



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2025-26)
CLASS – IX
The Man Who Knew Too Much
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Summary

The Man Who Knew Too Much is about **Private Quelch**, nicknamed *Professor* because of his serious looks, spectacles, and habit of showing off his knowledge. He often interrupted instructors to display facts he had memorised from manuals. Though hardworking and ambitious, he irritated both fellow trainees and superiors with his arrogance. His habit of correcting even Corporal Turnbull, a tough and respected officer, led to his humiliation. Instead of being rewarded with promotion, he was permanently assigned to cookhouse duties. The story highlights the difference between real wisdom and mere show-off knowledge.

Extract-based Questions

"The muzzle velocity or speed at which the bullet leaves the rifle," he told us, "is well over two thousand feet per second."

A voice interrupted. "Two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second." It was the Professor.

Questions

- a) Who is "he" in the passage?
- b) What does "muzzle velocity" mean?
- c) Why did the Professor interrupt?

Answers

- a) "He" is the Sergeant taking the musketry class.
- b) Muzzle velocity means the speed at which a bullet leaves the rifle.
- c) The Professor interrupted to show off his superior knowledge.

"And by the way, Corporal. Shouldn't you have started off with the five characteristics of the grenade? Our instructor at the other camp always used to, you know."

Questions

- a) Who is speaking in this extract?
- b) What was the Corporal's reaction to this interruption?
- c) What does this reveal about the speaker's nature?

Answers

- a) Private Quelch (the Professor) is speaking.
 - b) The Corporal got annoyed and asked him to deliver the lecture himself.
 - c) It shows the Professor's arrogance and habit of correcting others publicly.
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"Really, I must protest against this abominably unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes."

Questions

- a) Who is speaking here and where?
- b) What duty was he assigned that led him here?
- c) What quality of his character is shown?

Answers

- a) Private Quelch is speaking in the cookhouse.
 - b) He was punished with permanent cookhouse duties.
 - c) His habit of lecturing and correcting others is shown.
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"He borrowed training manuals and stayed up late at nights reading them. He badgered the instructors with questions. He drilled with enthusiasm, and on route marches he was not only miraculously tireless but infuriated us all with his horrible heartiness."

Questions

- a) What was Private Quelch's ambition?
- b) How did he try to achieve it?
- c) Why did his fellows feel irritated with him?

Answers

- a) He wanted to rise in rank and get a commission.
 - b) He studied manuals, questioned instructors, and worked hard in drills.
 - c) His endless energy and cheerful attitude during tiring marches annoyed his fellows.
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"Without even a glance upward the Professor announced, 'That, of course, is a North American Harvard Trainer. It can be unmistakably identified by the harsh engine note, due to the high tip speed of the airscrew.'"

Questions

- a) What was flying overhead?
- b) How did the Professor identify it?
- c) What was the reaction of his fellow soldiers?

Answers

- a) An airplane was flying overhead.
 - b) He identified it by its engine sound without even looking up.
 - c) His fellows were irritated and helpless, as he always showed off.
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The Sergeant asked, "You had any training before ?" The Professor answered with a phrase that was to become familiar to all of us. "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading."

Questions

- (a) What prompted the Sergeant to ask this question?
- (b) What was the Sergeant's purpose in putting the Professor through so many questions?
- (c) Give the meaning of 'intelligent reading'.

Answers:

- (a) The Sergeant asked the question because the Professor had already replied to all others with accuracy.
 - (b) The Sergeant put so many questions to belittle the Professor.
 - (c) It means 'complete understanding of what is read'.
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"Here," he said at last, "you give this lecture." As if afraid to say any more, he tossed the grenade to the Professor. Quite unabashed, Private Quelch climbed to his feet and with the aid of a man coming into his birth-right gave us an unexceptionable lecture on the grenade."

Questions

- a) Who is speaking here?
- b) Why did he hand over the lecture to the Professor?
- c) How did the Professor react?

Answers

- a) Corporal Turnbull is speaking.
 - b) He was angry because the Professor interrupted and corrected him.
 - c) The Professor was unashamed and delivered a perfect lecture on grenades.
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'....remember the first lesson we had in musketry. We stood in an attentive circle while a Sergeant, a man as dark and sun-dried as raisins, wearing North-West Frontier ribbons, described the mechanism of a service rifle.

