

Class XII

English Core

One-page chapter summaries
Large print • CBSE 2026-27 syllabus

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Chapter 1: The Last Lesson (Flamingo, Prose 1)

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Big idea: Alphonse Daudet shows how we value our language and freedom only when they are taken away.

Key points

- Setting: a village school in **Alsace**, France, after the region passed into **Prussian** hands (Franco-Prussian War).
- **Franz** is late, fears a scolding on **participles**; sees a crowd at the town-hall bulletin board.
- School is strangely quiet, 'as quiet as Sunday morning'; M. Hamel wears his special Sunday clothes.
- Village elders (old Hauser, the former mayor, postmaster) sit on the back benches to pay respect.
- **The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in Alsace and Lorraine** — this is the last French lesson.
- Franz feels regret; his books and M. Hamel suddenly seem like old friends.
- Hamel admits parents and he himself (sending pupils to water flowers) put off learning.
- At noon the church clock strikes, Prussian trumpets sound; Hamel writes '**Vive La France!**' and dismisses the class.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- **Franz**: careless boy who grows sensitive and patriotic in one morning.
- **M. Hamel**: strict teacher, devoted for forty years; dignified in grief.
- Themes: **linguistic chauvinism**, love of mother tongue, procrastination, loss of freedom.
- **"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."**
- "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?"

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain the irony: Franz values French only when he can no longer learn it.
- Link 'order from Berlin' to loss of identity; quote the 'key to their prison' line.
- Extract MCQs test tone (exclamations = intense emotion), sensory details and inference.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- What role does the French language play in 'The Last Lesson', in the context of the narrator's feelings towards it? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- What does the contrasting imagery of the church clock and the Prussian trumpets represent? (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- Extract: 'What a thunderclap these words were to me!' — what was the writer's purpose in using the metaphor of a 'thunderclap'? (SQP 2024-25, 1 mark)

Remember: Language = key to the prison; Franz learns too late.

Chapter 2: Lost Spring (Flamingo, Prose 2)

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Big idea: Anees Jung shows how poverty and tradition steal the childhood of India's poor children.

Key points

- Subtitle: 'Stories of Stolen Childhood'; two real case studies narrated by the author.
- **Saheb-e-Alam** ('lord of the universe') — a ragpicker in **Seemapuri**, Delhi; family came from Dhaka after storms swept away fields.
- Seemapuri: squatters from Bangladesh (1971), mud homes, no sewage; **survival means rag-picking**.
- Garbage is 'gold': survival for elders, 'wrapped in wonder' for children.
- Saheb later works at a tea stall for ₹800 and meals — 'no longer his own master'.
- **Mukesh** in **Firozabad**, the bangle-making centre; 20,000 children work near hot glass furnaces, often losing eyesight.
- Bangle-makers are trapped by **caste/karam** and the vicious circle of sahuikars, middlemen, police, bureaucrats, politicians.
- **Mukesh dares to dream: "I want to be a motor mechanic."**

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: child labour, poverty, broken promises, lost dreams, hope.
- "Garbage to them is gold."
- "Can a god-given lineage ever be broken?" — Mukesh's grandmother.
- Savita soldering glass: 'hands move mechanically like the tongs of a machine'.
- Saheb's steel canister 'seems heavier than the plastic bag' — loss of freedom.

Exam focus: how to score

- Contrast Saheb (resigned) and Mukesh (dares to dream) — key 2-mark point.
- Name the two traps: family/caste and the vicious circle of exploiters.
- Value-based answers: illegality of child labour, need for education and organisation.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Explain why the bangle makers of Firozabad are unable to imagine an alternative future despite their hardships. (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- What is the significance of a narrator in 'Lost Spring' as opposed to a plain narrative? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- Identify an instance of hope or resilience in 'Lost Spring' and analyse how it reflects one of the story's themes. (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)

Remember: Saheb loses freedom; Mukesh keeps a dream.

Chapter 3: Deep Water (Flamingo, Prose 3)

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Big idea: William O. Douglas tells how he conquered a deep fear of water through will, training and persistence.

Key points

- At three or four, waves on a California beach knocked him down — the first fear.
- At ten or eleven he learns to swim at the **Y.M.C.A. pool, Yakima** (safer than the treacherous Yakima River).
- A muscular older boy tosses 'Skinny' into the **nine-foot deep end**; he nearly drowns.
- Plan to spring up from the bottom fails; he goes down repeatedly, then blacks out ('curtain of life').
- The fear ruins fishing, canoeing, swimming in the Cascades for years.
- One October he hires an **instructor**: belt, rope and pulley; 'piece by piece, he built a swimmer'; can swim by April.
- Tests himself: Lake Wentworth (two miles), then **Warm Lake** — "Well, Mr Terror, what do you think you can do to me?"
- Lesson: conquering fear sets one free to live fully.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Theme: fear, courage, determination, will to live.
- **"All we have to fear is fear itself."** — Roosevelt
- "In death there is peace. There is terror only in the fear of death."
- Vivid sensory narration: yellow glow, aching lungs, legs paralysed.

