



# Collegedunia NCERT Notes

*The Ultimate NCERT Revision Guide for Class 12 English (Core),  
Flamingo*

*2026-27 syllabus, New NCERT*

## **class 12 english notes chapter 4 Flamingo Prose: The Rattrap**

by Selma Lagerlöf (Swedish Nobel Laureate)

**Also see for this chapter: [NCERT Solutions](#)**

## Contents

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### 1 Introduction and Author Background

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The Rattrap is the fourth prose piece in the Class 12 English (Core) Flamingo textbook, written by the Swedish author Selma Lagerlöf. It is a short story that combines the gentle rhythm of a folktale with a sharp ethical question: can a small act of kindness change the way a person sees the world? The narrative is built around a wandering peddler who sells small rattraps of wire, the people he meets during a few cold December days near an iron mill in Sweden, and the slow turn his thinking takes after one of them treats him with unexpected dignity. The chapter is short on plot complications and rich in symbolism, which is why almost every board question on this story circles back to the central metaphor of the world as a rattrap.

#### 1.1 About the Author

Selma Lagerlöf (1858–1940) was a Swedish writer who became the first woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded in 1909. Born in Värmland, a region of forests, lakes and old iron-mill towns, she trained as a teacher before turning to

writing full-time. Her stories are known for blending Swedish folktales, Christian moral themes and realistic social observation. A universal idea runs through all her work: the essential goodness in a human being can be awakened through understanding and love. The Rattrap is set against the mines and forges of her own home region, which is why the Ramsjö ironworks, the forest, and the long Christmas darkness feel so vivid in the text.

### Swedish Folktale Tradition

Lagerlöf grew up listening to folktales told around firesides in Värmland. Many of her stories, including The Rattrap, are written “somewhat in the manner of a fairy tale”: a lone wanderer, a moral test, a hidden identity, a transformation. Knowing the genre helps in exam answers because the story is not meant to be read as photographic realism but as a moral parable wearing the clothes of everyday village life.

## 1.2 Genre, Setting and Tone

The Rattrap is a short story that uses three layered settings: the open road that the peddler walks, the crofter’s cottage where he is first treated with warmth, and the Ramsjö ironworks and manor house where his deception is exposed and then forgiven. The time of year is significant: it is late December, just before Christmas, in a country where the daylight is brief and the cold is harsh. The tone shifts smoothly from gentle irony at the start, when the peddler invents his “rattrap” theory of the world, to suspense in the forest scene, to quiet warmth at the close. The story is told by a third-person narrator who sees inside the peddler’s thoughts but reports the actions of others from the outside, which is how Lagerlöf keeps the surprise of the final letter intact.

### Why this chapter is in the syllabus

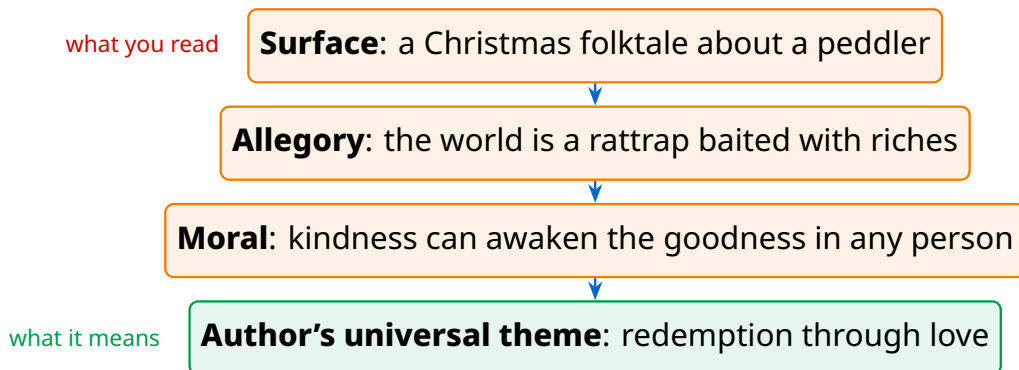
The Rattrap teaches three skills that the Class 12 board paper rewards: reading a literary metaphor (the rattrap), tracking character change across a story (the peddler), and writing about a moral theme without becoming preachy. A clean grasp of the chapter will help in long-answer (LA) questions worth 5 or 6 marks and in extract-based questions worth 4 marks.

## 1.3 What this Notes PDF Covers

These notes are organised so that you can revise the chapter end-to-end in roughly an hour. The next section walks through the plot in scene-by-scene order. After that we look at each major character in turn, then move into the central themes and the deep dive on the rattrap metaphor, followed by literary devices, key quotations, exam-pattern points and a quick revision checklist. Diagrams are used wherever a visual aid speeds up recall, especially for the journey arc of the peddler and the relationships between the four main characters.

