

4.5 The Last Lesson

Warming up!

Try to write phrases with each word beginning with the same letter.

Try these variations –

Prepare sentences which have as many letters in each word as there are words in that sentence.

Examples :

- Go in.
- You are out.
- Come here soon, dear.
- Bring those seven shiny belts.

Students may be allowed to keep working on this activity over a week or so. Encourage them to prepare one sentence for the whole class. Let them try to make the sentences meaningful in their own context.

Chit-Chat

- How was this year for you?
- Are you happy with what you could study this year?
- What did you miss, or could not do?
- What do you plan to do about it – about the things you could not do/study well?
- What was the best moment for you this year?



Growing Sentences

- Form pairs. Write two sentences of two words each.
- Form groups of three. Write three sentences of three words each.
- Form groups of four. Write four sentences of four words each.
- Continue to write as many sentences as the number of students in the group, till you reach the number 10.
- After that, go on forming bigger groups and writing sentences with as many words as the number of students in the group. However, you may write only one or two sentences at each step after 10.
- See if you can make a sentence with as many words in it as there are students in your classroom.
- Write the sentence in big letters on chart paper and display it in the classroom.



The Last Lesson

I started for school very late that morning and was in great dread of a scolding, especially because M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles, and I did not know the first word about them. For a moment I thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. It was so warm, so bright! The birds were chirping at the edges of the woods; and in the open field back of the sawmill the Prussian soldiers were drilling.

When I passed the town hall there was a crowd in front of the bulletin board. For the last two years all our bad news had come from there. I thought myself. “What can be the matter now?”

Then, as I hurried by as fast as I could go, the blacksmith, Watcher, who was there with his apprentice, reading the bulletin, called after me:

“Don’t go so fast, boy; you’ll get to your school in plenty of time!”

I thought he was making fun of me, and reached M. Hamel’s little garden all out of breath.

Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle, which could be heard out in the street—the opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated in unison, very loud, and the teacher’s great ruler rapping on the table. But now it was all so still!

Through the window I saw my classmates, already in their place, and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm. I had to open the door and go in before everybody. You can imagine how I blushed and how frightened I was.

But nothing happened. M. Hamel saw me and said very kindly:

“Go to your place quickly, little Franz. We were beginning without you.”

I jumped over the bench and sat down at my desk. When I had got a little over my fright, I saw that our teacher had on his beautiful green coat, his

- ◆ Who is M.Hamel?
- ◆ Find the explanation for ‘participles’ given in the book.

Guess the following :

- ◆ In what region does the story take place?
- ◆ In what time period does the story take place?
- ◆ What is it like when your school begins? Tell it in short.
- ◆ Why is the iron ruler said to be ‘terrible’?
- ◆ Who is narrating the story?

- solemn : serious

- ◆ How did M.Hamel dress up on special occasions?

Think and answer :

- ◆ Is the school closing down?
- ◆ Why is it the last lesson?
- ◆ What subjects does Franz study in school?
- ◆ Why were the old men of the village attending school that day?

- Saar : the name of a river

- ◆ Find where Alsace and Lorraine are located with the help of the map.

frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered, that he never wore except on inspection and prize days. Besides, the whole school seemed so strange and solemn. But the thing that surprised me most was to see, on the back benches, the village people sitting quietly like ourselves; old Hauser, with his three-cornered hat, the former mayor, the former postmaster, and several others besides. Everybody looked sad.

While I was wondering about it all, M. Hamel mounted his chair, and, in the same grave and gentle tone which he had used to me said :

“My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes tomorrow. This is your last French lesson. I want you to be very attentive.”

What a thunderclap these words were to me!

Oh, oh, oh! that was what they had put up at the town hall!

My last French lesson ! Why, I hardly knew how to write; I should never learn any more! I must stop there, then! Oh, how sorry I was for not learning my lessons, for seeking birds’ eggs, or going sliding on the Saar! My books, that had seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry, my grammar, and my history of the saints, were old friends now that I couldn’t give up. And M. Hamel, too; the idea that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was.

Poor man! It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes; and now I understood why the old men of the village were sitting there in the back of the room. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more. 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.

While I was thinking of all this, I heard my name called. It was my turn to recite. I had not learnt my

participles and so I could not say a single word. I heard M. Hamel say to me :

“I don’t scold you, little Franz, you must feel bad enough. See how it is! Every day we have said to ourselves: ‘Bah! I’ve plenty of time. I’ll learn it tomorrow.’ And now you see where we’ve come out. Ah, that’s the great troubles with Alsace; she put off learning tomorrow. 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.’ But you are not the worst, poor little Franz. We’ve all a great deal to reproach ourselves with.

