

# The Last Lesson

Class 12 - Flamingo - Prose - Chapter 1



## Author & Setting

By - Alphonse Daudet (French novelist, 1840 - 1897). Known for short stories rooted in everyday French life.

Setting : village school in ~~Paris~~ Alsace, a French district seized by Prussia after the Franco-Prussian War (1870-71). New rulers order German to replace French in all schools.

CRUX : the loss of one's language is the loss of one's identity.

## Historical Backdrop

Treaty of Frankfurt (1871) hands Alsace & Lorraine to Prussia / Germany. Local schools must teach German only - French Prussia banned. Daudet captures the last day of French class.

Tone : nostalgic, regretful, patriotic.

Narrator : Franz (a schoolboy) - 1st person.

Genre : short story, realistic fiction.

## Plot Summary

### Opening

Franz leaves home late, fearing M. Hamel's scolding - he has not learnt the rules of participles. He passes the ~~market~~ town hall ; a crowd reads a fresh notice on the board.

### Rising Action

Reaching school, Franz finds an unnatural stillness. M. Hamel wears his Sunday best - green coat, frilled\* shirt, embroidered cap. . Old villagers sit at the back benches\*.

### Climax

M. Hamel announces : an order from Berlin stops French in Alsace & Lorraine. Today is their LAST French lesson. Franz is stunned ; regret floods his small heart.

### Falling Action & Ending

M. Hamel praises French as the clearest, most logical tongue ; urges them to guard it among themselves. The class hangs on every word. Church clock strikes 12 ; he writes 'Vive La France!' on the board ( continued ... ).

## Ending & Character : Franz

### Closing Scene

M. Hamel writes 'Vive La France?' in chalk, then dismisses the class with a silent wave of his hand - too choked to speak. End of an era ; rest is left to the reader's heart.

### Franz - Character Sketch

- Young schoolboy of Alsace ; the narrator of the story (1st person POV).
- Lazy, restless, easily distracted - prefers birds' eggs & nature to grammar lessons.
- Fearful of his teacher ; ~~hate~~ dreads scolding but never truly disrespectful.
- Undergoes deep emotional change in ONE morning - matures more in this lesson than in years of schooling combined.
- Realises his books are 'old friends' he can't give up ; feels guilty for wasting time.
- Pities M. Hamel ; sees him with new respect.

Franz becomes the lens through which we feel collective regret over a lost language.

"What a thunderclap these words were to me!"

Vive La  
France?

## M. Hamel - Character Sketch

- French teacher in the village school of Alsace for 40 long years.
- Strict in manner ; carries an iron ruler - yet deeply devoted to his pupils.
- On the LAST day, wears his Sunday best : green coat, frilled shirt, embroidered black silk cap - worn only on inspection days.
- A patriot - treats French as the most beautiful, clearest, most logical language in the world.
- Honest & self-critical - blames himself, parents, all of Alsace for neglecting French.
- Emotional - speech grows soft & shaken ; voice breaks ; cannot finish his last words.
- Dignified - writes 'Vive La France!' on the board ; dismisses the class in silence.

**SYMBOLISM** : M. Hamel stands for every teacher who carries the soul of a culture forward across generations.

"...as long as they hold fast to their language, it is as if they had the key to their prison."

M. Hamel

## The Village Folk

(minor characters - collective conscience)\*

### Old Hauser

Sits on the back bench with an old primer open on his lap. Spells each letter aloud with the children ; voice trembling with tears. Symbolises ~~regret~~ repentance of a whole generation that took French for granted.

### The Blacksmith Wachter

Earlier mocks Franz for hurrying to school -  
'... you've plenty of time !' ; irony, since today there is no time left for French at all.

### Former Mayor & Postmaster

Both seated quietly at the back, alongside the old villagers - attending the lesson as a silent tribute & apology to M. Hamel and to their motherland.

Their presence shows that LANGUAGE  
is owned <sup>\*</sup> by the whole community,  
not by schoolchildren alone.

Daudet uses them as the conscience of Alsace.

## Major Themes

### 1. LINGUISTIC IDENTITY

Language is the carrier of culture, memory & national selfhood. To lose your tongue is to lose a part of WHO you are.

### 2. PATRIOTISM & PROTEST

Villagers' silent attendance & M. Hamel's chalked 'Vive La France!' are quiet acts of defiance against Prussian rule.

### 3. REGRET & PROCRASTINATION

Franz, M. Hamel & the elders all say 'plenty of time tomorrow'. Story warns against postponing what is precious.

### 4. LAST-DAY URGENCY

Knowing it is the FINAL lesson sharpens attention - a single morning of full focus outweighs many years of careless ones.

### 5. Change & Discipline

Change without notice is brutal - learning demands daily discipline, not crisis-driven zeal at the eleventh hour.

## Literary Devices & Quotations

### Literary Devices

- 1st person narration - Franz's <sup>\*</sup> voice creates intimacy & a child-eye lens on tragedy.
- Symbolism - Sunday clothes, ruler, the chalked slogan, the church bells, pigeons.
- Irony - Wachter's 'plenty of time' ; Franz longs to learn only when learning has stopped.
- Imagery - silent classroom, embroidered cap, pale face of M. Hamel, white head of Hauser.
- Metaphor - 'the key to their prison' for language as liberation.
- Pathos - M. Hamel's broken voice, his speechless wave at the end - moves the reader.



### Key Quotations

"What a thunderclap these words were to me!"

"It will be the last German lesson they give you."

"My friends, I - I - but something choked him."

"Hold fast to your language - it is the key"

"to your prison." (paraphrased - M. Hamel)"

## Exam Pattern - CBSE Prompts

### 1-mark (MCQ / VSA)

- Q. Who is the narrator of The Last Lesson ?
- Q. Which language replaces French in Alsace ?
- Q. Name M. Hamel's Sunday-best garments.
- Q. What does Hauser bring to the last lesson ?
- Q. Where was the order to stop French issued from ?

### 3-marks (Short Answer - 30-50 wds)

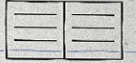
- Why does Franz say the chapter on participles felt 'easy' that morning ?
- How is the unusual stillness of the classroom described ? Why is it unusual ?
- What does M. Hamel's outfit on the last day signify ?
- Why are the village elders present in the classroom that morning ?

### 5-marks (Long Answer - 100-120 wds)

- Discuss The Last Lesson as a study of linguistic identity & cultural loss.
- Sketch the character of M. Hamel - what qualities make him a memorable teacher ?
- Comment on the title - why 'The Last Lesson' & not 'A Lesson Lost' ?

## Quick Revision Page

### In 5 seconds



- Author : Alphonse Daudet (France).
- Setting : Alsace school, post 1870-71 war.
- Narrator : Franz (boy) - 1st person.
- Teacher : M. Hamel - 40 years in Alsace.
- Conflict : French banned ; German imposed.
- Climax : the LAST French lesson is today.
- End line : chalked 'Vive La France!'

### Themes in one line

1. Language = identity.
2. Silent presence = patriotism.
3. Procrastination = regret.
4. Last day = sharpest attention.
5. Loss = teacher's deepest lesson.

#### MASTER LINE

"...hold fast to your language ; it is  
the key to your prison."

- M. Hamel

Remember : examiner wants **STORY + THEME**  
+ a relevant **QUOTE** - tie all three together.