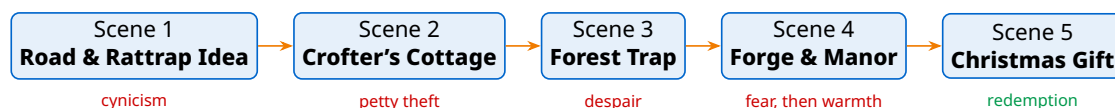
### How to use this PDF in the last week before exam

Read Section 2 (Plot Summary) on Day 1, Sections 3 and 4 (Characters and Themes) on Day 2, Sections 5 and 6 (Devices and Quotations) on Day 3, and end with the Quick Revision Summary the night before. Mark the box passages with sticky notes; those are the lines examiners reward in long answers.



## 2 Plot Summary: Scene by Scene

The story moves through five clear scenes. Treating them as separate units makes recall easier in the exam, especially when a question asks you to “narrate the events that led to the peddler’s change of heart.” The diagram below maps the five scenes onto the peddler’s emotional state, which moves from cynical detachment, to bitter triumph, to fear, to bewildered gratitude, and finally to quiet self-respect.



### 2.1 Scene 1 : The Peddler and his Theory of the World

The story opens with a poor man who walks from village to village selling small rattraps made of wire. He fashions them himself out of scrap material that he begs from country stores and farmhouses. His business is not profitable, so he supplements it with begging and the occasional bit of petty thievery. His clothes are in rags, his cheeks are sunken, and hunger gleams in his eyes. One day, lost in his usual gloomy thoughts while plodding along the road, he stumbles on an idea that pleases him: the whole world, with its lands and seas, its cities and villages, is nothing but a giant rattrap. It offers riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing, in the same way a rattrap offers cheese and pork. The moment a person is tempted to touch the bait, the trap closes in on him. The peddler has himself never been tempted, because the world has never been kind to him; this gives him a private, bitter pleasure in thinking of all the rich and respectable people who have already been caught in the snare.

## 2.2 Scene 2 : The Crofter's Cottage

One dark evening the peddler knocks at a small grey cottage by the roadside and asks for shelter. The owner, an old crofter without wife or child, welcomes him warmly, gives him porridge and tobacco, plays a card game called *mjolis* with him, and treats him as a friend rather than a beggar. The crofter tells his guest with simple pride that he once worked at the Ramsjö ironworks and that his cow now keeps him supplied with milk; the dairy paid him thirty kronor the previous month. To prove it, he takes down a leather pouch hanging from a nail in the window frame, picks out three crumpled ten-kronor notes, holds them up before the peddler, nods knowingly, and stuffs them back into the pouch. The next morning the two men say goodbye and go their separate ways. Half an hour later the peddler returns, smashes the window pane, takes the thirty kronor, hangs the empty pouch carefully back in its place, and walks off pleased with his "smartness."

## 2.3 Scene 3 : The Forest as a Real Rattrap

Knowing that he cannot stay on the public highway with stolen money, the peddler turns into the woods. The forest is large, dense and unfamiliar; the paths twist back and forth, and after hours of walking he realises that he has only been going round in circles. The December darkness descends quickly, and the trunks, branches, thickets and fallen logs close in on him "like an impenetrable prison." At this moment his own theory of the world catches up with him: he has let himself be fooled by the bait of thirty kronor and has been caught in a real rattrap of his own making. Exhausted and despairing, he sinks to the ground, convinced his last hour has come. Then he hears a regular thumping sound. He recognises it as the hammer-strokes of an iron mill, summons his strength, and staggers in its direction.

## 2.4 Scene 4 : The Forge, the Ironmaster and Edla

He reaches the Ramsjö ironworks, slips in through the gate during the night shift, and warms himself near the furnace. The blacksmiths take only a casual, indifferent look. The ironmaster, on one of his nightly inspection rounds, mistakes the bearded, ragged stranger for an old regimental comrade, Captain Nils Olof von Stahle. He invites him home. The peddler does not undecieve him, hoping for a few extra kronor, but refuses the invitation to the manor house, thinking of the stolen money in his pocket. The ironmaster then sends his daughter Edla Willmansson. Even after she suspects, looking at the man in the firelight, that he has either stolen something or escaped from jail, she insists in a friendly voice that he stay with them over Christmas Eve. Persuaded by her quiet sincerity, he accepts the fur coat she brings and goes home with her in the carriage.

