

## THE LAST LESSON

### Brief Introduction

'The last lesson' written by Alphonse Daudet narrates about the year 1870 when the Prussian forces under Bismarck attacked and captured France. The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine went into Prussian hands. The new Prussian rulers discontinued the teaching of French in the schools of these two districts. The French teachers were asked to leave. Now M. Hamel could no longer stay in his old school. Still he gave the last lesson to his students with utmost devotion and sincerity as ever.

One such student of M. Hamel, Franz who dreaded French class and M. Hamel's iron rod, came to the school that day thinking he would be punished as he had not learnt his lesson on participles. But on reaching school he found Hamel dressed in his fine Sunday clothes and the old people of the village sitting quietly on the back benches. It was due to an order from Berlin. That was the first day when he realized for the first time that how important French was for him, but it was his last lesson in French.

The story depicts the pathos of the whole situation about how people feel when they don't learn their own language. It tells us about the significance of one's language in one's life for the very existence of a race and how important it is to safeguard it.

### Main points

1. Franz is afraid of going to school as he has not learnt participles.
2. Wants to enjoy the beauty of nature - the bright sunshine - the birds chirruping in the woods - Prussian soldiers' drilling but resisted.
3. On reaching school Franz notices: unusual silence - Villagers occupying the last benches - teacher well dressed – everybody looked sad.
4. M. Hamel announces: Today is the last lesson in French.

5. Franz regrets and realizes why he had not taken his lesson seriously.
6. Understands the reason why teacher is well dressed and villagers sitting at the back.
7. M. Hamel realizes that all three, he himself, the children and the parents are to be blamed for losing respect and regards for the mother tongue.
8. Hamel says: French language – most beautiful, clear and logical language in the world. Always keep close the mother tongue to your heart as it is a key to the prison of slavery.
9. Hamel becomes emotional and writes on the black board “Vive La France”
10. Franz remembers the last lesson very well.

### Important Short Answer Type Questions

Q1. What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?

Ans: Franz was expected to be prepared with participles that day for school, as Mr. Hamel had said that he would question them on participles.

Q2. Why was Franz tempted to play truant from school?

Ans. The French teacher M Hamel was going to ask questions on participles which Franz had not prepared. To avoid being scolded he was tempted to play truant from school and spend the day out doors in a pleasurable manner.

Q3. What was unusual about the school that Franz noticed when he entered the school?

Ans. On entering the school, Franz noticed that there was unusual silence. There was no noise of opening and closing of desks. The village elders had occupied the last benches that were always empty. M Hamel was in his very fine Sunday clothes. Everybody looked sad.

Q4. What had been put up on the bulletin-board?

Ans: Franz had a negative view about the bulletin-board as for the last two years only bad news had come from it. That day was no exception as Germans had

put up an order passed from Berlin on the bulletin-board to teach only German in the school of Alsace and Lorraine.

**Q5. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?**

Ans: The order from Berlin caused many changes in the school that day. The entire school seemed strange and solemn. The old villagers were sitting on the back benches of the classroom quietly to thank M. Hamel for his forty years of faithful service and for showing their respect for the country. M Hamel also had put on his best dress on that day though it was not an inspection or prize day. The order from Berlin also brought a sense of repentance for those who in spite of having time didn't learn the French properly.

**Q6. How did Franz's feelings about M Hamel and school change?**

Ans: Earlier Franz didn't like M. Hamel much because of his ruler and cranky nature and he would feel fear from him but now all those feelings were entirely changed for M Hamel.

The message conveyed by M Hamel about the order from Berlin was a thunderclap for little Franz. He immediately felt sorry for not being sincere in the school and for not learning the French language and other lessons properly. His books, which seemed a nuisance and a burden earlier are now Franz's old friends.

**Q7. What reasons did M Hamel give for their lack of interest in learning French?**

Ans. The lack of interest in learning French was:

- (a) due to the parents who wanted their children to work in farm or mill to earn,
- (b) due to the students who were reluctant to learn and often put off the lesson for the next day
- (c) and due to himself as he asked them to water the flower and gave them off when he had to go for fishing

**Q8. Why doesn't M Hamel want the people to forget French?**

Ans. M Hamel wanted them not to forget French as it is the most beautiful, clear and logical language in the world and as long as they hold fast to their language it would be as if they had the key to the prison.

Q9. Franz thinks, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?”  
What could this mean?

Ans. The Frenchmen were highly patriotic and took a pride in their language. A strong feeling of revolt was in the air against the Germans. It shows that Franz did not accept their rule and thought that they can't tame pigeons.

Q10. Describe how M Hamel conducted the last lesson.

Ans. In his last French class though M. Hamel was emotional he fully involved himself in the teaching learning process. He heard every lesson to the last sitting motionless in the chair. When the church bell struck twelve he stood up pale and wrote ‘Vive La French’ and with a gesture he communicated that the school is dismissed.

Q11. What did M Hamel say about the French language?

Ans: M Hamel said that French language was world's most beautiful, clearest and logical language and therefore it should be guarded and should not be forgotten by them. He also added that the love with one's own language can be proven as the key to the prison for the people who are enslaved.

Q12. Why did villagers come to school that day?