Questions

- (a) What is the meaning of musketry?
- (b) Describe the Sergeant.

(c) What does the phrase 'North-West Frontier Ribbons' convey about the person mentioned? (CBSE 2014)

Answers:

- (a) It means the art of using musket, a type of gun.*
- (b) The Sergeant was a dark-complexioned, experienced soldier.*
- (c) It means that the Sergeant had won an honour fighting on the North-West Frontier.*

".....for permanent cookhouse duties, I've decided that Private Quelch is just the man for the job.' Of course, it was a joke for days afterwards; a joke and joy to all of us."

Questions

- a) Who made this announcement?
- b) Why was Private Quelch chosen for cookhouse duties?
- c) How did the other trainees react?

Answers

- a) Corporal Turnbull made this announcement.
- b) Quelch was punished for his arrogance and constant interruptions.
- c) The other trainees felt it was a joke and enjoyed his humiliation.

"Through the open door, we could see the three cooks standing against the wall as if at bay; and from within came the monotonous beat of a familiar voice. 'Really, I must protest against this abominably unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes ...'"

Questions

- a) Who was speaking in the cookhouse?
- b) What was he complaining about?
- c) What does this show about his personality?

Answers

- a) Private Quelch (the Professor) was speaking.
- b) He was criticising the cooks' way of peeling potatoes.
- c) It shows that he never stopped showing off, even after punishment.

"When, after a hard morning's work cleaning out our hut, we listened in silence to the Orderly Officer's praise, the Professor would break out with a ringing, dutifully beaming, "Thank you, sir!" And how superior, how condescending he was. It was always, "Let me show you, fellow," or "No, you'll ruin your rifle, that way, old man."

Questions

- (a) Give the meaning of the word 'condescending'.
- (b) Why did Private Quelch behave in this manner with his superiors?
- (c) Which expression tells us that Private Quelch was always cheerful?

Answers:

- (a) The word 'condescending' means behaving in a polite manner but showing as if one were obliging somebody.
 - (b) Private Quelch behaved in an over-confident manner because he wanted to show off his knowledge.
 - (c) The phrase is 'break out with a ringing, dutifully beaming'.
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"What could a gang of louts like us do with a man like that ?

Questions

- (a) Who utters these sentiments ?
- (b) Which 'gang of louts' is referred to here ?
- (c) What do you mean by 'louts' ?

Answers :

- (a) The narrator, one of the trainees, utters these sentiments.
 - (b) 'The gang of louts' refers to the group of trainees who are quite mischievous and aggressive.
 - (c) 'those who are uncouth, behave rudely and aggressively'. (In the story, the narrator and his fellow soldiers call themselves "louts" because, compared to Private Quelch's bookish knowledge and seriousness, they considered themselves rough, ordinary, and ill-mannered fellows, almost like idiots in contrast to him.)
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"Of course, it was a joke for days afterwards; a joke and joy to all of us.

Questions

- (a) What was the 'joke'?
- (b) Why were the trainees happy?
- (c) What do you mean by 'all of us' here?

Answers:

- (a) The 'joke' was the assigning of kitchen duties to Private Quelch quite unexpectedly.
 - (b) The trainees were happy because Private Quelch would no longer be with them to browbeat them with his superior knowledge.
 - (c) 'all trainees including the narrator'.
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"What about a song, chaps ?" is not greeted politely at the end of thirty miles.

Questions

- (a) Who would suggest singing a song ?

- (b) Why was this suggestion resented by his fellow trainees ?
- (c) What do you mean by 'chaps' ?

Answers :

- (a) Private Quelch would suggest singing a song.
- (b) The suggestion was resented because all the trainees, except perhaps Quelch, were dead tired at the end of a long thirty-mile route march.
- (c) 'boys'.

"We tried to hit back at him with clumsy sarcasms and practical jokes."

Questions

- (a) Who is 'him' referred to here ?
- (b) Why was he 'attacked' ?
- (c) Give the meaning of 'sarcasms'.

Answers :

- (a) 'Him' is here referred to Private Quelch.
- (b) He was 'attacked' for browbeating his fellow trainees with his vast knowledge.
- (c) 'remarks that are intended to hurt someone'.