## 2.5 Scene 5 : Christmas Eve and the Letter

On Christmas morning, in the clear light of the dining room, the ironmaster realises his mistake: the man before him is plainly not Captain von Stahle. He grows

angry and threatens to call the sheriff. The peddler then makes his only long speech: this whole world is nothing but a rattrap, and one day even Mr Ironmaster may want a big piece of pork and find himself caught. The ironmaster laughs at the boldness and orders him to leave, but Edla intervenes. She argues that they have invited a human being and promised him Christmas cheer; they cannot now chase him away. Her father gives in. The peddler eats Christmas dinner at the manor, sleeps deeply in a guest room, and the next morning is gone before they return from church. He has, however, left behind a small package addressed to Miss Willmansson. Inside is a rattrap containing the three crumpled ten-kronor notes and a letter, signed *Captain von Stahle*, asking her to return the money to the old crofter on the roadside. He explains that her kindness made him want to be the captain she imagined; he has been raised, even for a day, to the dignity of that title, and that has given him the power to clear himself.

### The arc of the plot in one sentence

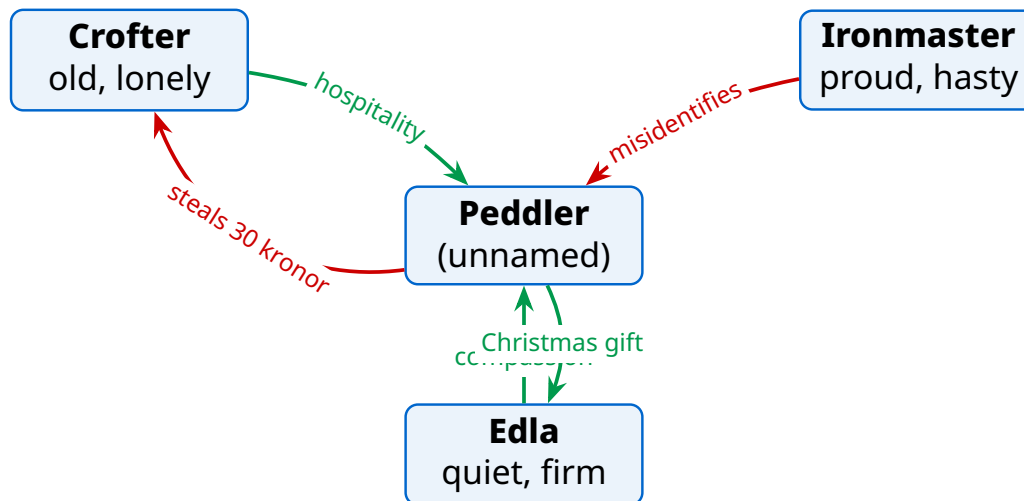
A cynical peddler who calls the world a rattrap falls into a real rattrap (the forest, the stolen money, the risk of jail), is pulled out by an unearned kindness, and answers that kindness by becoming, for one Christmas, the honourable man he was mistaken for.

### Five-scene memory trick

For long-answer questions, write your answer in five short paragraphs that match the five scenes: Road, Cottage, Forest, Forge, Christmas. That structure alone protects you from leaving out plot points, which is the most common reason students lose marks on a 5-mark plot question.

## 3 Character Sketches

The Rattrap has only four named characters, but each is carefully drawn to play a part in the moral journey. The peddler is the central consciousness; the crofter sets up the moral trap; the ironmaster represents the world's casual harshness; Edla represents redemptive kindness. The diagram below shows how the four characters connect across the story.



### 3.1 The Peddler : A Morally Complex Vagabond

The peddler has no name. He is a thin, ragged man with sunken cheeks and hungry eyes, who walks the Swedish countryside selling small rattraps of wire. Three traits matter for the board paper. First, he is not a flat villain; he is a thinking man who has been worn down by poverty and loneliness, which is why he invents the rattrap idea in the first place. Second, he is morally weak rather than wicked: he steals from the crofter when an easy chance appears, but he is also troubled enough by the deed to turn off the highway and lose himself in the forest. Third, he is capable of change: a single act of unconditional acceptance from Edla is enough to awaken the goodness Lagerlöf believes is essential to every human being. By the end he signs himself *Captain von Stahle*, not to deceive but to honour the dignity Edla offered him.

#### Common Misreading

A common mistake is to write that the peddler is “simply a thief” or “a bad man who finally became good.” Both readings flatten the character. The peddler is morally complex from the first page: even his rattrap theory contains a genuine moral observation about greed. He is a man bent low by poverty, not a villain, and Lagerlöf expects the reader’s sympathy for him from the beginning.

