

The Midnight Visitor

Answers to NCERT Questions

READ AND FIND OUT

1. How is Ausable different from other secret agents?

Ans: Ausable was different from other secret agents in more ways than one. He had a small room in a musty corridor of a gloomy French hotel. It was on the sixth and top floor, and it was scarcely the setting for a romantic adventure. He was extremely fat. In spite of living in Paris for over twenty years, he spoke French and German only passably and had an American accent. Instead of getting messages slipped into his hands by dark eyed beauties, he got only a telephone call making an appointment. In these ways, he was different from the conventional notion of a secret agent.

2. Who is Fowler and what is his first authentic thrill of the day?

Ans: Fowler was a writer and he had come to meet Ausable. Fowler's first authentic thrill of the day came when he saw a man in Ausable's room, pointing a pistol towards Ausable and himself.

3. How has Max got in?

Ans: Max had got into the room with a pass key or a master key.

4. How does Ausable say he got in?

Ans: Ausable said that he thought Max had got into the room through the balcony. He said that it was the second time in a month that somebody had got into his room this way.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. "Ausable did not fit any description of a secret agent Fowler had ever read". What do secret agents in books and films look like, in your opinion? Discuss in groups or in class some stories or movies featuring spies, detectives and secret agents, and compare their appearance with that of Ausable in the story. (You may mention characters from fiction in languages other than English. In English fiction, you may come across Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, or Miss Marple. Have you watched any movie featuring James Bond?)

Ans: Secret agents in fiction are projected like ideal men, 'Tall, dark and handsome'. They are usually well built and keep beautiful women for company. They would always smoke pipe or cigar and do death defying stunts. James Bond is a very famous

character by Ian Fleming. Movies based on James Bond show hi-tech gizmos which assist the detective in countering villains. There are some exceptions as well. There is a character named Feluda which was created by Satyajit Ray, the famous Bangla Filmmaker. Feluda was typical bhadralok by appearance.

2. How does Ausable manage to make Max believe that there is a balcony attached to his room? Look back at his detailed description of it. What makes it a convincing story?

Ans: Ausable creates a detailed description of how his office was part of a bigger apartment and how the next room had a direct connection with a balcony. His statement that, somebody else also broke into his office through that balcony earlier made it a convincing story. Ausable's ability to think quickly and calmly in a situation of panic makes it convincing.

3. Looking back at the story, when do you think Ausable thought up his plan for getting rid of Max? Do you think he had worked out his plan in detail right from the beginning? Or did he make up a plan taking advantage of events as they happened?

Ans: No, I don't think that he had worked out his plan in detail earlier. He took advantage of events as they happened. Ausable made up a story of the balcony outside the room and as there was a knock at the door, he said that it would be the police. All these made Max desperate. He became restless and without seeing below, jumped out of the window.

TALK ABOUT IT

1. In this story, Ausable shows great 'presence of mind', or the ability to think quickly, and act calmly and wisely, in a situation of danger and surprise. Give examples from your own experience, or narrate a story, which shows someone's presence of mind.

Ans: This story refers to the play, 'If I Were You'. Gerrard was held hostage by a criminal. However, Gerrard treated the criminal as a guest and trapped him with his confidence. He managed to convince the criminal to run away as the police is behind him. He told the criminal to run through the exit door, which was actually a cupboard door. The criminal exited through the door and was trapped in the cupboard.

2. Discuss what you would do in the situations described below. Remember that presence of mind comes out of a state of mental preparedness. If you have thought about possible problems or dangers, and about how to act in such situations, you have a better chance of dealing with such situations if they do arise.

- i. A small fire starts in your kitchen.

- ii. A child starts to choke on a piece of food.
- iii. An electrical appliance starts to hiss and gives out sparks.
- iv. A bicycle knocks down a pedestrian.
- v. It rains continuously for more than twenty-four hours.
- vi. A member of your family does not return home at the usual or expected time.

You may suggest other such situations.

Ans:

- If a blanket is available, it should be put over the fire to shut out the air. If the fire is not due to an electrical problem, water can be thrown on it. If it is due to a short-circuit, electricity must be disconnected immediately from everything in the kitchen before taking any other measure.
- The child's back must be thumped slowly until the piece of food stuck is vomited out. However, in case it continues, the child should be given trained medical aid immediately.
- Electricity to the appliance should be immediately disconnected. If it is plugged into a socket, the plug must be removed from the socket. Later on, the appliance may be got repaired by an authorised person.
- First aid should be given to the pedestrian at once. Public help may also be asked, if necessary. Depending on the seriousness of the injury, the affected person may be shifted to a hospital.
- Flooding may be caused by a heavy downpour. So all necessary precautions for saving various possessions should be taken, besides informing the concerned authorities to take preventive action.
- A family member not returning home at the usual time should be enquired for at the place where he or she was expected to visit. If he or she was with friends, these friends or the friends' families should be contacted. If there is no result from these enquiries, as a last resort, the local police may be informed.

