

FLAMINGO: LOST SPRING
ANEES JUNG

WORKSHEET/ STUDY MATERIAL

Understanding the Lesson: Spring is the Season of optimism and hope. Spring is the metaphor of childhood stage in a person's life. From birth till late childhood, life for every child is almost the beginning of a bright and a shiny future. Childhood is featured by innocence, physical stamina and vitality, tremendous urge for the outdoors and a tremendous appetite for fun and play. Activities have no limits. It is also the stage for gaining skill and knowledge, learning and going to school.

The Lost Spring by Anees Jung is an expression of national shame of children condemned to poverty and a life of exploitation. The two protagonists of the chapter, Saheb-e-Alam and Mukesh lose their childhood in carrying the burden of poverty and illiteracy. In their bleak stories of exploitation, the author finds glimpses of resilience and fortitude.

Saheb and his family have left their homes and green fields in Dhaka to settle in Seemapuri. They had left Dhaka because of storms and floods. They feel it is better to be without identity than going hungry.

Seemapuri is geographically close to Delhi, but its traditions, standard of life and people are far away from Delhi. Seemapuri was a deserted area when the Bangladeshis arrived here three decades ago. They were forced to come here due to the natural disasters in Bangladesh. They loved Seemapuri because they could survive here. They had food and shelter here.

The author's description of the life of the rag pickers in Seemapuri is touching. 10,000 people have come as squatters, staying in structures of mud, with roofs of tin and tarpaulin, devoid of sewage, drainage or running water. Squatters are persons who unlawfully occupy an uninhabited building or unused land. They have stayed there without any identity but food is more important than identity. Their fields in Dhaka could not give them food whereas being rag pickers, they don't go hungry. In Seemapuri survival means rag picking. The elders have made it their profession for a fixed wages whereas for the children rag picking is a game of treasure-hunting. They work through the garbage with a hope that one day they would get a gold coin or a rupee note from the garbage heap.

Through years rag picking has acquired the proportions of a fine art. Like any other art form, rag picking possesses certain talents and rules. One needs guidance and inborn talents to be a successful rag picker. He should know where to find garbage, what to take, what to ignore, what time is best for it and so on. In Seemapuri every child is skilled in this art form.

Saheb-e-Alam doesn't know the meaning of his name – lord of the universe-which he is not. He was a rag picker. He and his fellow rag pickers are barefooted and the reason one of them gives is his mother does not bring his shoes down from the shelf. The author has met many barefooted children roaming around. The reason is that it is not lack of money but a tradition to stay barefoot. According to Anees Jung, it is just an excuse to explain their state of poverty.

Education has brought timely changes in many people's lifestyle like the priest from Udipi and his son. A man from Udipi once told the author his own story when he was a boy and his father a priest in the temple. As a young boy he would go to school past this old temple and stop briefly to pray for a pair of shoes. Thirty years later when the author visited his town and the temple, she saw a lot of modern

instances in the town and lifestyle of the people. The priest's son now goes to school, wearing shoes and socks carrying a school bag. The author means to indicate the timely changes education brings to people and how the illiterate rag pickers remain unchanged, carrying the rotten traditions. The rag pickers have no way out of poverty since they have no chance to go to school and be educated.

Saheb is now employed in a tea shop with a fixed wage of 800 rupees and all meals. He is not happy as he has lost his freedom as he is bound to the owner of the tea stall who is his master. He is no longer his own master.

The title 'Lost Spring' is justified in the first part as Saheb-e-Alam's childhood – his spring time is lost first in picking rags and then in working for a master.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

Q1 'Lost Spring', is a sad commentary on the political system of our country that condemns thousands of people to a life of abject poverty. Comment.

Points: Saheb, optimistic and enthusiastic—prospect of finding gold in garbage—likes going to school but no opportunity—freedom and joy of childhood to burdens of job at tea-stall.

Mukesh, born at Firozabad (bangle maker)—works under inhuman condition—dark room, hot furnaces—caught in web of poverty—vicious circle of sahkars, policemen, politicians, bureaucrats and moneylenders—resigned to fate—unaware of child labour act—stifled initiation and hope—lose eyesight before becoming adults

Q2 How is the line 'few airplanes fly over Firozabad' symbolically significant?