### 3.2 The Crofter : Loneliness Turned to Generosity

The crofter is an old man who lives alone in a small grey cottage by the roadside. He once worked at the Ramsjö ironworks and now lives on the milk from his cow, which earns him thirty kronor a month from the local creamery. He is unusual because the standard reaction to a vagabond at the door is suspicion, but he is so starved of company that he welcomes the peddler “like a friend.” His generosity is shown in three quick acts: porridge from the fire, tobacco carved from his roll, and a card game played until bedtime. Showing the peddler the three ten-kronor notes is not vanity; it is an old man’s pride at proving that he is no longer a charity

case. His openness sets the moral trap that the peddler walks straight into.

#### Function in the story

The crofter exists in the story not as a fully developed character but as a moral mirror. His unguarded kindness shows what a generous heart looks like before it is tested; the peddler's reaction (theft) measures how far his cynicism has hardened him.

### 3.3 The Ironmaster : Pride that Mistakes the Surface

The ironmaster owns the Ramsjö mill and is described as a "very prominent" man whose greatest ambition is to ship out good iron to the market. His night-time inspection round shows him as a manager who is involved in the smallest details of his works. His character flaw is also his act of kindness: he mistakes the ragged stranger by the furnace for his old regimental comrade Nils Olof von Stahle and invites him home. The mistake is partly the dim firelight and partly his eagerness to find company for Christmas; but it is also a sign that he reads people by surface clues (the slouch hat, the height, the supposed bearing). When he sees the same man clean-shaven and well-dressed in daylight, he flies into a rage and threatens the sheriff. His turn from warm host to angry employer in the space of one breakfast is sharp, and it lets Edla's steadiness show by contrast.

### 3.4 Edla Willmansson : Quiet Christian Compassion

Edla, the ironmaster's daughter, is described as "not at all pretty" but modest, shy and friendly. She is the moral centre of the story. When she first sees the stranger in the forge she immediately senses that he is afraid, suspects he may have stolen or escaped from jail, and yet persists in inviting him home, because the world should give a hunted human being one day of peace in the year. On Christmas morning, when her father is ready to throw the man out, she argues from a position of principle: they have promised Christmas cheer, and they cannot withdraw it because the guest turns out not to be a captain. She speaks to the peddler with steady eyes and a calm voice; she does not preach. It is her treatment of him as a person, rather than as a problem, that gives the story its turn.

#### Misreading Edla's Role

Students often write that Edla "forgives" the peddler or "rescues" him. Both verbs miss the point. Edla never explicitly forgives anything; she does not even know about the theft until after church on Christmas morning. What she does is treat him as a human being entitled to one day of peace, regardless of whether he deserves it. The redemption is the peddler's own choice to live up to that treatment, not a gift Edla hands him.

### Christian-Redemption Arc

Edla's role echoes a long literary tradition in which a Christmas act of mercy redeems a person who has been cast out. Lagerlöf's Sweden was a deeply Christian society, and Christmas Eve was the most charged moment of the year for showing forgiveness and hospitality. Edla is not preached at us as a saint; she simply does what the season asks of her, and the peddler responds by trying, for one day, to live up to her image of him.

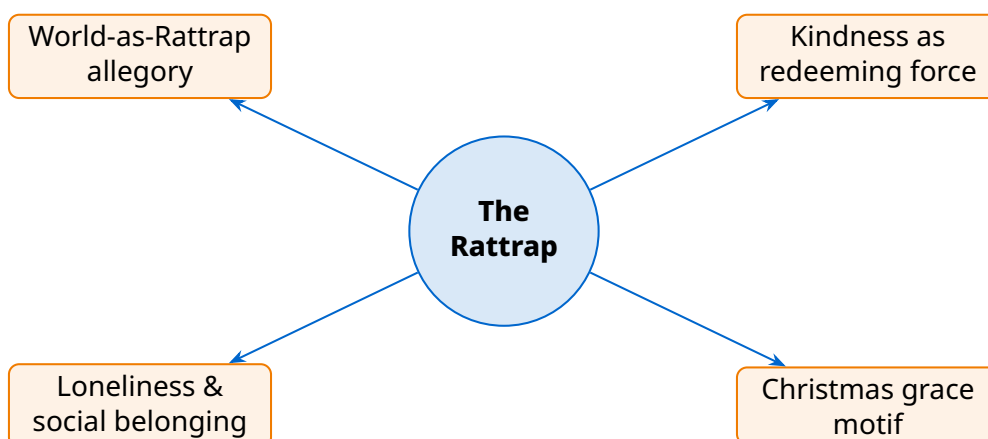
### Four-Character Arc: P-C-I-E

Remember the chapter's relationships with the chain **P**eddler → **C**rofter → **I**ronmaster → **E**dla. The peddler meets each one in this order, and each one teaches him something different: the Crofter that the world can be warm, the Ironmaster that it can still misjudge him, Edla that it can love him in spite of itself.