Exam focus: how to score

- Describe stages of training in order (rope-belt, breathing, kicking, integrating).
- Show how the first-person, sensory style makes panic real for the reader.
- Draw the larger meaning: fear of fear is the real enemy.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- What does William Douglas's experience in Deep Water suggest about the nature of fear and anticipation? (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- What lesson can individuals learn from Douglas's experience in overcoming his fear of water? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- What might be the impact on the reader if the narration were more informative than sensory? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)

Remember: Pool → panic → instructor → Warm Lake → freedom.

Chapter 4: The Rattrap (Flamingo, Prose 4)

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Big idea: Selma Lagerlöf shows that kindness and trust can awaken the goodness in even a petty thief.

Key points

- A poor **peddler** sells rattraps, begs and steals; thinks **the whole world is a big rattrap** baiting people.
- An old **crofter** hosts him, shows off his **thirty kronor**; the peddler later steals it.
- Lost in the forest, he realises he himself is caught in a rattrap.
- At **Ramsjö ironworks** the **ironmaster** mistakes him for old comrade **Captain von Stahle**.
- **Edla Willmansson**, the ironmaster's daughter, persuades him to spend Christmas; treats him kindly.
- Truth comes out; the ironmaster wants to throw him out but Edla insists he stays for Christmas.
- He leaves a rattrap gift with the **thirty kronor** for the crofter, signed **Captain von Stahle**.
- Edla's compassion redeemed him — he was 'raised to captain'.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Peddler: lonely, cynical, but has goodness within.
- Edla: compassionate, perceptive, true Christian spirit.
- Symbol: **the rattrap = material temptations that trap people**.
- Themes: loneliness, redemption, human goodness, Christmas spirit.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain the rattrap metaphor and how the peddler himself is trapped.
- Contrast Edla's trust with her father's anger; show cause of the change.
- Quote the letter's meaning: he was treated as a captain, so behaved like one.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- How does the Christmas episode influence the peddler's perception of human relationships? (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- Explain how the rattrap symbolises the dual aspects of human nature. (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- How does the setting of the remote forest location contribute to the overall tone and mood of the story? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)

Remember: Treated as a captain, the thief became one.

Chapter 5: Indigo (Flamingo, Prose 5)

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Big idea: Louis Fischer recounts Gandhi's Champaran struggle (1917): the first triumph of civil disobedience in modern India.

Key points

- At the **Lucknow Congress, Dec 1916**, poor sharecropper **Rajkumar Shukla** begs Gandhi to visit Champaran.
- Landlords forced tenants to grow indigo on **3/20 (15%) of land** and give the crop as rent.
- When synthetic indigo came, planters demanded compensation from peasants.
- Gandhi goes to **Motihari**; served notice to leave; refuses; a huge crowd gathers. **Civil disobedience triumphed** — case dropped.
- Lawyers decide to court jail with Gandhi — Rajendra Prasad: a lesson in courage.
- Settlement: planters agree to refund **25%** — Gandhi accepts; the principle of surrender of prestige mattered.
- Within a few years planters left; land returned to peasants.
- Gandhi opened schools in six villages, improved health and sanitation; Kasturbai taught cleanliness.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- **Gandhi**: humble, persistent, practical; insists on **self-reliance**.
- **C.F. Andrews**: Gandhi refuses his help — 'you want him to stand by you' shows weakness.
- "The British could not order me about in my own country."
- Themes: freedom, non-violence, courage, self-reliance, social reform.

Exam focus: how to score

- Give dates/places correctly: Lucknow 1916, Champaran 1917, Motihari.
- Explain why 25% refund was a victory — fear of the peasants removed.
- Long answer: link to exploitation in A Roadside Stand or power in Poets and Pancakes.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- What factor/s were largely instrumental in the victory of the peasants in 'Indigo'? (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- What can be inferred from Rajendra Prasad's recorded upshot of the lawyer consultations at Motihari? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)
- How do 'Indigo' and 'A Roadside Stand' highlight the theme of exploitation, and what similarities do they reveal about the plight of marginalised communities? (SQP 2025-26, 5 marks)

Remember: Shukla → Champaran → 15% indigo → 25% refund → self-reliance.

Chapter 6: Poets and Pancakes (Flamingo, Prose 6)

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Big idea: Asokamitran's humorous memoir of Gemini Studios, Madras, in the early days of Indian film-making.