Value Points : The author finds a spark of motivation in Mukesh who is quite determined about realizing his dream of becoming a motor mechanic. He is ready to walk to a garage far from his home. The author asks if he ever dreams of flying a plane- the question embarrasses him and Mukesh replies in the negative. He is satisfied with the more tangible and attainable dream related to the fast moving cars that he saw on the streets each day. Airplanes symbolize something distant, just like a far-fetched dream – people of Firozabad were not exposed to grand dreams like that.

Q3. The life of bangle makers of Firozabad was full of obstacles which forced them to lead a life of poverty and deprivation. Discuss with reference to *Lost Spring*.

Value Points: Bangle makers born in poverty, live in poverty, die in poverty - For generations people have been engaged in this trade - Work in inhuman conditions -

Although they work hard but the profit is meagre - Their hovels have crumbling walls, wobbly doors and no windows - They are overcrowded with humans and animals - Social customs, traditions, stigma of caste and people in authority combine so that they remain poor and uneducated - Money lenders, middlemen, politicians and policemen are all against them - Unable to organize themselves into a co-operative due to lack of a leader - They have lost the ability to dream - They can only talk but not act to improve their lot.

Q4. The bangle-makers of Ferozabad make beautiful bangles and make everyone happy but they live and die in squalor. Elaborate

Value points: — utter poverty generation after generation, —believe they are destined to work in bangle factories,—make beautiful bangles but live in dark, —bright furnaces to do welding, —they lose their eyesight, —victims of vicious circle of middlemen, —law enforcing authorities prey upon them, — bleak future.

Q5. Give a brief account of the life and activities of the people like Saheb-e-Alam settled in Seemapuri.

Value points: – poor rag pickers / unschooled / barefoot / sometimes taking up odd jobs like working at tea stalls - – garbage to them is gold, it is their daily bread, – migrants (squatters) from Bangladesh, came to Delhi in 1973 - – their fields and homes swept away in storms - – live in structures of mud with roofs of tin and tarpaulin, devoid of sewage, - drainage or running water - – have lived for more than 30 years without identity, without permits but with ration cards - – no intention of going back to their own country
– wherever they find food, they pitch their tents.

Q6 'Lost Spring' explains the grinding poverty and traditions that condemn thousands of people to a life of abject poverty. Do you agree? Why / Why not?

Yes – duly supported by examples from text, – both caught in the vicious cycle of poverty, apathy, affected by the greed of others, injustice, – lost childhood – spring of life

Mukesh's story – bangle making industry, – caught in the web of middlemen, politicians, policemen, the keepers of law, bureaucrats, – lose all spirit and ability to dream

Saheb-a-Alam's story, – rag picker, scrounging for gold, walking bare foot, got job, not happy because no freedom, lost childhood, – any other relevant point.

Q7. Explain the significance of title 'Lost Spring'.

Ans: In this lesson, the author Anees Jung examines and analyses the grinding poverty and tradition that condemn children to a life of exploitation.

Saheb as a ragpicker whose parents have left behind a life of abject poverty in Bangladesh. His family, like the many other families of rag pickers lives in Seemapuri. They live in miserable condition. The writer is pained to see Saheb, whose name means the ruler of the Earth, lose the spark of childhood. She then proceeds to tell about Mukesh who does want to be his own master. Hailing from Firozabad, the centre of India's bangle making and glass blowing industry, he has always worked in the glass making factory. His family does not know that it is illegal for children to work in such close to furnaces with such high temperatures. They are exposed to various health hazards like losing their eyesight as they work in dark and dingy cells. The family of bangle maker of Firozabad are so burdened that they have lost their ability to dream. The writer's observation is that these poor hopeless people are but pawn in the games that are played by Sahukars, middlemen, the policemen, the bureaucrats and the politicians.

The title is meaningful as they lost their spring (childhood). The writer has beautifully essayed the story of stolen childhood with a view to sensitizing us to the plight of these poor unfortunate children.

Answer the following in about 30-40 words.