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## 4 Themes and the Rattrap Symbolism

The Rattrap is best understood as a story that argues a moral case in the disguise of a folktale. Four themes carry that argument: the world-as-rattrap allegory, the redeeming power of kindness, the human need for social belonging, and the Christmas-grace motif. Each one shows up in specific passages of the chapter and is rewarded in long-answer questions.



### 4.1 The World as a Rattrap

The central image of the story is the peddler's invention: a rattrap, with its baited cheese, is a perfect picture of how the world tempts every human being. Riches,

joys, shelter, food, heat and clothing are baits; the moment a person reaches out to take them, the steel closes in. Lagerlöf pushes the metaphor a step further by showing the peddler caught in three nested rattraps. He is caught in poverty (a social trap), in greed for the thirty kronor (a moral trap), and finally in the dark forest (a physical trap that is the literal embodiment of the first two). Only at Ramsjö, in the warmth of Edla's hospitality, does he find a way out: not by escaping the world but by refusing the bait.

### World-as-Rattrap Allegory

The rattrap is an *allegory*, not a simple simile. A simile says “the world is like a rattrap”; an allegory says the rattrap stands for a whole way of looking at the world. Every bait in the story (the thirty kronor, the fur coat, the manor-house breakfast) is a test, and every character is in the trap whether they know it or not. The peddler simply puts the idea into words.

### Trap 1: Poverty (the social rattrap)



The peddler is caught in three nested traps before grace at Ramsjö lets him out.

### Key Quotation: The Rattrap Theory

*“The whole world about him, with its lands and seas, its cities and villages, was nothing but a big rattrap. It had never existed for any other purpose than to set baits for people. It offered riches and joys, shelter and food, heat and clothing, exactly as the rattrap offered cheese and pork, and as soon as anyone let himself be tempted to touch the bait, it closed in on him, and then everything came to an end.”*

**Use in answers:** cite this when the question asks for the metaphor's first statement, or when discussing the peddler's cynicism in Scene 1.

## 4.2 Kindness as a Redeeming Force

Lagerlöf's universal theme, stated in her own words, is that the essential goodness in a human being can be awakened through understanding and love. The peddler is the test case. The crofter's kindness is genuine but ordinary, and it cannot reach the hardened place in the peddler because it is offered to a man the crofter has already judged a friend. Edla's kindness is different: she keeps offering it even after she suspects he is a thief or fugitive. That unconditional generosity is what breaks through. The peddler answers it not with words but with an action that costs him the thirty kronor he risked so much for. Kindness in this story does not soften the world; it gives one human being the strength to behave honourably inside it.

## 4.3 Social Belonging and Human Loneliness

Three of the four main characters are isolated. The peddler walks alone; the crofter lives alone; the ironmaster is alone in the manor on Christmas Eve because his wife is dead, his sons are abroad, and only his daughter is at home. Loneliness is what makes the crofter open his door and his tobacco roll. Loneliness is what makes the ironmaster eagerly mistake a stranger for an old comrade. Edla's longing for one human being to enjoy peace "just one in the whole year" is also a longing for connection. The story argues that the rattrap of cynicism is partly built out of loneliness, and the way out is human company offered without conditions.

### Christmas Hospitality Customs

In nineteenth-century Sweden, Christmas Eve was the most important night of the year for hospitality. Houses were lit, the table was loaded with fish and porridge, and travellers, the poor and even strangers were expected to be welcomed in. The ironmaster's reflex when he sees a lonely figure by the furnace is shaped by this tradition; Edla's stubborn insistence that the man stay even after the truth comes out is the same tradition taken to its moral conclusion.

## 4.4 The Christmas-Grace Motif

The choice of Christmas Eve is not decoration. In the Christian story Christmas marks an unearned gift: a divine guest welcomed in a stable. The Rattrap quietly echoes this. A nameless, ragged traveller is taken into a house, offered food, sleep, clothes and a place at the family table, and on Christmas morning he leaves behind a gift in return: a small rattrap containing the stolen money and a letter that signs him as the captain he was mistaken for. The gift is humble, and that is its point. The story argues that grace is real, that it can be offered even by people who have been treated badly by the world, and that Christmas, for one day in the calendar, makes such gifts possible.

**Theme-pairing for 6-mark answers**

For 5- or 6-mark theme questions, pair two themes in your answer: “World as Rattrap” with “Kindness as Redemption,” or “Loneliness” with “Christmas Grace.” Pairing themes lets you cover both halves of the rubric: identifying the theme and showing how it works in the plot.

