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Class 12 · English Core · Flamingo · Prose 1

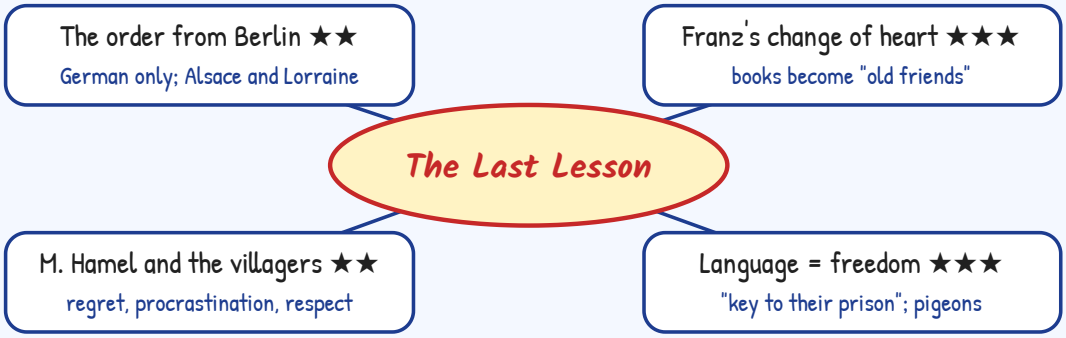
Chapter 1
The Last Lesson



M. Hamel's last words

Alphonse Daudet · NCERT Flamingo, Reprint 2026-27 · CBSE board 2027

Chapter map (★ = asked often in CBSE papers 2024–2026)



About the author

Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897) was a French novelist and short-story writer. The story is set in 1871, just after the **Franco-Prussian War** (1870–71), in which France was defeated by Prussia under Bismarck. The French districts of **Alsace and Lorraine** passed into Prussian hands.

What is inside

1. Concept notes: story in brief, themes, characters, key lines
2. NCERT exercises, fully solved
3. **CBSE PYQs 2024–2026, fully solved**
4. Quick-reference sheet and 3 extract-based sets; practice A–G, 20 MCQs, 6 A–R, answers, summary

Colour code used

red = key term green = definition
purple = sub-heading black = explanation
"purple Kalam" = a line quoted from the text

★ **Exam tip:** CBSE asks this story in every form: extracts (Q9), 40–50-word answers (Q10) and 120–150-word answers that pair it with "Lost Spring", "The Rattrap", "Deep Water" or "The Interview". Learn the key lines by heart.

Theme in one line: the pain a people feel when conquerors take away their language, and the truth that we value something only when we are about to lose it.

Background in 30 seconds



Prussia was a powerful German kingdom led by Bismarck; its capital Berlin issued the order. Daudet wrote the story in 1873 to show how a conquered people felt when their language was taken away.

I.1 The story in brief ★★

A. The morning (Franz's fear)

- Franz, a young French boy in a village of **Alsace**, starts for school very late. He is in **"great dread of a scolding"** because M. Hamel is to question the class on **participles**, and he does not know the first word about them.
- The warm, bright day, the chirping birds and the **Prussian soldiers drilling** behind the sawmill tempt him to bunk school, but he **"had the strength to resist"**.
- A crowd stands at the **bulletin-board** of the town hall, the source of "all our bad news" for two years: lost battles, the draft, orders of the commanding officer. The blacksmith **Wachter** calls out, "Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!" Franz thinks he is being mocked.

B. A strange, silent school

- Usually there is **"a great bustle"**: desks banging, lessons repeated **in unison**, the teacher's ruler rapping. Franz had **counted on** this noise to slip in unseen, but today everything is **"as quiet as Sunday morning"**.
- He must walk in before everyone, red with shame, but M. Hamel only says kindly, *"Go to your place quickly, little Franz. We were beginning without you."*
- M. Hamel wears his **green coat, frilled shirt and embroidered black silk cap**, kept for inspection and prize days. On the usually empty back benches sit **village elders**: old Hauser with his three-cornered hat and a primer **"thumbed at the edges"**, the former mayor, the former postmaster and others, all looking sad.

C. The announcement

- M. Hamel announces gravely: *"My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes tomorrow."*
- For Franz the words are **"a thunderclap"**. He regrets seeking birds' eggs and sliding on the Saar; his heavy books now feel like **"old friends"**, and he forgets M. Hamel's ruler and crankiness.
- He understands the elders: they are sorry they did not go to school more, and have come to thank the master for **forty years of faithful service** and to honour **"the country that was theirs no more"**.

D. The lesson

- Called to recite, Franz gets mixed up on the first words. M. Hamel does not scold: everyone in Alsace kept saying *"I'll learn it tomorrow"*; parents sent children to farms and mills; he himself sent pupils to water his flowers and gave holidays when he wanted to go fishing. *"We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with."*
- He calls French **"the most beautiful language in the world, the clearest, the most logical"**, and says a people who hold fast to their language have **"the key to their prison"**.

- Franz understands the grammar easily; the class writes new copies, **"France, Alsace"**, that hang like **little flags**. Pigeons coo on the roof: *"Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?"* Old Hauser spells with the babies, his voice trembling.

E. The end

- At twelve the church clock strikes, the Angelus rings and the **Prussian trumpets** sound. M. Hamel, very pale, tries to speak but chokes, writes **"Vive La France!"** on the board and dismisses the class with a gesture.