Key points

- **Pancake** = brand of make-up bought in truckloads; make-up room had incandescent lights — 'fiery misery'.
- Make-up staff from many regions: **national integration long before A.I.R. and Doordarshan**.
- Strict hierarchy; the 'office boy' (in his forties) makes up crowd players and blames **Subbu** for his failure.
- **Kothamangalam Subbu**: No. 2 at Gemini, loyal to the Boss, endlessly creative, poet, actor, generous host.
- The **legal adviser** accidentally ended an actress's career by playing back her outburst.
- Story Department closed — 'a lawyer lost his job because the poets were asked to go home'.
- MRA (Moral Re-Armament) troupe welcomed, 1952; plays 'Jotham Valley' influenced Tamil theatre.
- English poet **Stephen Spender**'s speech baffles everyone; later the author finds his name in **The God That Failed** and The Encounter.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Author (worked cutting newspaper clippings): observant, ironic.
- **The Boss** = S.S. Vasan, founder (1940).
- Themes: irony, satire of studio life, frustration, talent vs luck.
- Tone: gentle humour and self-mockery.

Exam focus: how to score

- Identify irony and humour with examples (office boy, lawyer, Spender).
- Character sketch of Subbu: loyal, versatile, charitable.
- Compare dreamers: office boy / Subbu vs Sophie (Going Places).

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Extract: what does the phrase 'fiery misery' suggest about the intense lighting? (SQP 2026-27, 1 mark)
- What does the story of Subbu's success in the film industry reveal about the importance of loyalty, creativity and versatility? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)
- How can the office boy, who harbours dreams, be compared to Sophie from 'Going Places'? Consider their ambitions and obstacles. (SQP 2025-26, 5 marks)

Remember: Pancake make-up, poet Subbu, puzzling Spender.

Chapter 7: The Interview (Flamingo, Prose 7)

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Big idea: Part I weighs the merits and harms of interviews; Part II shows a great interview with Umberto Eco.

Key points

- Part I (Christopher Silvester): invented a little over 130 years ago, the interview is now a commonplace of journalism.
- Supporters: it is a source of truth, 'an art'. Critics see it as intrusive.
- **V.S. Naipaul**: people are 'wounded by interviews and lose a part of themselves'.
- **Lewis Carroll** had 'a just horror of the interviewer'; **Rudyard Kipling called it 'immoral', 'a crime'**.
- **H.G. Wells** called it an 'ordeal'; **Saul Bellow**: like 'thumbprints on his windpipe'.
- Denis Brian: interviews give us our most vivid impressions of contemporaries.
- Part II: **Mukund Padmanabhan** (The Hindu) interviews **Umberto Eco**, professor at Bologna, expert in semiotics.
- Eco uses **interstices** (empty spaces) to write; **The Name of the Rose** (1980) sold over 10 million copies.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Eco: 'a professor who writes novels on Sundays'.
- His academic writing is playful, personal, narrative — he tells the story of his research.
- Success of the novel: 'a mystery'; written at the right time — 10 years earlier or later it 'wouldn't have been the same'.
- Themes: celebrity, privacy, art of writing.

Exam focus: how to score

- List views for and against interviews with names — quick 2-mark points.
- Explain 'interstices' and Eco's productivity.
- Comment on the question-answer format and conversational style.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- According to the interview, how did Umberto Eco make his academic writing accessible to readers? (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- How does Rudyard Kipling's refusal to be interviewed point towards the intrusive and unwelcome nature of interviews? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- Eco says if he had written The Name of the Rose ten years earlier or later it wouldn't have been the same. What could he have meant? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)

Remember: Kipling hates it; Eco fills interstices.

Chapter 8: Going Places (Flamingo, Prose 8)

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Big idea: A.R. Barton explores adolescent fantasy and hero-worship in a working-class girl's dreams.

Key points

- **Sophie** dreams of a boutique, acting or being a fashion designer; friend **Jansie** knows both are 'earmarked for the **biscuit factory**'.
- Home is cramped: mother's crooked back, father in a vest, little brother **Derek**.
- She admires brother **Geoff**, an apprentice mechanic, whose silent, separate world she longs to share.
- She claims she met **Danny Casey, young Irish football prodigy**, in the arcade by Royce's window.
- Father scoffs; Geoff doubts; she says Casey promised to meet her next week with an autograph.
- Family watches United play; Casey scores — Sophie feels proud as if she shared it.
- She waits by the canal under a tree; **he never comes**. She tells herself people won't believe her.
- Fantasy is her escape from a dull, limited reality.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Sophie: imaginative, restless, unrealistic; Jansie: practical, gossipy.
- Father: rough, sceptical, a football fan; Geoff: quiet, almost grown up.
- Themes: **fantasy vs reality**, hero-worship, class limits, family.
- "Takes money, Soaf, something like that." — Jansie

Exam focus: how to score

- Contrast Sophie with Jansie (dreamer vs realist).
- Explain the title: Sophie wants to go places but stays trapped.
- Long answers often pair Sophie with Subbu/the office boy or Keeping Quiet.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Extract: why does Sophie's father refer to knowing 'a man who had known Tom Finney'? (SQP 2026-27, 1 mark)
- Extract: the delicate bow on her mother's apron and her crooked back highlight the theme of _____. (SQP 2025-26, 1 mark)
- How do Sophie and Subbu compare and contrast in their aspirations, constraints and pursuit of dreams? (SQP 2024-25, 5 marks)

Remember: Sophie dreams of Casey; the biscuit factory waits.