## 5 Literary Devices and Narrative Style

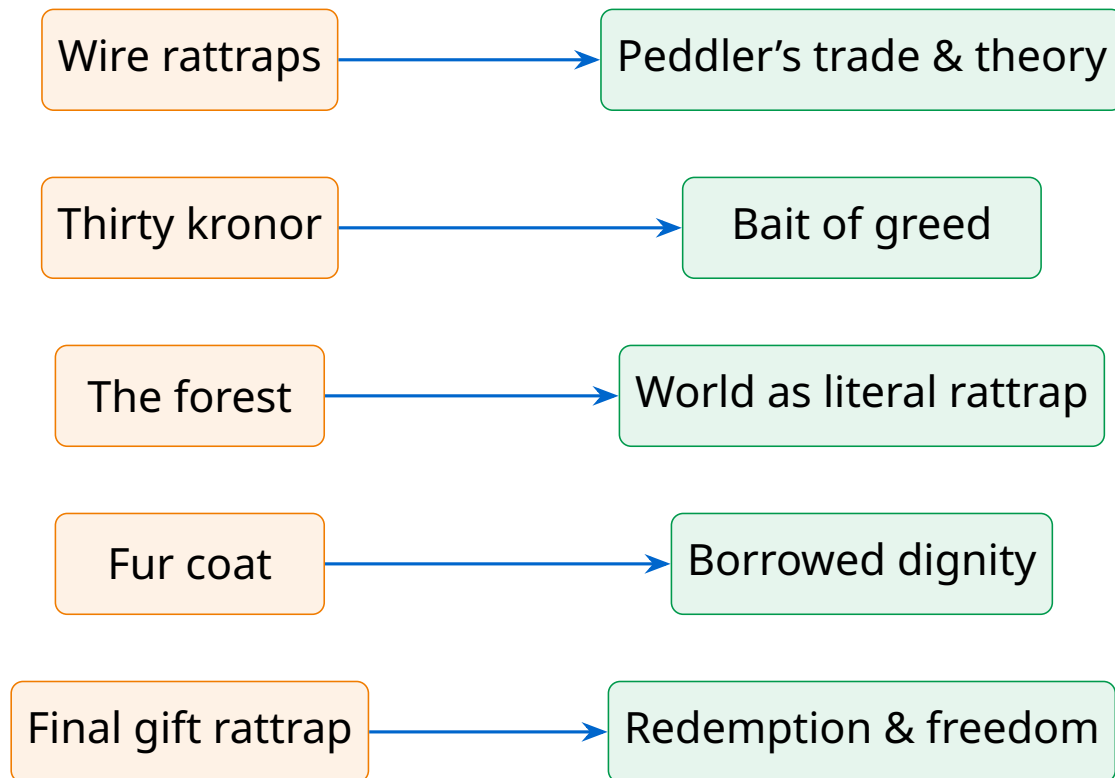
The Rattrap is short, but it uses a careful range of literary devices. A student who can name three or four of them, with one line of textual support each, will score the full “literary appreciation” marks on a long answer.

### 5.1 Allegory and Extended Metaphor

The whole story is an extended metaphor: a rattrap stands for the world, the bait stands for material temptation, and the wire that closes in stands for the consequences of greed. The metaphor is reinforced in three places: the peddler’s first thought on the road, his realisation in the forest, and his speech to the ironmaster on Christmas morning. Lagerlöf also turns the metaphor against itself at the end, when the peddler sends a rattrap back as a Christmas gift, no longer as a symbol of capture but as a token of escape.

### 5.2 Symbolism

Several smaller symbols support the central metaphor. The wire rattraps the peddler sells are a reminder of his trade and of his theory at once. The thirty kronor stand for the bait of easy money. The leather pouch hanging in the cottage window is the visible cheese in the trap. The forest is the physical embodiment of the rattrap. The fur coat that Edla brings to the forge is a borrowed dignity, foreshadowing the “captain” identity he tries on at the manor. The small rattrap with the thirty kronor and the letter is the symbol of redemption.



### 5.3 Irony

Lagerlöf uses both situational and verbal irony. The peddler invents the rattrap theory at the very start, and the irony is that he is the first to be caught in it. The ironmaster, a master of his works, completely misjudges the man at his furnace; the great judge of iron cannot judge a man. The peddler's final letter, signed *Captain von Stahle*, is verbal irony folded into gratitude: he uses the false title not to deceive but to honour the kindness that briefly made him worthy of it.

### 5.4 Imagery and Atmosphere

The chapter is built on contrasts of light and dark. The opening images are grey and cold: rags, sunken cheeks, hunger gleaming in the eyes. The crofter's cottage is lit by the fire and the card game. The forest is a black, twisting prison. The forge glows red against the December darkness; the manor house is bright with candlelight on Christmas Eve. The shifting light is not decoration; it tracks the moral journey of the peddler from the cold open road to the warm dining room and out again into the calm morning when he leaves the gift behind.



