

The Happy Prince - Oscar Wilde

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINK ABOUT IT

1. Why do the courtiers call the prince, “The Happy Prince? Is he really happy? What does he see all around him?

Ans: As a live human being, when he lived in a beautiful palace, the Prince did not know or feel the emotion, “sorrow because it was not allowed to enter ‘The Walls of the Palace’. He would be always pleasant and happy, therefore, the courtiers called him “The Happy Prince. He lived and died happily. But now within this stone structure placed on a very high pedestal, the prince is very unhappy because he can see all the ugliness and misery that is present in his city.

2. Why does the Happy Prince send a ruby for the seamstress? What does the swallow do in the seamstress’ house?

Ans: The happy prince sends a ruby for the seamstress because she did not have any money to give her little son who was down with very high fever. The swallow goes to the seamstress’ house and finds the lady sleeping due to fatigue. So he dropped the ruby on the table beside the lady’s thimble. Then he flew gently round the bed, fanning the boy’s forehead with his wings making him feel better, and helped him sink into a deep slumber.

3. For whom does the prince send the sapphires and why?

Ans: The prince’s eyes were made of rare sapphires. He had exhausted all the rubies. One night, he spotted a playwright trying to finish a play which he could not because of the excessive cold. He had no fire in his grate, and had fainted due to hunger. The prince told the swallow to scoop out one eye and give it to the playwright to help him get energy and warmth to get on with his work. His second eye was plucked out to be given to a little girl who had dropped her matches into a gutter. The prince knew that if she was not helped, her father would beat her. With both the sapphires gone, the prince had gone blind.

4. What does the swallow see when he flies over the city?

Ans: The swallow saw the rich enjoying themselves in their beautiful houses, while the poor were sitting at their gates hoping to receive some leftovers. In the dark lanes, white faces of starving children, stared listlessly into the bleak and hopeless black space around them. A watchman was driving away two little boys who were cold and hungry from under the archway of a bridge.

5. Why did the swallow not leave the prince and go to Egypt?

Ans: The swallow did not leave the prince and go to Egypt because the prince had lost both his eyes. He told the prince that he would stay back with him forever, and continued to sleep at his feet. The little bird now served the prince by being his eyes. He would fly around the city and perch upon the prince's shoulder and tell him all that he saw around him.

6. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

Ans: God told the angel to bring back two precious things from the city. The angel came back with the leaden heart of the prince and the body of the dead bird. They were precious because the prince's leaden heart had broken and the little bird had lost his life in the name of service to mankind. God appreciated the angel's choice and said that the bird would sing forever in his garden of paradise and the Happy Prince would praise the Lord in his city of gold.

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. "That is because you have done a good action. Explain

Ans: These lines were said by the prince to the swallow when he came back after his first errand. After handing over the ruby to the seamstress and fanning the little boy to sleep, the bird tells the prince that surprisingly, he was feeling quite warm when the weather was fairly cold. The prince explained to the bird that we experience warmth whenever we do something good.

2. What happened when the swallow was settling down to sleep?

Ans: After a long and tiring flight, the swallow settles down at the feet of a gilded statue for the night. Just as he was tucking his head under its wings, he felt a drop of water fall on him. He was wondering how it could rain on such a clear and starry night. Shortly, another drop fell on him and yet another. He was planning to fly off, when he noticed that the drops were the tears that were flowing from the eyes of the beautiful statue.

3. What happened to the golden leaves on the statue?

Ans: After the rubies and sapphires were exhausted, the prince had nothing else to give to his people who were still leading miserable lives. Whenever the swallow came after his aerial survey and reported the plight of the poor in the city, the prince would tell him to pluck out the golden leaves and give it to the needy. In this manner, all the leaves were also distributed.

4. Why did the leaden heart of the statue snap?

Ans: The cold had become unbearable. The little bird tried everything to keep himself warm. But he was not able to sustain, and refused to fly off because he loved the prince. On that particular day, the swallow knew that he would have to bid adieu to the prince and the world. With a lot of difficulty, he flew to sit on the prince's shoulder,

kissed him and said that he was going to the House of death and dropped dead at his feet. At that moment, a sound of something cracking came from within the statue. The leaden heart of the prince had snapped into two.

5. Explain the use of symbolism by the author.

Ans: Friendship is a motif for the story due to the recurring act of the swallow, sacrificing his time and distributes the prince's jewels to the less fortunate. The Prince's leaden heart symbolises immortality. This is because when the Happy Prince is being melted, they could not melt his heart. The swallow himself is a symbol of loyalty.

(Symbolism is the use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities, motif is a decorative image, idea, concept or design.)

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. Comment upon the reaction of the Mayor and his councillors.

Ans: Early one morning, when the Mayor and his councillors were walking in the square, they noticed that the statue of the Happy Prince looked very shabby. The absence of the decorations were noticed and they found it looking just a little better than a beggar. They are astounded to see a dead bird at his feet. The author is being very satirical, when he remarks upon the proclamation that the mayor wanted to pass, preventing birds from dying there. Unfortunately, these makers of law, did not know what was happening around them, neither did they notice the precious stones and gold vanishing earlier. The bird and the lifeless statue seemed to possess more humanitarian qualities than live human beings.

2. Discuss the role of the swallow in the story "The Happy Prince."

Ans: The little swallow plays a very important role in the story. He acts as the agent of charity for the prince. He carries gold leaves and precious stones to the poor people on the request of the prince. He does the noble work of rescue and relief. The swallow is a migratory bird who was planning to fly off into warmer regions. But he is a kind-hearted swallow. He stays with the happy prince to help the poor in the city. When the prince lost his eyes, the bird decides to give him company forever, and served as his eye too. Unfortunately, with the onset of winter, the bird was not able to sustain for long. He dies, serving the people on behalf of a kind-hearted prince, immortalising both the prince and himself. The angel of God carries away his dead body as one of the most precious things on earth. The role played by the little swallow has a lesson for us. We learn that even a little bird can help the poor and the needy, if he gets a chance. The author is perhaps posing a question to us, as to what is holding the human beings from being humane. The swallow plays the role of a good samaritan, which should be an example for us to emulate.

Self- Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. "There is no mystery in misery. Explain.
 2. Give a brief character sketch of the Prince.
 3. Do you think that the Prince should have bothered more about his people, when he was alive?
 4. What happened to the shabby statue of the Prince?
 5. How did the Prince help the match girl? What was the result?
-

Long Answer Questions

1. What is the lesson you have learnt from Oscar Wilde's, "The Happy Prince"?
2. The seamstress's son has grown up. He realises that it was the prince and the swallow who had helped him. Write a letter to the Mayor, requesting him to reinstate the statue of the Prince in all its glory. He added that a golden swallow must also be perched on his shoulder.
3. The swallow dies in the end, and the leaden heart of the prince snaps. Could you suggest a different conclusion to the story.