Chapter 9: My Mother at Sixty-six (Flamingo, Poem 1)

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Big idea: Kamala Das captures a daughter's fear of losing her ageing mother, hidden behind a smile.

Key points

- Driving from her parents' home to **Cochin** airport, the poet sees her mother dozing beside her.
- Mother's face is **ashen like that of a corpse** — she realises with pain her mother is old.
- She looks away at **young trees sprinting** and merry children spilling out of homes — life and youth.
- At security check she looks again: mother is wan, pale 'as a late winter's moon'.
- She feels 'that old familiar ache, my childhood's fear' — fear of separation and death.
- She hides her feelings: 'see you soon, Amma' and smiles, smiles, smiles.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: ageing, mortality, parent-child love, helplessness.
- **Simile**: 'ashen like that of a corpse'; 'pale as a late winter's moon'.
- Contrast: old mother vs sprinting trees and merry children.
- Repetition 'smile and smile and smile' = forced cheer, hidden anxiety.
- Whole poem is **one sentence** — a single flow of thought.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain both similes and the contrast imagery (very frequent).
- Interpret parting words and smile: hope, reassurance, suppressed fear.
- Use poetic devices by name for appreciation marks.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Kamala Das uses imagery and restraint to convey unspoken anxiety rather than overt grief. Comment. (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- Interpret the use of visual imagery by Kamala Das in her poem to depict the passage of time. (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- Extract: what does the imagery of the 'ashen face' of the mother suggest about her physical condition? (SQP 2025-26, 1 mark)

Remember: Ashen face, sprinting trees, winter moon, forced smile.

Chapter 10: Keeping Quiet (Flamingo, Poem 2)

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Big idea: Pablo Neruda urges a moment of silence and stillness for introspection, peace and understanding.

Key points

- 'Now we will count to twelve / and we will all keep still' — twelve = hours, months, zodiac: universal time.
- Not speaking any language: no barriers between people.
- An 'exotic moment / without rush, without engines' — a sudden strangeness, togetherness.
- Fishermen would not harm whales; the salt-gatherer would look at his hurt hands — reflection on cruelty and self-harm.
- War-makers of 'green wars, wars with gas, wars with fire' would walk with their brothers in the shade.
- **"What I want should not be confused / with total inactivity."** — 'I want no truck with death'.
- Silence might end 'this sadness / of never understanding ourselves'.
- **The Earth teaches us:** what seems dead later proves to be alive.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: introspection, peace, brotherhood, environment, life vs death.
- Symbol: Earth's seasons — life under apparent stillness.
- "Victory with no survivors" — futility of war.
- Free verse; varying stanza lengths; tone calm and persuasive.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain: keeping quiet ≠ inactivity or death.
- Explain the Earth image and the 'sadness'.
- Link with Going Places/Roadside Stand in long answers (silence, inner conflict).

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- What does the reference to fishermen not harming whales and the man gathering salt looking at his hurt hands signify? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- Extract: the putting on of 'clean clothes' by the warmongers symbolises _____. (SQP 2024-25, 1 mark)
- As Pablo Neruda, write a letter advising Robert Frost about his conflicted emotions in 'A Roadside Stand'. (SQP 2023-24, 5 marks)

Remember: Count to twelve, keep still, learn from the Earth.

Chapter 11: A Thing of Beauty (Flamingo, Poem 3)

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Big idea: John Keats says beauty is an eternal source of joy that binds us to life despite suffering.

Key points

- Excerpt from '**Endymion: A Poetic Romance**'.
- "**A thing of beauty is a joy for ever**": its loveliness increases, never passes into nothingness.
- Beauty keeps 'a bower quiet for us' — peace, sweet dreams, health, quiet breathing.
- Every day we weave 'a flowery band to bind us to the earth'.
- This is in spite of despondence, lack of noble natures, gloomy days and dark ways.
- Some shape of beauty 'moves away the pall / From our dark spirits'.
- Beautiful things: sun, moon, trees, sheep, daffodils, clear rills, musk-rose blooms, grandeur of the mighty dead, lovely tales.
- "**An endless fountain of immortal drink, / Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.**"

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: permanence of beauty, nature, hope amid suffering.
- **Metaphors**: bower, flowery band, pall, endless fountain.
- Beauty is a gift from heaven, immortal.
- Rhyme in couplets (aabb); Romantic poetry.