Setting and background. Time: 1871, after France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War. Place: a village school in Alsace (France), now under Prussia (then Germany, Poland and parts of Austria). Narrator: Franz, a schoolboy, in the first person. Order: from **Berlin**, the Prussian capital.

1.2 Themes, title and characters ★★★

Themes

1. **Language and identity.** A language is a people's identity and culture. Taking it away is the conqueror's way of enslaving them; holding on to it keeps freedom alive (*"the key to their prison"*).
2. **Linguistic oppression.** The order from Berlin imposes German. The story shows the pain of a people forced to give up their mother tongue (the theme NCERT names).
3. **Procrastination and regret.** Everyone in Alsace put off learning till tomorrow: Franz, the parents, the elders, even M. Hamel. They realise its value only when it is lost.
4. **Patriotism.** The elders' presence, M. Hamel's Sunday clothes, the copies "France, Alsace" and "Vive La France!" express love for a country "that was theirs no more".
5. **Teacher and pupil.** A strict, "cranky" teacher is seen with new love; a careless pupil becomes attentive. Attitudes to learning and teaching change in a day.

Significance of the title

The title is apt. The story describes M. Hamel's **last French lesson** in Alsace before German is imposed. It is also the "last lesson" in a deeper sense: it teaches Franz and the villagers the value of their language, their teacher and their freedom, a lesson they will never forget.

★ ***Exam tip:*** For "Why did the people suddenly value French?" always give the cause (the order from Berlin) and two pieces of evidence (Franz's regret, the elders on the back benches).

Characters

Franz (narrator)

A carefree, **playful** schoolboy who prefers birds' eggs and sliding on the Saar to participles, and dreads M. Hamel's ruler. Yet he is **honest** (admits his faults), **sensitive** and quick to **change**: the news makes him regret his idleness, see his books as old friends and listen with full attention. His innocent remark about the pigeons shows a child's sharp sense of injustice.

M. Hamel (the teacher)

Strict and "cranky" with his iron ruler, but **devoted**: forty years in the same school. On the last day he is **gentle, dignified and patient**, blames himself as well as others, and tries to give his pupils everything he knows "at one stroke". A true **patriot**, he loves French and ends with "Vive La France!", heartbroken but brave.

Old Hauser and the villagers

The former mayor, the former postmaster and other elders fill the back benches, sorry that they did not go to school more. Their presence is a silent **tribute** to the teacher and to their lost country. Hauser's trembling voice as he spells with the babies is the story's most moving image.

Wachter (the blacksmith)

Reading the bulletin, he calls after Franz that he will reach school "in plenty of time": he already knows there will be no lesson worth hurrying for.

1.3 Key lines explained, words and expressions ★★

Lines the board loves

"Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!" Wachter knows from the bulletin that it is the last French lesson; there is no point in hurrying. Franz mistakes it for mockery (dramatic irony).

"What a thunderclap these words were to me!" The news is sudden, shocking and unexpected, like thunder on a clear day.

"My books ... were old friends now that I couldn't give up." Shows Franz's change of heart: what he found a nuisance becomes precious when it is about to be lost.

"Ah, that's the great trouble with Alsace; she puts off learning till tomorrow." M. Hamel blames the habit of procrastination for the loss.

"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." Language keeps a people's identity and unity alive; through it they can one day win back freedom.

"Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" A child's innocent irony: the conquerors can impose a language on people but not on nature; forcing it is as absurd as making birds coo in German.

"I never saw him look so tall." Not physical height: his dignity, courage and patriotism made him seem great at that moment.

"Vive La France!" "Long live France!": his last, unspoken farewell and a cry of patriotism when emotion chokes his voice.

Words and expressions (NCERT "Notice these expressions")

expression	meaning in the story
in great dread of	very afraid of (a scolding)
counted on	relied on (the noise, to slip in unseen)
thumbed at the edges	worn and dirty at the edges from much use
in unison	all together, at the same time

a great bustle	a lot of noisy activity
reproach ourselves with	blame ourselves for

Symbols and devices

- **The bulletin-board**: a symbol of foreign rule, the source of "all our bad news".
- **Sunday clothes**: M. Hamel honours the last lesson as a solemn occasion.
- **Copies "France, Alsace"**, "like little flags": the classroom becomes a place of patriotism.
- **Prussian trumpets** at the end: the conquerors' power interrupting the last French words.
- **Irony**: Franz hoped for noise to hide; the silence exposes him. He wanted to escape the lesson; now he wishes it would never end.
- **First-person narration** makes the reader feel Franz's fear, regret and grief directly.

✗ **Don't do this:** Do not write that the order came from "Germany's king" or "the Prussian soldiers": it came "from Berlin". And Alsace was French, now taken by Prussia.

NCERT exercises, fully solved

Think as you read (section 1)

1. What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?

> **Ans.** Franz was expected to know the rule for **participles**; M. Hamel had said he would question the class on them, and Franz did not know the first word about them.

2. What did Franz notice that was unusual about the school that day?

> **Ans.** (1) There was none of the usual bustle; everything was as quiet as Sunday morning. (2) M. Hamel did not scold him for being late and spoke kindly. (3) M. Hamel wore his special green coat, frilled shirt and embroidered black silk cap, kept for inspection and prize days. (4) Village elders, including old Hauser, the former mayor and the former postmaster, sat on the usually empty back benches, looking sad. The whole school seemed strange and solemn.