*Light vs darkness tracks the peddler's moral state across the five scenes.*

## 5.5 Narrative Voice and Folktale Manner

The story is told in the third person by an omniscient narrator who slips inside the peddler's head but reports the actions of others from the outside. The opening sentence, "Once upon a time there was a man who went around selling small rat-traps of wire," deliberately echoes the formula of a fairy tale. That folktale manner is what lets Lagerlöf write a story with such a clean moral arc without seeming to lecture. The reader accepts the rattrap idea, the magical mistake at the forge, and the Christmas redemption because the story tells us, from the first line, that we are reading a fairy tale for adults.

### Literary-device acronym: A-S-I-I-N

**A**llegory, **S**ymbolism, **I**rony, **I**magery, **N**arrative voice. Use this five-letter list as a checklist for any 6-mark "literary devices" question on The Rattrap; you should be able to give one line of textual support for each.

## 6 Key Quotations and Their Use in Answers

Examiners reward answers that quote the text. The four boxes below give you the highest-value quotations from the chapter, with a one-line note on when to cite each.

### Key Quotation 1: The Cynical Joy

*"It became a cherished pastime of his, during many dreary ploddings, to think of people he knew who had let themselves be caught in the dangerous snare, and of others who were still circling around the bait."*

**Use in answers:** to show that the peddler's rattrap theory is not just an idea but a habit of mind, and to support a reading of him as cynical, not merely poor.

### Key Quotation 2: The Forest Realisation

*"The whole forest, with its trunks and branches, its thickets and fallen logs, closed in upon him like an impenetrable prison from which he could never escape."*

**Use in answers:** to support the point that the peddler's own theory turns on him; the world becomes, in the forest, the literal rattrap he had imagined.

### Key Quotation 3: Edla's Defence

*"It was all a mistake, of course, but anyway I don't think we ought to chase away a human being whom we have asked to come here, and to whom we have promised Christmas cheer."*

**Use in answers:** to show Edla's moral seriousness, and to illustrate the Christmas-hospitality theme. This is the line that turns the story.

**Key Quotation 4: The Peddler's Letter**

*"The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught in this world's rattrap if he had not been raised to captain, because in that way he got power to clear himself."*

**Use in answers:** the perfect closing quotation for any question on the rattrap symbolism, the redemption arc, or the meaning of the final gift.

## 7 Background, Context and Exam-Pattern Points

This section ties the story to its wider Swedish, Christian and folktale background, and then converts that context into the specific kinds of answers the CBSE board paper asks for.

### 7.1 Sweden, Iron Mills and the Late Nineteenth Century

The Ramsjö ironworks of the story is fictional, but it is closely modelled on the small iron mills of Värmland, the region where Lagerlöf grew up. By the time the story was written, many of these mills had begun to close down, which is why the opening of the forge scene says, "The Ramsjö Ironworks, which are now closed down, were, not so long ago, a large plant." The crofter's small landholding, the dairy creamery that pays him thirty kronor a month, the long winter darkness, and the importance of Christmas Eve as a family festival are all faithful to that society. Knowing this much helps in board questions that ask about the setting.

### 7.2 Folktale Frame and Christian Themes

Lagerlöf often borrowed the surface manner of Swedish folktales, with their wandering heroes, hidden identities and moral transformations, and used it to write modern stories about ethics and the inner life. The Rattrap is a small example of that method. The folktale frame allows for the magical-sounding mistake (an ironmaster taking a vagabond for an old comrade) and the symbolic neatness of the Christmas gift. The Christian theme of unearned grace – hospitality offered to a stranger who turns out to be more than he seems – is folded inside this folktale frame without ever being preached.

### 7.3 Typical Exam Questions on This Chapter

The CBSE Class 12 English (Core) board paper has tested The Rattrap in three formats:

- (1) **Extract-based questions** (4 marks): a passage from the story is given, followed by short questions on tone, context, the speaker, and a literary device.
- (2) **Short-answer questions** (3 marks): direct questions on a single scene, character motive or theme. Recent examples: "Why did the peddler decline the

ironmaster's invitation?", "What made the peddler think he had fallen into a rattrap?"

- (3) **Long-answer questions** (5 or 6 marks): an essay-style question on theme, character or moral. Recent examples: "How does the metaphor of the rattrap serve to highlight the human predicament?", "What instances in the story show that the character of the ironmaster is different from that of his daughter?"