Exam focus: how to score

- List things of beauty and things causing suffering separately.
- Explain 'flowery band' and 'endless fountain' images.
- Relate to real life: beauty helps us cope with hardship.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Extract: the image of 'a bower quiet for us' is best interpreted as beauty functioning as a _____. (SQP 2026-27, 1 mark)
- Based on 'A Thing of Beauty', how can recognising the lasting value of beauty help someone cope with challenges? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- Extract: the 'endless fountain of immortal drink' is an apt analogy for the tales of the mighty dead because _____. (SQP 2023-24, 1 mark)

Remember: Beauty = joy for ever, a flowery band to the earth.

Chapter 12: A Roadside Stand (Flamingo, Poem 4)

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Big idea: Robert Frost portrays the plight of poor rural folk ignored by rich city people and false benefactors.

Key points

- A little old house with a little new shed at the edge of a busy road: a roadside stand that 'too pathetically pled'.
- They want not charity ('a dole of bread') but **some city money** to improve their lives.
- 'Polished traffic' passes with 'a mind ahead'; some are annoyed that the artless signs spoil the landscape.
- They sell wild berries, golden squash; crossly say: keep your money if you want to be mean.
- The poet is hurt more by 'the trusting sorrow of what is unsaid'.
- Plans to resettle them near theatre and store: **"greedy good-doers, beneficent beasts of prey"**.
- They wait all day for the squeal of brakes; cars stop only to turn, ask the way, or ask for gas.
- Poet wishes to end their pain at one stroke, then asks how he would like that himself.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: rural-urban divide, poverty, exploitation, hypocrisy of welfare.
- **Oxymoron**: 'greedy good-doers', 'beneficent beasts of prey'.
- "Of all the thousand selfish cars that pass, / Just one to inquire what a farmer's prices are."
- Tone: sympathy, irony, anger.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain the two complaints (city folk vs rural folk).
- Explain oxymorons and the government's false promises.
- Pair with Indigo/Aunt Jennifer's Tigers for exploitation and inequality.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Extract: why does the poet clarify that the stand is not asking for 'a dole of bread'? (SQP 2026-27, 1 mark)
- Extract: 'greedy good-doers' and 'beneficent beasts of prey' illustrate the ____ (irony/satire) in the situation. (SQP 2024-25, 1 mark)
- Analyse 'A Roadside Stand' and 'Aunt Jennifer's Tigers' for the theme of inequality and its impact on the bearers. (SQP 2024-25, 5 marks)

Remember: Little shed, speeding cars, greedy good-doers.

Chapter 13: Aunt Jennifer's Tigers (Flamingo, Poem 5)

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Big idea: Adrienne Rich contrasts a woman oppressed in marriage with the proud, fearless tigers she embroiders.

Key points

- Aunt Jennifer's tigers 'prance across a screen' — bright topaz denizens of a world of green.
- They do not fear the men beneath the tree; they pace in 'sleek chivalric certainty'.
- Her fingers flutter through the wool; she finds even the ivory needle hard to pull — fear and weakness.
- **"The massive weight of Uncle's wedding band"** sits heavily on her hand.
- Even in death her terrified hands will lie 'still ringed with ordeals she was mastered by'.
- **The tigers will go on prancing, proud and unafraid** — art outlives the artist.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Symbols: **tigers** = freedom, courage, her suppressed desires; **wedding band** = patriarchal burden.
- 'Ringed': wedding ring and the circle of ordeals.
- Themes: oppression of women, art as escape, freedom vs bondage.
- Rhyming couplets (aabb); bright colours vs her fear.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain the contrast between Aunt and her tigers (most asked).
- Interpret 'massive weight' and 'ringed'.
- Speaker's attitude: sympathy and quiet feminist protest.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- What does Aunt Jennifer's portrayal of the tigers suggest about her suppressed desires? (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- How might the message of the poem be different if the last four lines were omitted? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)
- Extract: 'still ringed' refers to the literal ____ (shape of the embroidery panel / wedding band on her finger) and the figurative ring of constraints. (SQP 2025-26, 1 mark)

Remember: Tigers prance free; Aunt's hand bears the heavy ring.

Chapter 14: The Third Level (Vistas 1)

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Big idea: Jack Finney blends fantasy and reality to show modern man's longing to escape stress and fear.