3. What had been put up on the bulletin-board?

> **Ans.** The order from Berlin that only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine; from the next day a new German master would come. That was why a crowd stood in front of the board.

Think as you read (section 2)

1. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?

> **Ans.** It made it the last French lesson. The school was silent and solemn; M. Hamel was dressed in his best and taught with unusual patience, as if to give the pupils all he knew at one stroke. Village elders came to attend the lesson. Pupils, even the little ones, worked with full attention, and Franz understood the grammar easily. Everyone felt sad and regretful.

2. How did Franz's feelings about M. Hamel and school change?

> **Ans.** Earlier Franz found school dull, his books a nuisance and M. Hamel a cranky teacher with a terrible ruler. After the announcement his books became "old friends" he could not give up; he forgot the ruler and crankiness, felt sorry for M. Hamel, admired his courage and listened more carefully than ever before.

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Understanding the text

1. The people in this story suddenly realise how precious their language is to them. What shows you this? Why does this happen?

> **Ans.** **What shows it:** Franz regrets wasting time and sees his books as old friends; the village elders come to the last lesson and sit at the back, sad and attentive; old Hauser reads from his worn primer with a trembling voice; everyone writes the copies "France, Alsace" in silence; M. Hamel wears his best clothes and calls French the most beautiful, clearest and most logical language.
>
> **Why:** the order from Berlin bans French in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. People always thought there was plenty of time to learn it; only when it is taken away do they realise what it means. We value a thing most when we fear losing it.

2. Franz thinks, "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" What could this mean? (There could be more than one answer.)

> **Ans.** (1) It mocks the Prussians' tyranny: they can force a language on people but not on birds; language, like the pigeons' cooing, is natural. (2) It shows how deep the oppression feels: the conquerors seem to want to control everything, even nature. (3) It reflects a child's innocent irony and his sadness that French, natural to Alsace, is being silenced.

Talking about the text

1. "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." Can you think of examples in history where a conquered people had their language taken away or had a language imposed on them?

> **Ans.** Points: (1) **Colonial India**: English became the language of government and higher education under the British, pushing Indian languages aside (Macaulay's Minute, 1835). (2) **Native Americans and Australian Aborigines**: children in boarding schools were punished for speaking their own languages (see Zitkala-Sa in "Memories of Childhood"). (3) **Bangladesh**: the imposition of Urdu on Bengali speakers led to the Language Movement of 1952, honoured as International Mother Language Day (21 February). Holding on to their language helped these peoples keep their identity and resist.

2. What happens to a linguistic minority in a state? How can they keep their language alive (e.g. Punjabis in Bangalore, Tamilians in Mumbai, Kannadigas in Delhi, Gujaratis in Kolkata)?

> **Ans.** A linguistic minority slowly adopts the language of the majority for school, work and daily life, and the younger generation may lose the mother tongue. They can keep it alive by speaking it at home, teaching children to read and write it, forming cultural associations, celebrating festivals, running language classes and libraries, reading newspapers and books in it, and using constitutional rights (Articles 29 and 30) to run their own schools.

3. Is it possible to carry pride in one's language too far? Do you know what "linguistic chauvinism" means?

> **Ans.** Yes. Pride in one's language is healthy, but when it turns into contempt for other languages or forcing one's language on others, it becomes **linguistic chauvinism**: an aggressive, exaggerated belief that one's own language is superior. It breeds conflict and divides people; respect for all languages is the right balance.

Working with words

1. Find out the origins of: tycoon, tulip, logo, bandicoot, barbecue, veranda, robot, zero, ski, trek.

> **Ans.** tycoon: Japanese (taikun, "great lord") · tulip: Turkish/Persian (tülbent, "turban") · logo: Greek (logos, "word") · bandicoot: Telugu (pandikokku, "pig-rat") · barbecue: Spanish, from Taíno (barbacoa) · veranda: Hindi/Portuguese (varanda) · robot: Czech (robota, "forced labour") · zero: Arabic (sifr), via Italian · ski: Norwegian · trek: Afrikaans/Dutch (trekken, "to pull, travel").

2. Tick the option that best explains the meaning.

Ans. (a) "What a thunderclap these words were to me!" (ii) startling and unexpected. (b) "...key to their prison" (i) do not lose their language. (c) "you will get to your school in plenty of time" (iii) early enough. (d) "I never saw him look so tall" (b) seemed very confident (great in his dignity).

Noticing form

1. Pick out five sentences with the past perfect and say why this form is used.

Ans. (1) "M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles." (2) "I had counted on the commotion to get to my desk..." (3) "Hauser had brought an old primer, thumbed at the edges." (4) "It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes." (5) "...the hopvine that he had planted himself twined about the windows." (Also: "they had not gone to school more"; "he had been there in the same place".) The past perfect shows an action completed before another past action in the story (the "earlier past").

Writing

1. Write a notice for your school bulletin board (an event, a requirement or a rule).

Ans.

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL, JAIPUR
NOTICE
4 August 2026
HINDI DIWAS: ESSAY AND POETRY COMPETITION
On Hindi Diwas, 14 September, an inter-house essay and poetry-recitation competition will be held in the auditorium at 10 a.m. for Classes VI–XII. Topics will be given on the spot. Give your names to your class teacher by 5 September.
Ananya
Secretary, Literary Club

2. Write a paragraph of about 100 words arguing for or against studying three languages at school.

Ans. **For.** Studying three languages at school is a gift, not a burden. In a country as diverse as India, the mother tongue keeps us rooted in our culture, Hindi helps us connect across states, and English opens the doors of higher education and the world. Children learn languages easily, and each new language sharpens memory and thinking. It also teaches respect for other people and cultures. As "The Last Lesson" shows, a language is part of who we are; knowing three makes us richer, not poorer. With good teaching and a sensible syllabus, three languages can be learnt without strain.