1. Why had the rag pickers come to live in Seemapuri (Board 2014)?
2. How is Saheb's name full of irony?
3. Why does the author describe children of slums as partners in survival?
4. Despite being refugees, how do people in Seemapuri have ration cards?
5. How does working in the glass furnaces affect the young children?
6. How is Mukesh different from Saheb?
7. Why can't the people in Firozabad organize themselves into a cooperative?
8. How does Mukesh's grandmother view the family occupation of bangle making and its poverty?
9. Saheb wanted to be a master of his own destiny, Comment,
10. How has, being born in the caste of bangle makers, become both a destiny and a curse?
11. What two distinct worlds does Anees Jung speak of with respect to bangle makers?
12. Comment on the title 'Lost Spring'.

Explain the following statements.

1. **Seemapuri, (is) a place on the periphery of Delhi yet miles away from it, metaphorically.'**

Geographically, Seemapuri is a place on the outskirts of Delhi. It housed migrants from Bangladesh, who earned their living as rag pickers. A run down place that lacked amenities of sewage, drainage, or running water, it was unlike the life of glitter and glamour in Delhi. People in Delhi lived a luxurious life in contrast to the poverty prevailing in Seemapuri.

2. **Survival in Seemapuri means rag-picking.**

Rag pickers who live in Seemapuri on the outskirts of Delhi are very poor. They do not have a proper source of income. Since their migration from Bangladesh in 1971 they have been engaged

in rag picking. It is the only means of survival for them. So survival in Seemapuri means rag picking.

3. An army of barefoot boys who appear like the morning birds and disappear at noon.

The author uses the metaphor of ‘army’ to describe a group of rag pickers who invade garbage dumps in the streets of Delhi. Next, she uses the simile ‘like birds’ to describe the manner in which these rag pickers converge on and desert the garbage dumps like the scavenger birds haunting these dumps. Just like the birds, the boys are free spirited and enjoy and revel in their freedom.

4. Few airplanes fly over Firozabad.

Mukesh wanted to be a motor mechanic and he was prepared to walk to the garage to learn. He never dreamt of flying a plane as to the slum dwellers in Firozabad, planes were a far-fetched reality. Because of the limited exposure in the slums of Firozabad, Mukesh dreamt within his means.

5. The steel canister seems heavier than the plastic bag.

Saheb doesn't seem to be happy working at the tea stall. His face doesn't show the carefree look of the old days though he is paid.. He feels bound and burdened. The steel canister he holds seems heavier than plastic bag he would carry so lightly on his shoulders. The bag was his; the canister belongs to the owner of the shop. Saheb is no longer his own master.

6. Little has moved with time in Firozabad.

Though laws have been made against child labour, children still continue to work in the bangle industry in Firozabad. The children working in this industry are exploited by money lenders, the middlemen and the bureaucrats. Even the police do not protect them. They lead a miserable and hard life. They live and work in inhuman conditions. In fact, little has moved with the time in the city of bangle makers. They are as poor and miserable as they were before.

Long Answer Questions

1. What could be some of the reasons for the migration of people from villages to cities?

People migrate for various reasons- basic needs ...food, clothing and shelter – in search of job opportunities, education – fulfil their dreams – make money and some for name and fame – social, economic and political environment plays a prominent role – lack of physical infrastructure(no medical support, no educational institutions, no other forms of employment)- lack of public health amenities like sewage, water- inability to deal with environmental hazards- limited opportunities for progress-aspirations for a better lifestyle.

2. For most women, bangles are dreams in glass but for bangle makers of Firozabad they are a vicious circle they cannot wriggle out of. Comment.

Bangles – red, green, blue, yellow etc – symbol of suhaag – auspiciousness in marriage – in today's world – fashion statement for the young and old women alike – glass bangles of varied hues adorning a woman's wrist provide – visual treat – music of their own with their sweet clinking and tinkling – rainbow colours and bright hues bangles – spread joy and happiness in the lives of women –

Ironically – bangle makers lead a miserable life – underdeveloped industry, lack of basic amenities and infrastructure – glass furnaces- ill lit – ill ventilated – dingy hovels with high

temperatures –barely have a full meal a day - live in shacks – temporary roofs, crumbling walls and wobbly doors - lose eyesight at a young age – live in a dark world – no help no hope.