Key points

- **Charley** says he found a **third level** at **Grand Central Station**, New York.
- His psychiatrist friend **Sam** calls it 'a waking-dream wish fulfilment' — escape from an unhappy modern world.
- Charley's stamp collecting is also called a 'temporary refuge from reality'.
- On the third level: gas lights, old-fashioned clothes, a small Currier & Ives locomotive; newspaper dated **June 11, 1894**.
- He wants tickets to **Galesburg, Illinois** (1894) for himself and wife **Louisa**; his modern money is rejected.
- He draws three hundred dollars and buys old currency, but never finds the corridor again.
- Sam disappears; Charley finds in his stamp collection a **first-day cover letter from Sam, postmarked July 18, 1894**.
- Sam is now living in Galesburg of 1894; he says the third level exists.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Charley: imaginative, insecure, nostalgic.
- Sam: psychiatrist who himself escapes to the past.
- Themes: **escapism**, nostalgia, modern insecurity, fantasy vs reality.
- Technique: first-person, blurred line between real and imaginary.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain why Charley wants to escape and what the third level symbolises.
- Explain the irony of Sam's letter at the end.
- Diary-entry or narrative-technique questions appear as 5-markers.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Elaborate on Charley's fascination with the third level and the way he relates to the past. (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- Interpret the significance of both literal and metaphorical journeys in 'The Third Level'. (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- Discuss the narrative techniques used in 'The Third Level' and how they convey escapism and nostalgia. (SQP 2024-25, 5 marks)

Remember: Grand Central → 1894 → Galesburg → Sam's letter.

Chapter 15: The Tiger King (Vistas 2)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Kalki's satire mocks the arrogance of rulers who try to defy fate and kill wild animals for pride.

Key points

- The **Maharaja of Pratibandapuram** (Sir Jilani Jung Jung Bahadur) is the 'Tiger King'.
- Astrologers foretell death; the **ten-day-old baby speaks**: 'Let tigers beware!' — he will die by a tiger.
- Told he will die by the 100th tiger, he bans tiger hunting for others and vows to kill 100.
- He risks his throne: bribes a British officer's wife with ~fifty diamond rings.
- Kills seventy in ten years; marries a princess from a state rich in tigers to reach **ninety-nine**.
- Desperate, he raises land tax; the dewan plants an old tiger from People's Park, Madras.
- The king's bullet misses; the tiger only faints; hunters kill it secretly.
- A **wooden toy tiger** for his son's third birthday: a sliver pricks his hand; infection, surgery — he dies. 'The hundredth tiger took its revenge.'

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: satire on power, arrogance, cruelty to animals, fate.
- Irony: killer of tigers dies from a toy tiger.
- Characters: Maharaja (proud, stubborn), Dewan (servile, clever).
- Techniques: humour, exaggeration, foreshadowing, dramatic irony.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain the irony of the death (most asked).
- Comment on the satire on rulers and on ecological imbalance.
- Narrative technique: story told with the end revealed early.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Examine the outcome of the Tiger King's actions in the light of the prophecy and comment on his belief about controlling fate. (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- Discuss the significance of the toy tiger in the climax of 'The Tiger King'. (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)
- Analyse how the narrative technique used in 'The Tiger King' enhances the impact of the story. (SQP 2025-26, 5 marks)

Remember: 99 real tigers, killed by a wooden one.

Chapter 16: Journey to the End of the Earth (Vistas 3)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Tishani Doshi's Antarctic trip shows how the planet's past and future can be read in its ice.

Key points

- Author travels aboard the Russian research vessel **Akademik Shokalskiy** to Antarctica, the coldest, driest, windiest continent.
- Started from Madras; crossed nine time zones, six checkpoints; over 100 hours of travel.
- 650 million years ago India and Antarctica were part of **Gondwana**.
- Antarctica holds half-million-year-old carbon records in its ice-cores — vital to climate change debate.
- Never sustained a human population — relatively 'pristine'.
- **Students on Ice** (led by Canadian Geoff Green) takes high school students there to inspire respect for the planet.
- Phytoplankton feed the Southern Ocean food chain; ozone depletion harms them.
- Lesson: **take care of the small things and the big things will fall into place**

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: climate change, environment, global warming, human impact.
- Students are future policy-makers; seeing is believing.
- 'Walk on the ocean': walking on a metre-thick ice pack above 180 metres of salt water.
- Tone: informative, reflective, urgent.

Exam focus: how to score

- Explain why Antarctica is the place to study the Earth's past and future.
- Explain the importance of Students on Ice programme.
- Explain the phytoplankton metaphor.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Describe the idea that emerges from the author's portrayal of Antarctica as a warning rather than a destination. (SQP 2026-27, 2 marks)
- How can programmes like 'Students on Ice' help raise awareness about environmental issues? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- Extract: how does the absence of a human population in Antarctica make it significant in the climate change debate? (SQP 2023-24, 1 mark)

Remember: Gondwana past, ice-core records, small things matter.

Chapter 17: The Enemy (Vistas 4)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Pearl S. Buck explores a Japanese doctor's conflict between duty as a healer and loyalty to his nation.

