

Science Fiction

Class 12 English Supplementary

Kaleidoscope Chapter 19, Isaac Asimov

wonder + scientific law

Core idea

Asimov explains science fiction as a modern literature of wonder.

It satisfies old human desires, but works through science instead of magic.

Exam cue

Keep two contrasts ready: myth versus science, and content genre versus background genre.

Isaac Asimov

Writer profile

Asimov was a major science fiction writer and science populariser.

His essay explains the genre from inside, as a working writer and reader.

Tone

The tone is explanatory, witty and analytical. He uses many examples to make the genre clear.

Prescientific Universe

Old world-view

Before modern science, people explained events through gods, demons, priests and magicians.

The universe seemed personal, alive and changeable by command or prayer.

Why it matters

This old world gave stories freedom to imagine miracles and impossible events.

Myths and Legends

Function

Myths and legends gave people strange*
journeys, powerful beings and
enchanted objects. *

'They answered curiosity before people
had a scientific language for the
universe.

Answer line

Their method is magic, but their
emotional pull is close to science
fiction.

Longing for Wonder

Human desire

People wanted flight, speed,
distance-vision, strange creatures and
hidden powers.

— Flying carpets and crystal balls are
old dream-forms of later inventions.

Revision point

— Do not write that myth and science
fiction are identical. Write that both
satisfy wonder.

Hybrid Creatures

Examples

Asimov names beings like Centaur, Satyr, Sphinx, Harpy, Gryphon and Gorgon.

Such creatures show the imagination of life beyond ordinary experience.

Use in answer

Use these examples when asked how prescientific stories created strangeness.

Science Changes the Rules

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Modern shift

Science made the universe less magical
but more law-governed and knowable.

Science fiction keeps wonder, but
places it inside natural law and
experiment.

Key phrase

The wonder survives. The explanation
changes from miracle to scientific
possibility.

Validity of Science Fiction

Main basis

Science fiction gains validity when its changes follow known science or careful extrapolation.

A story may be imaginary, but it should not break its own scientific frame.

Exam cue

Use laws of nature, consistency and extrapolation as the three terms.

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Content and Background

Important distinction

Asimov says science fiction is not
*
only content. It can also be the
background.

A familiar plot becomes science
fiction when the world behind it is
scientifically changed.

Answer line

This is why many ordinary genres can
be shifted into science fiction.

Sports Story Shift

Example

A sports story can become science fiction through zero gravity, a sphere and a gas gun.

The contest remains sport, but the playing conditions belong to a different universe.

Use

This example *proves the background theory clearly and quickly.

*

Western Story Shift.

Example

The fishboy and dolphin example changes the Western pattern into an undersea setting.

Herding remains central, but horses and cattle become dolphins and fish.

Exam cue

Explain the old pattern first, then show the changed scientific environment.

Jungle Story Shift

Example

A jungle adventure can move to another planet with new dangers and strange life.

The adventure content remains, but the background makes it science fiction.

Do not miss

Asimov is showing flexibility. Science fiction can absorb other story types.

Science Fiction Mystery

Problem

John W. Campbell doubted whether a science fiction mystery could be fair.

The writer might invent a device or rule at the end and cheat the reader.

Asimov's answer

The form is difficult, not impossible.

Fairness depends on rules given in advance.

Boundary Conditions

Meaning

Boundary conditions are the limits of the imagined world: what can happen and what cannot.

The reader must know these limits before solving the mystery.

Answer line

A fair science fiction mystery explains the world before using it for detection.

Clues and Red Herrings

Fair play

Asimov says the investigator and reader should have the important clues.

Red herrings are allowed, but hidden scientific rules are not allowed.

Exam cue

Use clue-sharing and no sudden private invention in the same answer.

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Pitfalls for Writers

Avoid these

A writer must avoid wrong science,
careless extrapolation and convenient
late devices.

The imagined society must feel
consistent, not patched together for
one twist.

Better habit

Introduce the special rule early, then
let the solution grow from it.

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Language Work

Terms to know

Revise prescientific, extrapolation, boundary conditions, genre, background and validity.

These words help in short-answer and vocabulary tasks.

Grammar cue

The chapter also asks students to notice prefixes, compounds and ^{*}genre-related words.

Important Questions

Common prompts

What parallel does Asimov draw between myth and science fiction?

Why does he say science fiction may be background rather than content?

Long answer prompt

Can a science fiction mystery be fair?

Use Campbell, boundary conditions and clues.

Answer Frame

Four-step method

Start with Asimov's claim. Add one example. Explain the contrast. End with the exam phrase.

This keeps answers focused and prevents story-summary writing.

Best examples

Use flying carpet, sports in zero gravity and fair mystery rules as your quick evidence set.

Common Mistakes

Avoid

Do not say science fiction is only about robots, spaceships or future machines.

Do not say myth is foolish. Asimov respects its role in satisfying wonder.

Better wording

Science fiction is a disciplined form of wonder, shaped by science and consistency.

Quick Recall

Memory chain

Prescientific world, mythic wonder,
science changes rules, background
genre, fair mystery.

Remember this chain before writing any
long answer.

Last line

Science fiction keeps the old dream of
wonder, but makes it answerable to
reason.

One Page Revision

Final checklist

Writer: Isaac Asimov. Main theme:
science fiction as wonder under
scientific law.

Core contrast: magic explanation
versus scientific extrapolation.

Most important concept: background can
turn any genre into science fiction.

Final exam tip

In every answer, name the example and
explain what changes because of
science.