attitude of the people needs to be changed, - -Do not want sympathy but accept them as they are, -Wounds get healed –but bitter comments never forgotten leaves a scar.

Q6. “Acid...ate my face up. It ate me up.” Describe the miseries suffered by Derry after the unfortunate incident he refers to.

Ignored by others or has to face curious looks, glances and questions, feels awkward and abnormal, sense of isolation, unkind comments, over-protective attitude of mother, no true friends.

Q7. Various factors can lead to psychological changes in one’s personality. Discuss with reference to Derry’s experiences in *On the face of it*.

Burn scars and unkind attitude of others make him negative, encouraging, positive and kind attitude of Mr. Lamb changes his attitude.

Q8.Explain: “Derry is a victim of his own complex.” How does there come a change in his thinking?

Ans: Derry is a young boy of fourteen years. One side of his face is badly burnt due to falling of the acid. He thinks it ‘the ugliest thing’ in the world. When he sees his face in the mirror, he gets afraid of himself. He has heard ladies saying ‘What a terrible face!’ None will like him. He becomes dejected, withdrawn and defiant. He is unable to face the world. He avoids the general public. All these facts turn Derry a victim of his own inferiority complex and negative attitude. By chance he sneaks into the garden of Mr. Lamb thinking it to be a secluded place. But Mr. Lamb interrupts him and tells that his door is always open. People can come and he has got so many friends. Consequently a surge of relief starts flowing in the mind of Derry. He is drawn towards him. Mr. Lamb tells that children tease and call him ‘Lamey Lamb’ but he never minds. He plays with them and gives them toffees. His viewpoint brings a great change in Derry. He becomes free from inferiority complex and decides to face the realities of life.

Q9. Both Mr. Lamb and Derry represent two serious aspects of life, though their origin can be called the same. Explain the statement.

Suggested Answer / Value Points:- Both Mr. Lamb & Derry are physically handicapped – but have a different perspective on life – Derry an escapist – intentionally distances himself from people – likes solitude – considers his burnt face as the ugliest thing – believes none even his mother will never love him. On the other hand Mr. Lamb – an open hearted & broad minded – does not let his disability affect his life – being an optimistic – takes life as it comes, enjoys sitting in the sun – reading books – growing flower & weeds – with his positivism enlightens Derry who then follows his foot step.

Points for the Textual Long Answer Questions:

1. What is it that draws Derry towards Mr Lamb in spite of himself?

Derry's meeting with Mr Lamb –chance – pain of having a burnt face is expressed in this meeting- Mr Lamb convinces him through his conversation that beauty is relative- explains that the world is as one looks at it- Mr Lamb advises him to listen to nature- also tells him that hating people will burn him more than acid itself- one had to watch, listen and think to notice the difference- all these things attract Derry to Mr Lamb- decides to go back and inform his mother that he would continue living with him- has learnt to look at the brighter side of things.

2. In which section of the play does Mr Lamb display signs of loneliness and disappointment? What are the ways in which Mr Lamb tries to overcome these feelings?

Mr Lamb's leg –blown off years back-kids called him Lamey-Lamb – there are various indicators that reveal his loneliness- spends his time listening, watching and thinking- tells Derry that he has lots of friends- Derry understands that he was lying- refuses to tell the names of his friends- when Derry speaks of going home- becomes apprehensive that he would never come back- not fond of curtains because it shuts off the people and the world from him- likes to keep the windows open- to hear the wind- tries to overcome his loneliness by enticing people into his garden- keeping the gate open.

3. The actual pain or inconvenience caused by a physical impairment is often less than the sense of alienation felt by the person with disabilities. What is the kind of behaviour that the person expects from others?

People who are physically challenged- expect more acceptance and no ostracism- they have to be accepted as contributing citizens- issues of physical accessibility are just the tip of the iceberg- Derek in the play suffers because of the pain caused by people rejecting him on account of his face- suffers pangs of alienation within his family- the words of compassion that he hears- not genuine- even his mother kisses him on the other cheek- these people need to be given time and space to overcome their handicaps and live life to the fullest- Mr Lamb in the play has overcome this and is able to even influence Derry to look at life optimistically.

4. Will Derry get back to his old seclusion or will Mr Lamb's brief association effect a change in the kind of life he will lead in the future?

Although Derek stay with Mr Lamb for a brief period of time- association leaves an indelible print on his mind- attitude towards life is totally changed- from a shy, bitter and complex-torn lad he has been transformed into a mature and confident individual- already started considering Mr Lamb as his guide- and even explain to his mother-“You shouldn't believe all that you hear”-doesn't care about how he looks like- this transformation effected by Mr Lamb is there to stay in his life- negativity now is a matter of the past- trains himself to be immune to what others have to say or feel about himself- will lead a wonderful life in the future.

5. Mr. Lamb is a man of numerous positive qualities. Mention the qualities which make him overlook the deformity of Derek? Why do you think he changes the topic when Derek talks about his ugliness?

So far Derek always stared at – conscious of his deformity – Mr. Lamb – talks – views him from a totally different angle – sympathetic, understanding, compassion, a considerate attitude and positivity - didn't attach any importance to the outburst of Derek about his handicap - knew - he was drowned in self pity and self rejection - paying undue attention to his deformity - Mr Lamb didn't want Derek to dwell unduly on the issue of his ugly looks - so changed the topic the moment the boy started elaborating it - also wanted to impress upon Derek that in order to lead a healthy life one must accept one's lot - Life accords us so many bounties which merit appreciation - mentions healthy and ripe apples and jelly he was going to make out of them was an indirect reflection on the sweetness that life is full of that is available - his indifference to Derek's outburst indirectly aimed at helping him learn the lesson of positivity in life.

Answer the following in about 30-40 words.

1. Why does Derek enter Mr Lamb's garden?
2. What terrible complex does Derek suffer from?
3. Why do kids call Mr Lamb 'Lamey-Lamb'? How does he feel about it?
4. 'It's all relative. Beauty and the Best.' What does Mr Lamb mean by this statement?
5. What does Mr. Lamb tell Derek he can do?
6. Why doesn't Mr Lamb have any curtains at the windows?
7. What is Mr Lamb's routine?
8. Explain Mr Lamb's observation 'Everything's the same, but everything is different'.
9. How does Mr Lamb transform Derek?
10. Why does Derek return to Mr Lamb's garden?