Key points

- Wartime Japan. **Dr Sadao Hoki**, surgeon trained in America, and wife **Hana** find a wounded American POW on their beach.
- Duty as a doctor wins: they take him in; Sadao removes the bullet and saves him.
- The old gardener and servants disapprove; **Yumi refuses to wash him**; Hana does it herself.
- Servants leave the house, fearing punishment.
- Sadao tells the **General**, who offers private **assassins** to kill the prisoner quietly.
- The assassins never come; the General admits he 'thought of nothing but myself' and forgot his promise.
- Sadao gives the prisoner a boat, food and clothes to row to an island and wait for a Korean fishing boat.
- Ending: 'I wonder why I could not kill him?' — humanity wins over hatred.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- **Sadao**: patriotic but a true doctor; humanity over nationalism.
- **Hana**: compassionate, brave.
- **General**: selfish, needs Sadao for his operation.
- Themes: **humanity vs patriotism**, moral dilemma, war.

Exam focus: how to score

- Discuss Sadao's dilemma with evidence: doctor vs patriot.
- Compare Hana and Sadao's responses.
- Comment on the General's selfishness and the irony of his help.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Dr Sadao's decision to shelter an enemy soldier places him in a moral dilemma. Assess whether it can be seen as an act of moral courage. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)
- Justify how Sadao's character arc is more central to the moral dilemma as opposed to Hana's. (SQP 2025-26, 5 marks)
- Explain the superiority Hana is convinced about when she says 'Stupid Yumi... a wounded helpless man!' (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)

Remember: A doctor first, a patriot second.

Chapter 18: On the Face of It (Vistas 5)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Susan Hill's play shows how acceptance and a positive outlook can heal the pain of physical disability.

Key points

- **Derry**, 14, with a face burned by acid, enters **Mr Lamb**'s garden thinking it empty.
- Mr Lamb has a **tin leg** (lost in war); kids call him 'Lamey-Lamb', but he doesn't mind.
- Derry is bitter and isolated; he overheard a woman say 'a face only a mother could love'.
- Mr Lamb: 'The gate's open' — welcomes all, listens to his bees 'singing'.
- He tells the story of a man who shut himself in a room, afraid of everything, and was killed by a falling picture.
- Mr Lamb shows that people's looks are not the whole of them: 'Not the whole of you'.
- Derry promises to return to help pick crab apples; his mother forbids him, but he goes back.
- **Mr Lamb falls from the ladder; Derry returns to find him lying still** (implied death) — yet Derry now wants to face the world.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Derry: angry, lonely, self-pitying → hopeful.
- Mr Lamb: wise, cheerful, lonely too.
- Themes: **loneliness, disability, acceptance, positive attitude.**
- "I'm not afraid. People are afraid of me."

Exam focus: how to score

- Compare Derry and Mr Lamb; show how Lamb changes Derry.
- Explain the title: appearances vs inner self.
- Tragic ending — but hope survives in Derry.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Discuss how Mr Lamb's outlook challenges Derry's fear-driven self-image and shapes his understanding of self-worth. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)
- What does Derry's remark, 'Think, you might have been blinded...', reveal about his perspective on how people console others? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- How does Susan Hill subtly portray a blend of pessimism and optimism in 'On the Face of It'? (SQP 2024-25, 2 marks)

Remember: Burned face, tin leg, open gate.

Chapter 19: Memories of Childhood (Vistas 6)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Two women from marginalised communities recall childhood humiliation and their spirit of resistance.

Key points

- **I. The Cutting of My Long Hair — Zitkala-Sa** (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, Native American).
 - First day at a missionary school in 'the land of apples': harsh noises, stiff shoes, rules at the breakfast table.
 - Friend **Judewin** warns that their hair will be cut; among her people **shingled hair was for cowards** or mourners.
 - She hides under a bed; is dragged out, tied fast in a chair; loses her long braids — 'Then I lost my spirit'.
- **II. We Too are Human Beings — Bama** (Tamil Dalit writer, from **Karukku**).
 - In third class she sees an elder carry a **vadai packet by its string** so as not to 'pollute' it — she laughs.
 - Her elder brother **Annan** explains untouchability; she is furious.
 - Annan: education is the way to dignity — 'Work hard and learn'. She studies hard and stands first.

Characters, themes & key quotes

- Themes: **racism and casteism**, loss of identity, education as resistance.
- Both narrators rebel: Zitkala-Sa by struggle, Bama by learning.
- "I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder."
- Autobiographical first-person accounts.

Exam focus: how to score

- Compare the two narratives: different cultures, similar oppression.
- Explain the vadai incident and Annan's advice.
- Diary-entry style 5-markers are common.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- Extract: according to Annan, what is the main reason the community is denied honour and respect? (SQP 2026-27, 1 mark)
- What does Zitkala-Sa's description of being 'tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet' reveal about her feelings? (SQP 2025-26, 2 marks)
- How can we say that the vadai packet incident reveals the writer lacked the maturity to understand untouchability? (SQP 2023-24, 2 marks)

Remember: Shingled hair and the vadai packet — both fight back.