Short Answer Questions

1. Why was Private Quelch nicknamed the Professor?

Answer:

He was nicknamed the Professor because of his lanky appearance, horn-rimmed spectacles, frowning face, and his habit of constantly displaying his superior knowledge like a teacher.

2. What were Private Quelch's ambitions in the army?

Answer:

He wanted to rise quickly in rank. He aimed to earn a stripe first and later get a commission as an officer by working hard and showing off his intelligence.

3. How did the other trainees feel about the Professor?

Answer:

At first, they respected him, but soon they grew irritated and feared his approach because he always lectured, corrected them publicly, and outshone them in every situation.

4. Why did Corporal Turnbull assign him cookhouse duties?

Answer:

Corporal Turnbull was angered when Private Quelch interrupted his grenade lecture and corrected him. As punishment, he humiliated Quelch by assigning him permanent cookhouse duties.

5. What did Private Quelch mean by “intelligent reading”?

Answer:

By “intelligent reading,” Private Quelch meant that he gained his knowledge not through prior training, but by carefully reading manuals and books. He believed studying smartly could make anyone knowledgeable and successful.

6. How did Private Quelch behave during route marches?

Answer:

During route marches, he was energetic and tireless, unlike the others who felt exhausted. He even irritated his fellow soldiers by cheerfully suggesting songs after long walks, showing off his stamina and enthusiasm.

7. How did the other trainees feel about the Professor’s behaviour and constant lecturing?

Answer:

At first, his fellows respected his knowledge, but soon they began to dislike him. His constant lecturing and corrections made them feel small, and they even tried jokes and sarcasm to silence him.

8. How did Corporal Turnbull react when the Professor interrupted him during the grenade lecture?

Answer:

When the Professor interrupted and corrected Corporal Turnbull during the grenade lecture, Turnbull grew annoyed but stayed calm. He asked the Professor to give the lecture himself and later punished him by assigning permanent cookhouse duties, humiliating him before all.

9. How did the Professor’s habit of correcting others affect his popularity?

Answer:

His habit of interrupting instructors and correcting fellow trainees made him unpopular. Instead of winning admiration, he earned irritation, because people dislike being publicly shown as less knowledgeable.

10. How did the narrator and his friend Trower react when they saw him in the cookhouse?

Answer:

They fled in fear and amusement. Even while peeling potatoes, the Professor was lecturing about scientific and hygienic methods, proving he could never stop showing off his knowledge.

11. Do you think Private Quelch learned a lesson from his punishment? Why/why not?

Answer:

It seems he did not learn his lesson. Even in the cookhouse, he continued lecturing the cooks about unscientific methods, showing he had not changed his habit of boasting and correcting others.

12. Aircraft recognition was a matter of pride for the narrator and his friends. How did the Professor humiliate them?

Answer:

One day the trainee fellows of the Professor, among whom was the narrator, heard the sound of an aircraft. The aircraft was not visible in the sun. The Professor at once said on hearing the drone of the plane that it was a North American Harvard Trainer, while no one could recognize the plane. It was something humiliating for the narrator and his friends.

13. Why was everybody happy when Private Quelch was shifted to the cookhouse?

Answer:

When Private Quelch was shifted to the cookhouse, everybody was happy. He had become a nuisance for them by finding faults with one and all in the public. Everyone felt that it was a good riddance.

Value- Added Questions

Q. 1 Private Quelch was hardworking and intelligent, yet he failed to win respect. Why? What does this teach us?

OR

Q. Private Quelch was intelligent and hardworking, yet he failed to achieve success. What lesson does his story teach us?

OR

Q. Private Quelch's behaviour often irritated his companions. What does the story teach us about the importance of teamwork and humility?

Answer :

Private Quelch, or the Professor, was intelligent, disciplined, and ambitious. He studied hard, borrowed manuals, and even memorised technical facts about rifles, grenades, and airplanes. However, his constant need to display his knowledge made him unpopular. He interrupted instructors, corrected seniors publicly, and outshone fellow trainees in an irritating way. His arrogance cost him dearly when Corporal Turnbull, annoyed by his interference, punished him with permanent cookhouse duties. His story teaches us that knowledge without humility becomes dangerous. True wisdom lies in using knowledge wisely, not in showing off. People admire modesty more than arrogance. Real success requires not only intelligence but also modesty, respect, and good social behaviour. One must know when to speak and when to remain silent.