3. What forces conspire to keep the workers in the bangle industry of Firozabad in poverty?

Caught in two distinct worlds – one is of the bangle makers who continue to live in poverty and destitution

Lead a life of poverty and misery – lack of enough money to do anything except carry on the business of making bangles – families have spent generations working around furnaces, welding glass, making bangles for all the women in the land – young men who learn the art of making bangles from their elders follow in their footsteps – years of mind numbing toil have killed all initiative and ability to dream – carry on the job of making bangles

Do not have a leader – organise them into a cooperative and improve their economic conditions – vicious circle of the sahkars, the middlemen, the keepers of the law, the bureaucrats and the politicians – both these worlds have imposed the baggage on the child that he cannot put down. Before he is aware, he accepts it as did his father. To do anything else would mean to dare. So this forces the workers to continue working in the bangle industry – thus lead a life of misery and poverty.

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS

Q1. Child labour is an eternal problem in India despite much legislation made by the Government. Small children working in dhabas or roadside eateries have become a common sight. The ordeals undergone by them do not evoke any response from us. Looking at all these facts, write an article on 'How can Child Labour Be Eliminated'

Value Points

- Ban on child labour has come into effect- but not much hope
- Life for them is still full of misery and drudgery
- Mere ban will not help abolish child labour
- We must address the reasons (poverty-illiteracy-extra income for big families)that force them to take up such jobs
- Give them education or training in some skills
- Awareness regarding literacy can be created through media
Rehabilitation –hand in hand with ban

Q2. Choosing a career is the focus of most of the children, when they go to school. In some cases, it is up to the children to decide the career they wish to pursue but in some cases, it is the parents who force their views on the children. Children like Mukesh or Saheb are left with no choice. Keeping this in mind, write an article in 100 words.

Value Points

- Deciding on a career is one of the most difficult decisions
- Parents know what is best for their children-best well-wishers and guides
- But sometimes decisions can be unfair because the child should be the ultimate judge
- If the child is forced into something that he does not like- may end to be a failure
All careers are equally good- what matters is how best one can shine in it.

Q3. Anees Jung in 'Lost Spring' advises Saheb, a poor rag boy, to join school, knowing that it was not possible. She later regrets making promises to him, uttering hollow words that were not meant to be fulfilled. Promises like hers abound in every corner of the bleak world. This is a sad reflection on human psychology. Why do we make false promises to beggars and others, without really meaning them? What does this reflect about our attitudes? Write an article in 100 words on 'The importance of Being Earnest'.

Value Points

- When a student is asked why he has not finished his homework –standard answer is that he had done it but forgotten to bring it to school.
- Incidents like these raise ethical questions- why do we really say something without meaning them
- Hypocrisy, double standards, cheating-part of our lives
- We have forgotten to be earnest-accept our mistakes
- If we accept our mistakes- we will be more responsible
- Our words will evoke confidence and trust in others
Let's stand up and be earnest and true at least to ourselves.

Q4. Mukesh in the lesson '**Lost Spring**' has had a dream. He is thinking of throwing away the baggage of traditions and family profession. To do anything else would mean to dare. To be able to dream is very important for a person, otherwise there is no future. Keeping this in mind, write a speech in 100 words on the topic, 'The Importance of Dreams'.

Value points

- Every mission or achievement has been a dream in its infancy
- Realistic dreams, if nurtured are the foundations of a successful future.
- Every dream carries with it the energy for its realisation
- When one dreams one prepares oneself for the struggle and battles of life
But dreams should be realistic, achievable and well-grounded

Q5. Mukesh and other bangle makers are unable to break out of the vicious circle of poverty due to the collision of government agencies, Sahukars, middlemen and the police. What are the values that are lacking in these people? Write an article discussing these values.

Value Points

- Poverty is the greatest disgrace and the worst stigma on the face of a civilised world.
- The poor need our sympathy and empathy to break open the barriers around them
- The poor also should have a desire to live a life of dignity, inculcate a progressive approach to make use of free educational facilities provided by the government.
- Unless the poor have the inclination to improve no social welfare agencies can be of any help. The deprived should break out of the web of ancestral professions and boycott all kind of manipulation done by the middlemen.