3. Have you ever changed your opinion about someone or something you had liked or disliked? Narrate what led you to change your mind.

Ans. In Class IX I disliked our mathematics teacher, Mr Rao. He gave us long homework, checked every step and never accepted excuses; I thought he enjoyed troubling us. Before the half-yearly examination I fell ill and missed two weeks of school. To my surprise, Mr Rao stayed back every day for a week to explain the chapters I had missed, refusing any thanks. When I scored my best marks ever, he only smiled and said, "Your hard work did it." I realised his strictness came from care, not cruelty. Like Franz with M. Hamel, I learnt to see my teacher with new eyes.

CBSE board questions 2024–2026, fully solved

Every question on this chapter from the 16 papers (2024 301/1–5, 2025 301/1, 2, 4–7, 2026 301/1–5), quoted with complete model answers. Questions that join two texts appear in both chapters.

A. Extract-based questions (4 and 6 marks)

CBSE 2024 · 301/3/1 Read the extract and answer the questions.

> For a moment I thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. It was so warm, so bright! The birds were chirping at the edge of the woods; and in the open field back of the sawmill the Prussian soldiers were drilling. It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles, but I had the strength to resist, and hurried off to school. *(The Last Lesson)*

(i) List two sensory details in the extract.

(ii) Why is the narrator tempted to spend the day out of doors?

(iii) I hurried off to school resisting _____.

(iv) Why does the narrator want to bunk school? (A) he dislikes the teachers (B) he dislikes his classmates (C) he isn't prepared for the test on participles (D) he forgot his homework

(v) Which trait does "I had the strength to resist" reveal? (A) sincerity (B) determination (C) bravery (D) kindness

(vi) Which headline best suggests the central idea? (A) The Drilling of Prussian Soldiers (B) The Rule of Participles (C) Strength to Resist (D) Out of Doors [6]

> **Ans.** (i) the chirping of birds and the warm, bright day (also the soldiers drilling).
>
> (ii) The day is warm and bright, and he has not learnt his participles.
>
> (iii) the temptation to spend the day outdoors.
>
> (iv) (C).
>
> (v) (B) determination.
>
> (vi) (C) Strength to Resist.

CBSE 2024 · 301/4/1 Read the extract and answer the questions.

> I heard M. Hamel say to me, "I won't scold you, little Franz; you must feel bad enough. See how it is! Every day we have said to ourselves, 'Bah! I've plenty of time. I'll learn it tomorrow.' And now you see where we've come out. Ah, that's the great trouble with Alsace; she puts off learning till tomorrow. Now those fellows out there will have the right to say to you, 'How is it; you pretend to be Frenchmen, and yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?' But you are not the worst, poor little Franz. We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with." *(The Last Lesson)*

(i) The tone of M. Hamel in "And now you see where we've come out" is: (A) kindness (B) happiness (C) regret (D) enthusiasm

(ii) Which sentence uses "reproach" in the same sense? (A) The player received a reprimand for breach of rules. (B) The students approached the management with a demand. (C) The clerk received a letter of appreciation. (D) She could not broach the subject with her boss.

(iii) True or False: M. Hamel endorses the belief that there is plenty of time to learn their language.

(iv) "You must feel bad enough." Through these words M. Hamel urges people _____.

(v) Identify the line that reinforces the theme of patriotism.

(vi) "She puts off learning till tomorrow." "Puts off" suggests _____. [6]

> **Ans.** (i) (C) regret.
>
> (ii) (A): to reproach is to blame or reprimand.
>
> (iii) False: he criticises exactly that habit.
>
> (iv) to realise their mistake and value their language.

(v) "How is it; you pretend to be Frenchmen, and yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?"
(vi) putting things off (procrastination).

CBSE 2025 · 301/2/1 Read the extract and answer the questions.

> My last French lesson! Why, I hardly knew how to write! I should never learn any more! I must stop there, then! Oh, how sorry I was for not learning my lessons, for seeking birds' eggs, or going sliding on the Saar! My books, that had seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry, my grammar, and my history of the saints, were old friends now that I couldn't give up. And M. Hamel, too; the idea that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was. Poor man! It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes, and now I understood why the old men of the village were sitting there in the back of the room. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more. It was their way of thanking our master for his forty years of faithful service and of showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more. *(The Last Lesson)*

(i) The tone in "I hardly knew how to write … how sorry I was for not learning my lessons" is: (A) confused (B) regretful (C) surprised (D) happy
(ii) "Seeking birds' eggs" and "sliding on the Saar" are: (A) part of his routine (B) his daily routine (C) distractions from learning (D) fun time with friends
(iii) What does the shift from "nuisance" to "old friends" reflect?
(iv) The old men were sorry for (not following the government order / not learning their language).
(v) What is inferred from "the country that was theirs no more"?
(vi) What does M. Hamel's ruler reflect about him? [6]

Ans. (i) (B) regretful.
(ii) (C).
(iii) Franz has realised the value of his books and his language now that he is about to lose them.
(iv) not learning their language.
(v) Alsace has been conquered by Prussia; they have lost their freedom.
(vi) He was a strict disciplinarian.