Chapter 20: Reading Skills + Notice & Invitation (Sections A-B)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Paper = 80 marks: Reading 22 + Creative Writing 18 + Literature 40; Internal Assessment 20 (Listening 5, Speaking 5, Project 10).

Key points

- **Reading (22):** two unseen passages, **700-750 words combined**: Q1 factual/descriptive/literary (12 marks), Q2 case-based with data/charts (10 marks).
- Question types: MCQs, fill-ins, vocabulary by inference, and short answers in **about 40 words (2 marks)**.
- Tip: read questions first; quote paragraph evidence; for chart passages compare numbers (e.g. % growth).
- **Notice (Q3, 4 marks):** **up to 50 words**, one of two. Marks: Format 1 / Content 2 / Accuracy 1.
- Content: what, who, when (date, time), where, how to register, contact.
- **Invitation/Reply (Q4, 4 marks):** up to 50 words, formal (third person) or formal letter/reply (first person). Marks: Format 1 / Content 2 / Accuracy 1.
- Reply: thank, accept/decline, refer to event, date, venue.

Formats that earn the Format mark

- **Notice** (per marking scheme): **box**; name of issuing organisation (top centre); word NOTICE (centre); date of issue (left); heading; body; name, designation & signature (bottom left).
- Notice: ½ mark lost if 1-2 aspects missing; zero format mark if more than two missing.
- **Formal invitation:** third person — '...request(s) the pleasure of your company...' + occasion, date, time, venue, RSVP.
- **Reply:** sender's address, date, receiver, body (thanks + acceptance/regret), name.

Exam focus: how to score

- Stay within 50 words; extra words do not add marks.
- Always box the notice and give a catchy heading.
- Write in passive/impersonal style for notices; no 'Dear'.

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- You are Rishitha Menon of the Horizon Club, Bala Vidyalaya, Chennai. Draft a notice inviting senior students to a one-day workshop on project work and presentation skills. (SQP 2026-27, 4 marks)
- As Ananya, lead coordinator, Media Club, St. Xavier's School, draft a formal invitation to Ishaan Grover to be keynote speaker at a seminar on Digital Storytelling & Ethics. (SQP 2026-27, 4 marks)
- As Dr. Sameer, write a formal reply accepting an invitation to judge a 'Waste-to-Wealth' project competition. (SQP 2026-27, 4 marks)

Remember: Notice: Box, Name, NOTICE, Date, Heading, Body, Sign — in 50 words.

Chapter 21: Letters, Article & Report (Section B)

Class XII • English Core • CBSE 2026-27

Big idea: Q5 Letter and Q6 Article/Report: 5 marks each, 120-150 words, one of two.

Key points

- **Q5 Letter (5):** letter to the editor (suggestions/opinion on public issues) or **job application with bio-data/resume**.
- Marks: Format 1 / Organisation of ideas 1 / Content 2 / Accuracy 1.
- Letter to editor: close with **Yours truly**. Job application: close with **Yours sincerely**.
- Job letter content: refer to the advertisement, show suitability, submit application; bio-data as a separate enclosure.
- **Q6 Article/Report (5):** descriptive and analytical; same 1/1/2/1 marking.
- Article: title + by-line; introduction, body (cues + own ideas), conclusion.
- Report: headline, by-line, place & date; para 1 = what, who, when, where; para 2 = how/details; para 3 = steps, outcome, witness quotes.

Formats that earn the Format mark

- **Formal letter:** sender's address, date, receiver's address, subject, salutation (Sir/Madam), body, complimentary close, name.
- **Bio-data:** personal details, educational qualifications (as advertised), work experience, skills/achievements, references.
- **Article:** Title — By: Name, Class; 3-4 paragraphs.
- **Report:** Headline — By: Name (designation); Place, Date; past tense, third person.

Exam focus: how to score

- Use all the given cues + your own ideas — this is the Content (2) mark.
- Organise in clear paragraphs with linkers — the Organisation mark.
- Leave 3-4 minutes to check spelling and grammar (1 mark).

★ Important questions from CBSE sample papers

- As Kavya, write a letter to the Editor proposing a 'Community Food Redistribution Initiative' to tackle food wastage at social events. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)
- As Ranjay Thakur, apply for the post of Sustainable Tourism Coordinator at 'EcoTrails India', with a detailed bio-data. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)
- Write an article for your school magazine on why Digital Wellness should be integrated into the school curriculum. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)
- As Prem Kumar, write a report on the launch of the 'Tobacco Free Youth Campaign' in your school. (SQP 2026-27, 5 marks)

Remember: Editor = Yours truly; Job = Yours sincerely + bio-data.