“Your parents were not anxious enough to have you learn. They preferred to put you to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money. And I’ve been to blame also. Have I not often sent you to water my flowers instead of making you learn your lessons?”

Then, from one thing to another, M. Hamel went on to talk of the French language saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world. We must guard it among us and never forget it, because 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. Then he opened a grammar and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how well I understood it. All he said seemed so easy, so easy! I think, too, that I had never listened so carefully, and that he had never explained everything with so much patience. It seemed 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.

After the grammar, we had a lesson in writing. That day M. Hamel had new copies for us, on which were written in a beautiful round hand: ‘France, Alsace, France, Alsace.’ They looked like little flags fluttering everywhere in the school room, hung from the rod at the top of our desks. You ought to have seen how every one set to work and how quiet it was. The only sound was the scratching of the pens over

◆ Why did M.Hamel not scold Franz?

• reproach : blame

◆ According to M.Hamel, who are the people that did not take education seriously? What examples does he give to support his view?

◆ Why does Franz understand his lesson well?

Discuss :

◆ With the coming of the Prussians, will language be the only thing that will change? What other changes may take place?

◆ Where does M.Hamel live? Who lived with him?

◆ Guess why M.Hamel was leaving the country.

◆ Why does the author say 'I never saw him look so tall'.

• Vive la France : Long live France!

the paper. On the roof, the pigeons cooed very low, and I thought to myself:

“Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?”

Whenever I looked up from my writing I saw M. Hamel sitting motionless in his chair and gazing at one thing, then at another, as if he wanted to fix in his mind just how everything looked in the little school-room. Fancy! For forty years he had been there in the same place, with his garden outside the window and his class in front of him, just like that. Only the desks and benches had been worn smooth and the walnut trees in the garden were taller. How it must have broken his heart to leave it all, poor man; to hear his sister moving about in the room above, packing their trunks! For they must leave the country next day.

After the writing, we had a lesson in history, and then the babies chanted their ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Ah, how well I remember it, that last lesson!

All at once the church clock struck twelve. At the same moment the trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under our windows. M. Hamel stood up, very pale, in his chair. I never saw him look so tall.

“My friends”, said he, “I – I –” But something was choking him. He could not go on.

Then he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and, bearing on with all his might, he wrote as large as he could :

“VIVE LA FRANCE !”

Then he stopped and leaned his head against the wall, and, without a word, he made a gesture to us with his hand:

“School is dismissed – you may go.”

– *Alphonse Daudet*

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1. Find the meaning of the following words from a good dictionary.
 - sawmill • Prussian • apprentice • nuisance
 - cranky • hold fast to something • at one stroke • might
2. List the people and their occupations mentioned in the story.
3. Find five words ending with ‘-ing’ and five words ending with ‘-ed’ from the lesson.
4. Find five examples of commonly used past participles from the story. For example, said, learnt.
5. What is the meaning of the following words and phrases in the passage? Choose the correct alternative.
 - (a) was in great dread of
 - (i) was in a great hall
 - (ii) was in great demand
 - (iii) was afraid of
 - (iv) was angry with
 - (b) did not know the first word about them
 - (i) did not know anything about them
 - (ii) did not care about them
 - (iii) knew all the words except the first word
 - (iv) had not learnt them by heart
 - (c) terrible iron ruler
 - (i) a great king
 - (ii) a ruler made of poor quality iron
 - (iii) a magic ruler
 - (iv) ruler with which the master hit the student hard
 - (d) got a little over my fright
 - (i) got very frightened
 - (ii) got something because I was frightened
 - (iii) became little
 - (iv) got less frightened
 - (e) What a thunderclap these words were to me !
 - (i) The words came as a shock.
 - (ii) He shouted the words at me.
 - (iii) There was thunder and lightning.
 - (iv) The words were accompanied by claps.

- (f) ----- she put off learning tomorrow
(i) she prepare for learning
(ii) she did not learn at that time
(iii) she cancelled tomorrow's learning
(iv) she studied the word 'tomorrow'.

6. Fill in the following blanks using proper words from 'who', 'when', 'what', 'how' or 'why'.
- (a) She started jumping for joy ----- she heard the news.
(b) You must tell ----- I mustn't do it.
(c) The person ----- is making the speech is my friend.
(d) They wondered ----- had happened to him.
(e) You must show me ----- to mix the solutions.
(f) I'll tell you ----- it is time to leave.

Write a letter of thanks to your English teacher. Thank him/her for everything that he/she did for you.

7. Write a short note on your mother tongue and the attempts you make to study it well.
8. Write points and counter points on the following topics :
- You should study all subjects in your mother tongue
 - You must memorise the rules of grammar

9. Why was Franz sad?

10. What should people never lose even when they lose freedom?