B. Short answer questions (2 marks, 40–50 words)

CBSE 2024 · 301/1/1 "We miss a thing when we fear losing it." With two examples from "The Last Lesson", show how people suddenly realised how precious their language was. (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. When the order came that only German would be taught, Franz regretted wasting time and felt his grammar books were now old friends he could not leave. The village elders, old Hauser, the former mayor and postmaster, came to the last lesson, sat quietly at the back, and Hauser's voice trembled as he read.

CBSE 2024 · 301/2/1 What was the "thunderclap" Franz received as M. Hamel began the lesson? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. M. Hamel announced that this was their last French lesson: an order had come from Berlin that only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine, and a new master would come the next day. This shocking news struck Franz like a thunderclap.

CBSE 2024 · 301/5/1 What can be inferred from "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. Hearing the pigeons cooing on the roof, Franz innocently wonders whether the Prussians will force even the birds to sing in German. The line is a sarcastic comment on the tyranny of the conquerors: they can impose a language on people, but they cannot control nature or kill the love of one's mother tongue.

CBSE 2025 · 301/1/1 "I've plenty of time. I'll learn it tomorrow. And now you see where we've come out." What does M. Hamel mean to convey? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. M. Hamel regrets that the people of Alsace, himself included, always put off learning French, taking it for granted. Now that the Prussians have banned it, it is too late. He blames their habit of procrastination and expresses his grief and helplessness at the lost chance to learn their own language.

CBSE 2025 · 301/2/1 How did Franz plan to turn the commotion in the classroom to his favour? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle of desks opening and closing and lessons repeated aloud. Franz, who was late, planned to slip into his seat unnoticed in the noise. But that day everything was as quiet as Sunday morning, so he had to walk in before everyone.

CBSE 2025 · 301/4/1 Why does M. Hamel call language a key to freedom from slavery? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. M. Hamel says that 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". Language is part of a people's identity; it unites them, keeps their culture alive and gives them the strength to resist the conqueror and one day win back freedom.

CBSE 2026 · 301/1/1 "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" What does Franz's remark suggest about the imposition of German in Alsace? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. Franz's innocent question shows how absurd and oppressive the order is. A language is as natural to a people as cooing is to pigeons; forcing the French to stop using their mother tongue is as unnatural as making birds sing in German. The remark expresses his frustration at linguistic tyranny.

CBSE 2026 · 301/3/1 "I won't scold you, little Franz; you must feel bad enough." What must Franz have been feeling bad about? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. Franz could not say the rule for participles when M. Hamel called on him. He felt ashamed that he had wasted time, neglected his lessons and kept putting off learning French, his own language. Now that it was the last lesson, he realised he would never get the chance to learn it properly.

CBSE 2026 · 301/5/1 "We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with." What does this reveal about M. Hamel's emotional turmoil after the ban on French? (The Last Lesson) (40–50 words) [2]

Ans. M. Hamel is filled with regret and self-blame. He holds everyone responsible: parents who sent children to work instead of school, children who put off learning, and himself, who gave holidays when he wanted to go fishing. All of Alsace had taken French for granted, and now the chance was lost.

C. Long answer questions (5 marks, 120–150 words)

CBSE 2024 · 301/2/1 Franz in "The Last Lesson" realises the importance of going to school, while Saheb in "Lost Spring" yearns to go to school. Write a paragraph exploring the different perspectives of the two boys on learning and education. (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. Franz and Saheb are both young boys, but they stand at opposite ends of the road to education.

Franz has a school, a devoted teacher and books, yet takes them for granted. He is often late, has not learnt his participles and would rather chase birds or watch Prussian soldiers drill. Only when Prussian orders announce the last French lesson does he realise what he is losing; his books suddenly feel like old friends and he regrets every wasted day.

Saheb, a ragpicker in Seemapuri, has no school at all. "There is no school in my neighbourhood. When they build one, I will go," he says, and when the author jokingly offers to start one, he eagerly asks if it is ready. Poverty forces him to work in a tea stall, where he loses even his freedom.

Franz learns the value of education when it is taken away; Saheb knows it all along but can never reach it.

CBSE 2025 · 301/5/1 How do "The Last Lesson" by Alphonse Daudet and "Lost Spring" by Anees Jung illustrate the impact of socio-political factors on education? (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. Both stories show that a child's education depends on forces far beyond the classroom.

In "The Last Lesson", politics destroys learning. After the Prussian victory, an order from Berlin bans French in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. Overnight, Franz loses the chance to learn his own language, and the villagers realise too late what they have neglected. A conqueror's decision takes away not only a subject but a people's identity and culture.

In "Lost Spring", poverty and social systems deny education. Saheb, a ragpicker in Seemapuri, says "there is no school in my neighbourhood". Mukesh and other children of Firozabad's bangle-makers are pushed into dangerous work in furnaces instead of classrooms. Moneylenders, middlemen, police and politicians keep the families in debt, while tradition makes bangle-making their fate. The state's neglect leaves them without schools or hope.

Whether through war or poverty, both stories show children robbed of the learning that is their right.

CBSE 2025 · 301/6/1 M. Hamel in "The Last Lesson" and Edla in "The Rattrap" are the guiding lights of self-realisation for Franz and the peddler. Comment. (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. Both M. Hamel and Edla awaken something good in another person and lead him to realise his mistakes.