The story shows that true wisdom is more about how we behave and approach others than just knowing facts.

Q. 2 “Too much knowledge is also a bane’. Comment on the statement with reference to Private Quelch’s character.

Answer:

Knowledge is always valuable, but showing it off carelessly can cause problems. Private Quelch is very intelligent and knows a lot, but he often flaunts his knowledge in front of others. He corrects his seniors publicly, which annoys them. For example, he interrupts the Sergeant while explaining bullet speed and criticizes Corporal Turnbull’s lecture. His habit of proving himself in public harms his own career. Instead of helping him, his tactless behaviour makes him unpopular and eventually leads to him being punished with permanent cookhouse duties, showing that knowledge must be paired with humility and tact.

Q. 3 Did Private Quelch’s day to day practices take him closer towards his goal? How can you make out?

No, Private Quelch’s day-to-day practices did not take him closer to his goal of getting a commission in the army. Although he was very knowledgeable and had the potential to succeed, his habit of showing off his knowledge constantly annoyed both his seniors and fellow trainees. He corrected his superiors in public, interrupted lectures, and tried to prove himself at every opportunity. Instead of earning respect, he created resentment and became the target of jokes and sarcasm. His careless and tactless behaviour harmed his reputation and eventually led to him being punished with permanent cookhouse duties. This shows that talent and knowledge alone are not enough; discipline and tact are equally important to achieve one’s goals.

Q. 4 Self-promotion always brings resentment from others. Keeping the above statement in mind, comment on the character of Private Quelch.

Answer:

Private Quelch tries hard to impress everyone with his knowledge because he wants a commission in the army. But his constant self-promotion backfires. He corrects his seniors in front of others and interrupts lectures to show off. His fellow trainees start resenting him and even make fun of him.

Rather than gaining respect, his actions create dislike. Ultimately, his attempts at self-promotion cost him dearly, as he is punished by being sent to permanent cookhouse duties. This shows that too much self-promotion can harm a person’s reputation and opportunities, no matter how talented they are.

Q. 5 What is one positive quality of Private Quelch that can be appreciated?

Answer:

One quality we can like about Private Quelch is his **ambition and determination**. He is hardworking, knowledgeable, and very serious about achieving his goal of getting a commission in the army. Despite being unpopular and often punished, he continues to strive for success and tries to make the most of his abilities. His dedication and passion for learning show that he is disciplined and intelligent. Even though his tactless behaviour creates problems, his strong desire to improve himself and achieve his aim is a quality worth appreciating.

Q. 6 Did Private Quelch deserve his punishment? Justify your answer in 100-120 words.

Answer:

Yes, Private Quelch definitely deserved his punishment. Although he was intelligent and hardworking, his behavior was completely wrong. Quelch constantly interrupted his instructors and corrected them publicly, which was very disrespectful. He looked down on his fellow soldiers and made them feel uncomfortable. His teammates “lived in terror of his approach” because of his showing-off attitude. His worst mistake was questioning Corporal Turnbull's teaching methods. In the army, respecting officers and following hierarchy is essential. Quelch wanted quick promotion, but his arrogant behavior destroyed his chances.

The cookhouse punishment was well-deserved, but sadly, Quelch learned nothing from it. Even there, he continued lecturing the cooks about their “unscientific methods” of peeling potatoes. This proves that he was too proud and stubborn to change. His punishment was justified because such behavior needed to be stopped, even though he refused to learn from his mistakes.

“Is the habit of correcting others considered a positive trait? Discuss with examples from Private Quelch.”

Answer:

Correcting others can be a good quality, but it depends on how and when it is done. If someone corrects others politely and at the right time, it shows knowledge, helpfulness, and a willingness to guide others, which can be appreciated. However, if someone corrects others rudely, publicly, or all the time, it can annoy people and harm relationships, just like Private Quelch. Therefore, the intention and manner matter. Correcting others tactfully can be a strength, but doing it carelessly or to show off can easily become a weakness.

In the case of Private Quelch, he constantly corrected his seniors and fellow trainees in public to show off his knowledge. This behaviour annoyed everyone around him, created resentment, and damaged his reputation.

Instead of helping him achieve his goal of getting a commission in the army, it backfired and led to his punishment with permanent cookhouse duties. This shows that while correcting others can be positive, doing it without tact and humility can be fatal to one's reputation and career.