Additional Questions

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)

1. What made the story of the balcony so convincing?

Ans: Ausable showed his annoyance for the nuisance created by the balcony. He said that this was the second time that someone had got into his room through it. He also said that the balcony was not his but belongs to the next apartment and earlier his room used to be a part of a large unit.

2. How did Max go out of Ausable's room to save himself from the police?

Ans: Max was very nervous to find the police at the door. He went out of the window saying that he would wait in the balcony. He warned Ausable to send them away or he would shoot him. Max did not confirm the balcony and stepped out of the window and died.

3. How did Ausable kill Max without using a weapon?

Ans: Ausable was an intelligent spy. When he found Max waiting for him in his room, he made a story of a balcony under his window. He convinced Max about the balcony. When someone knocked at the door, Max fearing it to be the police, jumped out of the window and died.

4. How and why did Max come inside Ausable's room?

Ans: Max had come into the room using a pass key. He had come to get the secret report about some new missiles, which he was sure, was with Ausable.

5. How was Ausable different from the other secret agents?

Ans: Ausable, unlike other secret agents, was very fat with an accent of German. Fowler was expecting a smart and active agent having messages slipped into his hand by a dark beauty. Whereas, Ausable received a telephone call making an appointment in his room.

6. Why was Ausable confident that Max would never return?

Ans: Believing Ausable's story about the balcony to be true, Max stepped out, however, had concocted a very convincing story, and knew that what awaited him was a drop from the sixth floor. Hence, he was confident that Max would never return.

7. How did Ausable befool Max about the balcony?

Ans: Ausable was a very intelligent spy agent. When he found Max waiting for him in his room, he immediately thought of a plan. He told Max that there is a balcony from where people enter his room that Max must have also entered from there. Max got convinced about the story and hence, when someone knocked at the door, he ran towards the balcony to hide but unfortunately died.

8. Why did Fowler come to meet Ausable? Was he able to achieve his target?

Ans: Fowler was a young and romantic writer. He had come to see Ausable to know about the life of a secret agent. Fowler was fascinated by them and thought of them as mysterious and romantic. He was not able to achieve his target as Ausable was a boring man.

9. Why did so many people risk their lives?

Ans: Ausable had received a paper which had certain important information about the new missiles. The paper was so important that several men and women had risked their lives to get it.

10. Why did Fowler feel let down when he met Ausable?

Ans: Fowler felt let down and disappointed to meet Ausable. He had a different picture of a secret agent in his mind. He thought they should look to be very mysterious and romantic, but he found Ausable to be a very fat and boring man.

11. What was someone expected to bring to Ausable's room?

Ans: Someone was expected to bring a paper containing important information to Ausable's room.

12. Who was in Ausable's room? What was in his hand?

Ans: A man named Max was there in Ausable's room. He was another secret agent. He had an automatic pistol in his hand.

13. What did the secret agent tell Max when he heard the knock?

Ans: He told Max that it would be the police. He said that he had called the police for the protection of such an important paper that he was going to receive that night. He wanted to have an extra protection for the report.

14. Did Ausable know that it was the waiter who had knocked at the door?

Ans: Yes, Ausable knew that the man knocking at the door was the waiter. He had ordered him to bring a bottle of wine. And he knew that the waiter must have come with the drinks.

15. Was there a balcony outside the window? Give instances from the text in support of your answer.

Ans: No, actually there was no balcony outside the window. Ausable had falsely told Max about the balcony. When Max dropped himself to the balcony, he screamed. He fell down to the ground from the sixth floor. In the end, Ausable told Fowler, "No, he won't return."

16. Did Fowler find this episode, thrilling or disappointing? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans: Fowler found this episode very thrilling. He was very much surprised by the tactful nature of Ausable. He cocked-up a story about the balcony and the police. He got the intruder, Max, killed without firing a shot.

17. How did Ausable get rid of Max?

Ans: Ausable cocked-up a story. He told Max that there was a balcony just below his window. He told him that the balcony was a part of the next room. When the waiter knocked at the door, Ausable told Max that it would be the police. Max was nervous. He dropped himself to the balcony through the window. But outside, there was no balcony. He fell down and died.

18. How did Ausable behave to see Max in his room?

Ans: To see Max in his room, Ausable remained cool and silent. He was not afraid of Max. He seemed to be angry with the management of the hotel, regarding the balcony below the window of his room.

19. Describe Ausable.

Ans: Ausable was a secret agent. He was a fat and sloppy fellow. He was not a romantic figure. He had come to Paris from Boston twenty years ago. He could speak French and German passably. He had a style of his own in the American language.

20. Fowler said that Max would soon come back from the balcony. What did Ausable tell him and why?

Ans: Ausable told Fowler that Max would never return. He said so because he knew that there was no balcony outside. He said that Max had fallen down to the ground to meet his end.

21. Why did Fowler want to meet Ausable? Why was he disappointed?

Ans: Fowler was a young and romantic writer. He wanted to meet Ausable because he was a secret agent. He was disappointed to meet Ausable because he was a fat, sloppy fellow. He was not romantic. He lived in a small room in a gloomy hotel.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words)

1. With reference to 'The Midnight Visitor', do you think the presence of mind should be developed and to what advantage? Elaborate highlighting the characteristics of Ausable.

