

The Last Leaf - O. Henry

Answers to NCERT Questions

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What is Johnsy's illness? What can cure her, the medicine or the willingness to live?

Ans: Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia. The doctor who was checking on her said that she will not get cured by the medicines that are being administered to her, if she gives up hope of recovering.

2. Do you think the feeling of depression Johnsy has is common among teenagers?

Ans: Yes, I think the feeling of depression, Johnsy experiences is very common among teenagers. The present lifestyle is putting teenagers under constant pressure as they are burdened with studies and the anxiety of future. They are also subjected to a lot of parental and peer pressure. Along with this, they are also expected to behave in a certain manner as deemed appropriate by the society. Most often, they are unable to bear so much of stress and end up being depressed.

3. Behrman has a dream. What is it? Does it come true?

Ans: Behrman always dreamt of creating a masterpiece. Behrman's dream comes true because the leaf he had painted on to the tree, 'the last leaf', on which Johnsy's life depended, helped save Johnsy's life. It looked so original to Johnsy that the hope to live and survive revives within her.

4. What is Behrman's masterpiece? What makes Sue say so?

Ans: The painting of a leaf, which Behrman made after the last leaf fell, was really a masterpiece. Sue has every reason to say so because the painted leaf, that looked like the original, was able to inspire Johnsy to live her life. His last stroke was a masterpiece, as he sacrificed his life to revive that of a young teenager, who was in the throes of death, and had given up the desire to live.

Additional Questions

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

1. Why was Johnsy counting numbers in the descending order?

Ans: Johnsy was suffering from pneumonia, and she had seen many of her friends succumb to the illness. She had therefore, given up the hope of survival. She looked out

of the window and was counting the leaves that remained on the ivy, for she concluded that her heart would stop beating as soon as the last leaf dropped. Johnsy was counting down the leaves as they remained and dropped from the creeper.

2. What is the significance of the ivy leaves?

Ans: In O. Henry's story "The Last Leaf", the ivy plays a significant role because the leaves of the ivy had become the object of measurement of Johnsy's life and time on earth. She had given up hope, and had convinced herself of the imminent departure from the mortal world. Her life on earth would end the day, the last leaf dropped off the creeper. It was eventually an ivy leaf, though a painted one, that revived in her the desire to live, and got her back on the road to recovery.

3. How did Behrman react when Sue told him about Johnsy's condition?

Ans: Behrman was a sixty-year-old painter who lived on the ground floor of Johnsy's house. After the doctor's report of Johnsy's condition, Sue, her friend went down to pour out her worries to the old man. He reacted by saying, "Is she stupid? How can she be so foolish? and went up to meet her. He left the sleeping girl alone, and went back to his room without uttering a single word.

4. "In spite of the storm and the fierce winds, it didn't fall. Explain.

Ans: When Johnsy gets up the next morning, she draws the curtain and looks out to check, if the last leaf had fallen. To her surprise, she sees the leaf still on the creeper looking more green and healthy. It had not fallen despite the storm and fierce winds of the previous night. She had actually prepared herself to follow the last leaf out of the world. She kept looking at the leaf that was clinging quite strongly to the creeper and developed her own strength and will to get back to life.

5. Why did Johnsy say that she has been a bad girl?

Ans: After noticing the leaf firm and alive on the creeper, she calls out to her friend Sue, and regrets having been a bad girl. She feels sorry for not having cooperated with Sue who looked after her so lovingly. Johnsy was sorry for having gone into depression, and realises that it was sinful of her to have wanted to die.

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

1. What is depression? Why does one go into depression? Can it be treated?

Ans: Depression is a common yet serious medical illness that negatively affects how one feels, thinks and acts. Fortunately, it is also treatable. Depression causes feelings of sadness and/or a loss of interest in activities, once enjoyed. It can lead to a variety of emotional and physical problems and can decrease a person's ability to function at work and at home, and causes changes in sleep, appetite, energy level, concentration, daily

behaviour or self-esteem. Depression can also be associated with thoughts of death, as seen in the case of Johnsy in the story, "The Last Leaf."

Possible causes include a combination of biological, psychological and social sources of distress. Increasingly, research suggests that these factors may cause changes in brain function, including altered activity of certain neural circuits in the brain.

The mainstay of treatment is usually medication, talk therapy or a combination of the two. Increasingly, research suggests that these treatments may normalise brain changes, associated with depression.

2. How has O. Henry featured friendship in the story, "The Last Leaf?"

Ans: Friendship is one of the main themes of the lesson. It has been glorified by the character of Johnsy's friend, Sue and neighbour, Behrman. When Johnsy suggests that Sue sketch in the other room, Sue declares her friendship, saying that she would rather be with Johnsy and stay in the same room with her. After the doctor's visit, a worried Sue rushes down to Mr Behrman, who cares about Sue, and informs him of Johnsy's growing hopelessness. Hearing of this despair, Behrman becomes angry and changes his mind about not posing for Sue. Instead, he accompanies Sue to the girls' apartment, where Johnsy is now sleeping. Sue and Behrman look out the window. Then they looked at each other for a moment without speaking. Behrman sits down and poses for Sue; later, he returns home, and ascertains that the last leaf does not fall.

3. What is the importance of sacrifice?

Ans: Sacrifice has been taken to very extraordinary heights by O. Henry. Sue's outpouring of her worries and concerns about the miserable and depressed condition of her friend to their affectionate neighbour, resulted in an unusual display of humanitarian behaviour.

Old Behrman, who had not said anything about what he has seen out the window is found to have been inflicted by pneumonia in a serious form. Chances of recovery seemed bleak. He died in the hospital having fulfilled the scriptural words, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Behrman had gone into the icy night, climbed a ladder, and painted an ivy leaf, so Johnsy will not know all the real leaves are gone. Behrman's leaf restored hope in Johnsy and made her determined to get well. He had sacrificed his life for the young teenager.

Self- Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. Give an alternate conclusion to the story, 'The Last Leaf'.
2. What was the doctor's observation?
3. Explain the role of nature in the story. How does it affect life and death?
4. Justify the title of the story, 'The Last Leaf'.
5. Give a character sketch of Johnsy.

Long Answer Questions

1. "A diseased mind is even more harmful than the disease itself. Justify with reference to O. Henry's, "The Last Leaf?"
2. In what way, has the character of Behrman influenced you?
3. As Sue, make a diary entry about the interaction with Behrman, and his death, expressing the varied emotions that is going through in your mind.