Franz was a careless boy who dreaded M. Hamel's ruler and often skipped lessons. On the last day, M. Hamel does not scold him; he gently says that all of Alsace, himself included, kept putting off learning, and he speaks of the beauty of French and the duty to guard one's language. His dignity and grief transform Franz: his books become old friends, he regrets every wasted day and he understands the value of his language and his teacher.

The peddler was a thief who believed the world was a rattrap. Even after learning the truth about him, Edla treats him with kindness and respect, lets him stay for Christmas and sends him off in the captain's suit. Her trust makes him return the stolen money with a rattrap and a letter signed "Captain von Stahle".

Patience and compassion, not punishment, bring about their change.

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CBSE 2025 · 301/7/1 Analyse how freedom is curbed for Franz in "The Last Lesson" and for Saheb in "Lost Spring". (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. Franz and Saheb lose their freedom to very different masters: a foreign conqueror and poverty.

Franz lives in Alsace, which has been taken over by Prussia after the war. An order from Berlin bans French in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. His beloved teacher must leave, and from the next day he must learn German. He loses the freedom to learn his own language, which M. Hamel calls the key to a people's prison; his school and village will never be the same.

Saheb is a ragpicker in Seemapuri, a "partner in survival" from childhood. When he takes a job at a tea stall for 800 rupees and meals, he seems better off, but he has lost his carefree look. The steel canister he now carries is heavier than the plastic bag he once carried, because "the bag was his. The canister belongs to the man who owns the tea shop." He is no longer his own master.

One loses his language, the other his independence; both are robbed of a free childhood.

CBSE 2026 · 301/2/1 "The Last Lesson" and "The Interview" highlight the importance of language in one's life. Comment. (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. Language gives people their identity and is a powerful tool that can unite, inform or distort, as both texts show.

In "The Last Lesson", the Prussian order banning French in Alsace makes everyone realise what their language means. M. Hamel calls French "the most beautiful language in the world" and says that as long as an enslaved people hold fast to their language, "it is as if they had the key to their prison". Language here is cultural and national identity and a means of resisting oppression.

In "The Interview", language is the interview's tool. Words can bring out truth and make the interview an art, but they can also intrude on lives or distort a celebrity's image, which is why writers like Kipling and Naipaul despise it. Eco shows the other side: his warm, conversational language makes difficult ideas clear, and his writings preserve his thoughts for others.

Whether it defines a nation or shapes a reputation, language deeply affects our lives.

CBSE 2026 · 301/4/1 The casual attitude of the people of Alsace led to the loss of their mother tongue, while Douglas's understanding of his fear of water urged him to overcome it and succeed. Analyse "The Last Lesson" and "Deep Water" in the light of this comparison. (120–150 words) [5]

Ans. The two texts contrast neglect with determination.

In "The Last Lesson", the people of Alsace took French for granted. Franz preferred chasing birds to learning participles; parents sent children to work in fields and mills to earn more; even M. Hamel gave holidays when he wanted to go fishing. Everyone said, "I've plenty of time; I'll learn it tomorrow." When the Prussians banned French, it was too late. Only then did the villagers realise its value and gather, full of regret, for the last lesson.

In "Deep Water", Douglas understood that his fear of water was ruining his life: his fishing, canoeing and swimming. Instead of putting it off, he acted. He hired an instructor, practised five days a week for months, and tested himself in Lake Wentworth and Warm Lake until the terror was gone.

Alsace lost its language through procrastination; Douglas won his freedom through timely, persistent effort.

What the board asked (16 papers, 2024–2026)

Type	2024	2025	2026	Total
Extract-based questions	2	1	0	3
Short answer questions	3	3	3	9
Long answer questions	1	3	2	6

Quick-reference sheet

point	remember
author, genre	Alphonse Daudet (1840–1897), French; short story, first person (Franz)
setting	1871, after the Franco-Prussian War; a village school in Alsace
the order	from Berlin: only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine; new master tomorrow
Franz's fear	late; did not know participles; dreaded M. Hamel's iron ruler
unusual signs	silence; kind teacher; green coat, frilled shirt, silk cap; elders on back benches
elders	old Hauser (primer, three-cornered hat), former mayor, former postmaster
why they came	sorry they had not gone to school more; thanks for 40 years; respect for lost country
who is to blame	everyone: Franz, parents (farms, mills), M. Hamel (flowers, fishing holidays)
key idea	language = "key to their prison"
copies	"France, Alsace", like little flags
ending	clock strikes 12, Angelus, Prussian trumpets; "Vive La France!"; "School is dismissed"

Extract-based practice

Set 1.

> Poor man! It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes, and now I understood why the old men of the village were sitting there in the back of the room. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more.

(i) What were M. Hamel's "fine Sunday clothes"? (ii) Why does Franz call him "poor man"? (iii) The old men felt (proud / sorry). (iv) Give one reason why they had come.

Set 2.

> Then he opened a grammar and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how well I understood it. All he said seemed so easy, so easy! I think, too, that I had never listened so carefully, and that he had never explained everything with so much patience.

(i) Why was Franz amazed? (ii) Find a word that means "calm endurance". (iii) Why did M. Hamel explain with so much patience? (iv) Choose the correct option: the extract shows Franz's (a) boredom (b) new attentiveness (c) fear (d) pride.

Set 3.