Ans: Max was waiting for Ausable to steal the important paper from him. As Fowler observed, apart from the pointed gun, he didn't look very menacing. Even this proved useless for him as Ausable outwitted him with his presence of mind and intelligence. Ausable cleverly found out how Max had entered the room and created an extremely believable story about a non-existent balcony. He kept calm, and hearing the waiter knock, declared it to be the police. Max, in an attempt to hide, fell to his death. Thus, Ausable got rid of Max without moving a muscle.

2. Pride before a fall befits Max, who said: "I will get it back tonight". Was he successful? What lesson can be learnt from this?

Ans: Max was a spy who was overconfident and too proud. His pride blinded him, and he thought that wielding a gun would give a further edge over the seemingly slow Ausable. However, despite this apparent pride and confidence, Max was utterly unsuccessful. Ausable outwitted him without lifting a finger. Max, in fact, jumped to his own death by taking Ausable's words at face value. Thus, one learns that one should

not be proud and must pay attention to the finer details before attempting to do anything.

3. At the beginning of the story, Fowler felt disappointed with Ausable. Do you think Fowler had the same feeling towards the end of the story? Give reasons for your answer.

Ans: At the beginning of the story, Fowler felt disappointed with Ausable because he did not at all look like a secret agent of his imagination. He found him quite boring. He did not want to be with him any more. But when he found Max in his room with a gun, he was thrilled. He found that Ausable was not at all perturbed. He cocked-up a story about the balcony outside his window. When the waiter knocked at the door, Ausable told Max that it would be the police. He told him that he had called the police for the security of that important paper. Hearing this, Max jumped outside the window to the balcony. But there was no balcony. He fell down from the sixth floor and died. Thus, Fowler was thrilled to see all this. So towards the end of the story, he was not disappointed with Ausable.

4. Describe the incident leading to the death of Max.

Ans: Ausable was a secret agent. He was living in a French hotel. His room was on the sixth and top floor of the hotel. One evening, a young writer named Fowler came to meet him. When they entered the room and switched on the light, they found a man standing in the centre of the room. He had a pistol in his hand. His name was Max. He came there to grab the important report from Ausable. Seeing Max, Ausable remained cool and silent. But he seemed to be angry with the management of the hotel. He said that because of the balcony just below his window anyone could enter the room.

When there was a sudden knock at the door, Ausable said that it might be the police. He said that he himself had called the police. Max jumped through the window to the balcony. But in reality, there was no balcony. So, Max fell down to the ground from the sixth floor and was killed.

5. Write a character sketch of the secret agent Ausable.

Ans: Ausable was a secret agent. He was a fat and sloppy fellow. In his appearance, he did not seem to be a romantic figure. He came to Paris from Boston twenty years ago. He could speak French and German passably. He had not lost the American accent. Ausable was a very intelligent person. He had a great presence of mind. He did not lose heart in a difficult situation when he faced a man with a pistol in his hand. He remained cool. He cocked-up a story about the balcony. He made Max nervous by telling him about the police. He got Max killed without any fighting and shooting. Fowler who was disappointed to meet him at the beginning of the story was very much impressed with his intelligence and presence of mind at the end of the story.

6. Though Max was very cunning, still he was but 'a little spy' before Ausable. Explain.

Ans: Though Max was very cunning, he was indeed no match to Ausable. He was easily misled by Ausable into believing that there was a balcony attached to the room. He also made him fool by cocking up a false story about the police knocking at the door though he knew that it was the waiter. Ausable's facial expressions were so normal that Max could not believe that he was telling lies to him. Ausable was able to get rid of Max with very little efforts. So, we can say that Max was 'a little spy' before Ausable.

7. How did Ausable use 'the knock' at the door in his favour? What light does it throw on his character?

Ans: Ausable was a secret agent. He was staying in a hotel. A guest named Fowler comes to meet him. Ausable gives an order to the waiter for a bottle of wine and two glasses. When they entered the room, they were surprised to see an intruder named Max in the room. That man had a pistol in his hand. After sometime, there was a knock at the door. Ausable knew that it was the waiter but he told Max that it would be the police. He said that he himself had called the police for the protection of the important report. Hearing this, Max jumped out of the window on to the balcony. There was no balcony. He fell down and died. This episode shows that Ausable had great presence of mind. He was a clever spy indeed.

Self-Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. Did Max really deserve to get a chance to accomplish a risky task?
2. Why did Fowler come to visit Ausable?
3. What element of drama did Ausable promise him?
4. Why was Max in the room?
5. How did Ausable react when he saw Max in the room?

Long Answer Questions

1. Presence of mind and intelligence are more powerful than a gun. How far is it true in the case of Ausable, the secret agent?
2. What makes you think Max was a careless and foolish fellow?
3. Ausable was a secret agent. What qualities can be attributed to him? Give some examples.