Ans: The old men of the village came to the school that day to thank M Hamel for his forty years of faithful service. They also came to show their respect for the country that was theirs no more.

Q13. How did Franz find teaching and learning that day?

Ans: Franz found teaching and learning very interesting that day. He was very attentive and careful. Franz also realized that M Hamel had never explained everything with so much patience. It seemed almost as if the poor man wanted to give them all he knew before going away. M Hamel wanted to put it all into their heads at one stroke as it was their last lesson.

### Important long Answer Type Questions

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Q1. How did M Hamel react when Franz failed to recite rule for the participle?

Ans. Franz's name was called to recite the rule for the participles. But he got mixed up on the first word. He was standing there, holding on to his desk, his heart beating and not daring to look up. But M. Hamel instead of scolding, he told Franz that he must feel bad enough. He said that every day we think that we have plenty of time and we will learn it tomorrow. And now you see where we have come out by putting off learning till tomorrow. Now those fellows out there will have the right to say to you, "How is it; you pretend to be Frenchman, and yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?"

Then M Hamel told Franz that only he was not to be blamed. His parents were not anxious enough to have him learn. They preferred to put Franz to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money. M. Hamel blamed himself for it also. He said that quite often he had been sending Franz to water his flowers instead of learning his lessons. And when he wanted to go for fishing, he would just give him a holiday.

Q2. What does M Hamel tell about the significance and safeguarding of French language? How does he conclude his last lesson?

Ans. M Hamel said that French was the most beautiful, clear and logical language in the world. They must guard it among them and never forget it because when the people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison.

Then M. Hamel opened a grammar and read the students their lesson. All he said seemed so easy. He had never explained everything with so much patience: After the grammar, they had a lesson in writing. M Hamel had new copies for the students, written in a beautiful round hand: France, Alsace, France, Alsace. He had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last. It seemed almost as if he wanted to give us all he knew before going away and put it all into their heads at one stroke. He wanted to say something, but he could not go on. Then he turned on the blackboard, took a piece of chalk and wrote "Vive La France!" Lastly he said: "School is dismissed—you may go."

Q3. What impression do you form of M Hamel on the basis of your study of the story "The Last Lesson"?

M. Hamel is an experienced teacher who has been teaching in school for forty years. He imparts primary education in all subjects. He is a hard task master and students like Franz, who are not good learners, are in great dread of being scolded by him.

The latest order of the Prussian rulers upsets him. He has to leave the place for ever and feels heart broken. He feels sad but exercises self-control. He has the courage to hear every lesson to the last.

His performance during the last lesson is exemplary. He is kind even to a late comer like Franz. He uses a solemn and gentle tone while addressing the students. He has a logical mind and can analyze problems and deduce the reasons responsible for it. The problem for Alsace is that it puts off learning till tomorrow.

He knows the emotional hold of a language over its users. He is a good communicator and explains everything patiently. Partings are painful and being human, M. Hamel too is no exception. He fails to say good-bye as his throat is choked. On the whole, he is a patriotic gentleman.

Q4. Franz' attitude towards school as well as towards M. Hamel changes when he comes to know about the takeover of his village by Prussians. Do you agree? Discuss with reference to the 'Last Lesson'.

Ans. The orders from Berlin to take over the village where Franz lives have been pasted on the school notice board. Only German language would be taught in the school and French teacher had to go. Franz felt sorry for not learning his lessons in French any more. His books that had seemed such a nuisance a short while ago, which he found so heavy to carry seemed to him old friends. His feelings about his French teacher M Hamel Were changed. He decided to pay attention to the lesson. The school became very important for him. The idea that the teacher was going away, genuinely upset Franz who became too serious for history and grammar. I fully agree with it as one has to take one's deeds seriously when he feels the loss of it.

Q5. Give a brief description of M Hamel.

Ans: M Hamel was a very devoted, dedicated and a strict man of discipline. Students were afraid of his cranky nature and iron ruler. He was a true patriot and a sincere teacher who dedicatedly served the school for long forty years. The heart of this true Frenchman totally broke when he received the order from Berlin to vacate his place to make the space for a new German teacher. He remained upset during his last class. This changed his behavior too and he behaved rather very politely and patiently. When Franz was not able to say his lesson correctly, he, instead of scolding him, just made him understand about the importance and relevance of learning the mother tongue. He preached everyone presented in the class that important things should never be postponed as time flies very fast.

Q6. What is linguistic chauvinism? Is it possible to carry pride in one's language too far?

Ans. Linguistic chauvinism means an aggressive and unreasonable belief that your own language is better than all others. This shows an excessive or prejudiced support for one's own language. Sometimes pride in one's own language goes too far and the linguistic enthusiasts can be easily identified by their extreme zeal for the preservation and spread of their language. In their enthusiasm, love and support for their own language, they tend to forget that other languages too have their own merits, long history of art, culture and literature behind them. Instead of bringing unity and winning over others as friends, having excessive pride in one's own language creates ill-will and disintegration. The stiff resistance to the acceptance of Hindi as national language by the southern states of India is a direct outcome of the fear of being dominated by Hindi enthusiasts. The result is that "one India" remains only a slogan.