## 7.4 High-Yield Points for the Board Paper

Five points come up repeatedly in mark schemes. First, the peddler is morally complex, not a simple thief. Second, the rattrap is an allegory, not a simile, and works on three levels (poverty, greed, the forest). Third, the crofter and Edla represent two kinds of kindness: ordinary friendliness and principled compassion. Fourth, the ironmaster's mistake about identity is also a mistake about character; he reads the surface, not the man. Fifth, the Christmas setting is essential, not decorative, because it carries the theme of unearned grace.

### How to write a 6-mark answer in seven minutes

Spend one minute outlining: a single-sentence thesis, three supporting points, one closing line. Spend five minutes writing those three points, each with one piece of textual evidence (paraphrase or short quotation). Spend the last minute on the closing line and a quick reread. Examiners reward structure and textual support; long flowing paragraphs without quotations score the same as short paragraphs with quotations.

### Common 5-mark Mistakes

Students lose marks on this chapter most often by retelling the plot instead of answering the question, by quoting too much without commenting, and by treating the peddler's change of heart as sudden. The change is gradual: the crofter sets up the moral, the forest forces reflection, the ironmaster threatens consequences, and Edla supplies the reason to be honourable. Show the gradient in your answer.

## 8 Quick Revision Summary

This section is designed to be read in ten minutes on the morning of the exam. Everything on this page is testable.



*The peddler's moral arc, from cynicism to quiet self-respect*

## 8.1 One-Paragraph Summary

A poor peddler who sells small rattraps of wire walks the Swedish countryside, inventing a private theory that the world itself is a giant rattrap baited with riches and joys. He is taken in for the night by a kind old crofter, repays the hospitality by stealing thirty kronor, and loses his way in the December forest, where he sees his own theory turn on him. Stumbling into the Ramsjö ironworks, he is mistaken for an old regimental comrade by the ironmaster and is brought to the manor house against his will. The next morning the mistake is exposed and he is about to be thrown out, but the ironmaster's quiet daughter Edla insists that they keep their promise of Christmas hospitality. On Christmas Eve she treats him as a guest and a person. He leaves before they return from church, but leaves behind a small rattrap containing the thirty stolen kronor and a letter, signed *Captain von Stahle*, asking her to return the money to the old crofter.

## 8.2 Five-Point Character Recall

- **Peddler:** ragged, hungry, cynical, capable of change; signs himself "Captain von Stahle" at the end as a gesture of gratitude.
- **Crofter:** lonely old man, ex-ironworks worker, lives off his cow, shows the thirty kronor in pride, not vanity.
- **Ironmaster:** owner of Ramsjö, judges by surface, hot-tempered, capable of warmth but not of patience.
- **Edla:** not pretty but compassionate, modest and firm; the moral centre of the story.
- **Captain Nils Olof von Stahle:** the regimental comrade never seen on stage; his name becomes the peddler's borrowed dignity.

## 8.3 Four-Theme Checklist

- **World as a rattrap:** bait of riches, joys, shelter and food; trap closes when one is tempted.
- **Kindness as redemption:** unconditional compassion (Edla) can awaken the essential goodness in a person.
- **Loneliness and belonging:** all four main characters are isolated; the crofter's openness and Edla's hospitality are responses to that isolation.
- **Christmas grace:** the timing of Christmas Eve makes the act of hospitality, and the return gift, possible.

## 8.4 Five-Device Checklist

- Allegory (whole story).
- Symbolism (rattrap, kronor, forest, fur coat, gift rattrap).
- Irony (situational, verbal in the final letter).

- Imagery (light vs darkness across all five scenes).
- Narrative voice (third-person omniscient, folktale manner).

### 8.5 Top Quotations to Carry into the Hall

- “The whole world... was nothing but a big rattrap.”
- “It had never existed for any other purpose than to set baits for people.”
- “The whole forest... closed in upon him like an impenetrable prison.”
- “I don’t think we ought to chase away a human being whom we have asked to come here.”
- “The rattrap is a Christmas present from a rat who would have been caught... if he had not been raised to captain.”

### 8.6 One-Line Thesis Statements (for long answers)

- **On the rattrap metaphor:** The rattrap is not a simile but an allegory that catches the peddler in three nested traps – poverty, greed and the December forest – before it lets him out through an act of grace.
- **On the peddler’s change of heart:** The peddler’s transformation is gradual, beginning with the crofter’s hospitality, sharpening in the forest, and completing only when Edla insists on treating him as a person rather than a problem.
- **On the ironmaster and Edla:** The ironmaster reads the surface of people, while Edla reads their humanity; the contrast between father and daughter is what makes the redemption possible.
- **On the Christmas setting:** Christmas Eve is the moral engine of the story, not its backdrop; it is what makes the act of hospitality, and the return gift, plausible.

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