> All at once the church-clock struck twelve. Then the Angelus. At the same moment the trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under our windows. M. Hamel stood up, very pale, in his chair. I never saw him look so tall.

(i) What does the sound of the Prussian trumpets signify? (ii) Why was M. Hamel "very pale"? (iii) Explain "I never saw him look so tall". (iv) What is the Angelus?

Practice set: test yourself *Exam-style*

Try every question before looking at the answers at the end of the chapter. 56 or more out of 70 means you are ready for the board.

A. Fill in the blanks (1 mark each)

1. M. Hamel had said he would question the class on _____.
2. For two years all the bad news had come from the _____ at the town hall.
3. The blacksmith who called after Franz was _____.
4. The order to teach only German came from _____.
5. M. Hamel had taught in the school for _____ years.
6. Old Hauser held an old _____, thumbed at the edges.
7. The new copies read "France, _____".
8. M. Hamel wrote "_____" on the blackboard at the end.

B. True or false? (1 mark each)

1. Franz bunked school that day to watch the soldiers.
2. M. Hamel scolded Franz for coming late.
3. The back benches were usually empty.
4. Franz recited the rule for participles without a mistake.
5. M. Hamel admitted that he too was to blame.
6. Even the little ones traced their fish-hooks attentively.
7. M. Hamel and his sister would stay on in the village.

8. M. Hamel finished his speech with "My friends..." in a clear voice.

C. Very short answer (1 mark each)

1. Name the two districts where German was to be taught.
2. What tempted Franz to spend the day out of doors?
3. What did Franz count on to reach his desk unseen?
4. Name two village elders present in the class.
5. Which river did Franz go sliding on?
6. Why had the parents kept children away from school?
7. What did the pigeons do on the roof?
8. What three sounds came together at noon?

D. Short answer I (2 marks each)

1. Why did Wachter tell Franz not to hurry?
2. Why was the school unusually quiet that day?
3. What did M. Hamel say about the French language?
4. How did M. Hamel blame himself for the loss?
5. Why were the elders sitting on the back benches?
6. Describe old Hauser's reading of the primer.
7. How did M. Hamel spend the last moments in class?
8. What is the significance of the title "The Last Lesson"?

Answer in 40–50 words.

E. Long answer (5 marks each)

1. Describe the changes in Franz's attitude towards M. Hamel, his books and school in the course of the day.
2. "We've all a great deal to reproach ourselves with." Who were to blame for the neglect of French, and how?
3. Write a character sketch of M. Hamel.
4. Imagine you are Franz. Write a diary entry on the evening of the last lesson.

Answer in 120–150 words.

F. Intertextual long answer (5 marks each)

1. Compare Franz ("The Last Lesson") and Saheb ("Lost Spring") on what education means to them.
2. Both M. Hamel and Edla ("The Rattrap") bring about a change in another person. Compare.

G. HOTS (higher-order thinking)

1. Why do you think the elders, and not the children's parents, came to the last lesson?
2. Is it fair to blame only the conquerors for the loss of French in Alsace? Give your view.
3. "We value a thing only when we are about to lose it." Give an example from your own life or from today's world that shows this.

★ **Exam tip:** In 120–150-word answers, open with one line that answers the question directly, give three points with a quoted phrase each, and end with a one-line conclusion. Examiners mark content 3 + expression 2.

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Assertion–Reason (6)

(a) Both true, R explains A. (b) Both true, R does not explain A. (c) A true, R false. (d) A false, R true.

1. A: Franz was surprised to find the school silent. R: It was the day of the last French lesson.
2. A: The village elders sat on the back benches. R: They wanted to learn German before the new master came.
3. A: M. Hamel did not scold Franz. R: He felt everyone shared the blame for neglecting French.
4. A: Franz's books became old friends. R: He was about to lose the chance to learn French.
5. A: M. Hamel wrote "Vive La France!" on the board. R: He was too choked with emotion to speak.
6. A: Alsace had been taken by Prussia. R: France had won the Franco-Prussian War.

Key: 1 (a) · 2 (c) · 3 (a) · 4 (a) · 5 (a) · 6 (c)

My score (fill in after checking the answers)

Section	A /8	B /8	C /8	D /16	E /20	F /10	G (bonus)	Total /70
My marks								

Rough work

20 MCQs

1. Franz was late for school and was afraid because:
   (a) he had lost his books (b) he had hurt a friend (c) M. Hamel would question them on participles (d) the soldiers had stopped him
2. The Prussian soldiers were drilling:
   (a) in the open field back of the sawmill (b) near the church (c) in the school garden (d) by the river Saar
3. For the last two years the bulletin-board had brought news of:
   (a) festivals (b) market prices (c) school results (d) lost battles, the draft and orders
4. Wachter's words "you'll get to your school in plenty of time" mean Franz would reach school:
   (a) very late (b) early enough (c) too early (d) never
5. Franz had counted on the usual commotion to:
   (a) copy homework (b) get to his desk without being seen (c) talk to friends (d) avoid the test
6. M. Hamel's clothes that day were usually worn on:
   (a) Sundays only (b) his birthday (c) festivals (d) inspection and prize days
7. "Thumbed at the edges" means:
   (a) worn from much use (b) newly bought (c) torn by the soldiers (d) folded neatly
8. The order to teach only German came from:
   (a) Paris (b) Alsace (c) Berlin (d) Lorraine
9. "What a thunderclap these words were to me!" shows the news was:
   (a) loud and clear (b) expected (c) pleasant (d) startling and unexpected
10. Franz's books now seemed like:
    (a) enemies (b) old friends (c) heavy loads (d) prizes

11. The elders had come to the class mainly to:
(a) learn German (b) inspect the school (c) thank the master and honour their lost country (d) take their children home

12. M. Hamel blamed the parents because they:
(a) sent children to work on farms and mills (b) moved to Germany (c) did not pay fees (d) supported the Prussians

13. M. Hamel admitted he had sent pupils to:
(a) the market (b) water his flowers (c) the church (d) the town hall

14. According to M. Hamel, French is the most beautiful language and also the:
(a) oldest and richest (b) easiest (c) clearest and most logical (d) most musical

15. "The key to their prison" refers to:
(a) money (b) their land (c) their weapons (d) their language

16. The copies "France, Alsace" looked like:
(a) little flags (b) flowers (c) birds (d) stars

17. The remark about the pigeons is an example of:
(a) irony (b) simile (c) alliteration (d) rhyme

18. What made Franz and his classmates want to "laugh and cry"?
(a) the beetles (b) the babies' chanting (c) the pigeons (d) old Hauser spelling with a trembling voice

19. "I never saw him look so tall" shows M. Hamel's:
(a) height (b) dignity and courage (c) anger (d) weakness

20. The story is set after the:
(a) First World War (b) French Revolution (c) Franco-Prussian War (d) Second World War

1 (c) · 2 (a) · 3 (d) · 4 (b) · 5 (b) · 6 (d) · 7 (a) · 8 (c) · 9 (d) · 10 (b) · 11 (c) · 12 (a) · 13 (b) · 14 (c) · 15 (d) · 16 (a) · 17 (a) · 18 (d) · 19 (b) · 20 (c)

Answers

Extract sets. Set 1: (i) his beautiful green coat, frilled shirt and embroidered black silk cap (ii) he must leave the school and country he served for forty years (iii) sorry (iv) to thank the master for forty years of service / to honour the country that was theirs no more / they regretted not going to school more. Set 2: (i) the grammar seemed so easy; he understood everything (ii) patience (iii) he wanted to give them all he knew before going away (iv) (b). Set 3: (i) the power of the conquerors and the end of the lesson and of French in the school (ii) grief at leaving; emotion overcame him (iii) his dignity, courage and patriotism made him seem great (iv) the church bell rung at noon for prayer.

A. 1. participles 2. bulletin-board 3. Wachter 4. Berlin 5. forty 6. primer 7. Alsace 8. Vive La France!

B. 1. F (he resisted) 2. F 3. T 4. F 5. T 6. T 7. F (they had to leave the next day) 8. F (he choked)

C. 1. Alsace and Lorraine 2. the warm, bright day, chirping birds, the soldiers drilling 3. the usual noise and bustle 4. old Hauser, the former mayor (former postmaster) 5. the Saar 6. to earn a little more money from farms and mills 7. cooed very low 8. the church clock striking twelve, the Angelus, the Prussian trumpets

D. 1. he had read the order; there would be no real lessons worth hurrying for 2. it was the last French lesson; everyone was solemn 3. most beautiful, clearest, most logical; guard it; key to the prison 4. sent pupils to water his flowers; gave holidays to go fishing 5. regret at not studying; thanks for 40 years; respect for lost country 6. glasses on, primer in both hands, spelling with the babies, voice trembling with emotion 7. gazed at everything to fix it in his mind; heard every lesson; at noon wrote "Vive La France!" 8. see '1.2 Themes, title and characters'

E. 1. before: dull school, heavy books, cranky teacher, birds' eggs and sliding; after: books old friends, forgot the ruler, listened carefully, understood easily 2. Franz (put off learning), parents (farms, mills, money), M. Hamel (flowers, fishing holidays), all Alsace ("puts off learning till tomorrow") 3. strict yet devoted, forty years' service, dignified,

patient, self-critical, patriotic 4. diary: date, shock of the announcement, regret, the elders, Hauser's voice, "Vive La France!", resolve to treasure French

F. 1. Franz takes school for granted and realises its value when French is banned; Saheb longs for school but poverty denies it; one learns too late, the other never can 2. M. Hamel's dignity and self-blame change careless Franz into an attentive pupil; Edla's trust and kindness reform the thieving peddler; patience and compassion, not punishment, change people

G. 1. the elders felt the loss most deeply, regretted their own neglect and came to honour the teacher and their country; parents were at work 2. own view: the conquerors imposed German, but Alsace's own neglect made the loss more painful; both share blame 3. e.g. a grandparent's language, a forest cut down, freedom during a lockdown

Last-night summary

- Daudet; set in 1871 after the Franco-Prussian War; Alsace and Lorraine pass to Prussia; narrator Franz.
- Franz is late, unprepared on participles; the school is silent, M. Hamel kind and in his best clothes, elders on back benches.
- "The order has come from Berlin to teach only German": a thunderclap; books become old friends; regret all round.
- Everyone put off learning (Franz, parents, elders, M. Hamel); French is "the key to their prison".
- Copies "France, Alsace" like flags; "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?"; Hauser's trembling voice.
- Noon: clock, Angelus, Prussian trumpets; M. Hamel "so tall", writes "Vive La France!"; "School is dismissed".
- Themes: language and identity, linguistic oppression, procrastination and regret, patriotism, teacher and pupil.