

My Old Home by Lu Xun

Notes, Summary, Questions and Answers

(Exam focused Questions)

Class 12 English

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Summary

The story is narrated from the first person point of view by a man who returns to his hometown after being away for more than twenty years. As his boat approaches the familiar shore, he notices that the once beautiful landscape now appears dull, cold, and deserted. The contrast between his childhood memories and the present reality makes him realize that the home he cherished exists mostly in his memories.

The narrator has returned only to say goodbye because his family has sold their old house. After arriving, he meets his aging mother, who tells him that his childhood friend Runtu may come to visit before they leave.

Hearing Runtu's name brings back vivid memories of their childhood adventures. Although Runtu's family worked for the narrator's family, the two boys shared an innocent friendship without caring about social class. They played together in sandy fields, guarded watermelons, hunted a Zha, and exchanged stories about nature.

When Runtu finally visits, the narrator is shocked by how much life has changed him. The cheerful and energetic boy has become a pale, thin, and exhausted farmer burdened by poverty, taxes, family responsibilities,

and unfair treatment from officials. Their conversation feels distant because the warmth of childhood has disappeared under the weight of social inequality.

Before leaving, the narrator helps Runtu by giving him useful household items from the old house. As the boat carries him away with his mother and nephew Hong'er, he reflects on hope. He concludes that hope is neither something that naturally exists nor something that is completely empty. Like a road formed by people walking repeatedly across the land, hope is created when people continue moving forward together.

Important Themes

Nostalgia

The story explores how childhood memories can seem more beautiful than reality when people return to familiar places after many years.

Social Inequality

The friendship between the narrator and Runtu reveals how class divisions shape people's lives and relationships.

Loss and Change

Time changes both people and places, making it impossible to fully return to the past.

Rural Hardship

The story highlights the difficult lives of farmers who struggle with poverty, taxes, and exploitation.

Hope and the Future

The ending suggests that hope is created through human effort rather than simply waiting for change to happen.

Character Information

The Narrator

The narrator returns to his hometown after more than twenty years. He is thoughtful, emotional, and reflective. His memories of childhood help him realize how much time, society, and personal experiences have changed both people and places.

Runtu

Runtu is the narrator's childhood friend. As a boy, he is energetic, fearless, curious, and full of life. As an adult, poverty, heavy responsibilities, taxes, and hardship transform him into a tired and reserved farmer.

Mother

The narrator's mother is elderly and practical. She prepares the family for leaving their old home and reminds the narrator about his childhood friendship with Runtu.

Hong'er

Hong'er is the narrator's young nephew. His innocent friendship with Runtu's son reflects the possibility that future generations may overcome the barriers that separated their fathers.

Mrs. Yang

Mrs. Yang is a humorous yet selfish character who represents changing social attitudes. Her behavior contrasts with the narrator's genuine concern for Runtu.

Important Events

The Narrator Returns Home

After more than twenty years, the narrator travels by boat to his hometown.

The Changed Landscape

The once familiar place now appears dull, cold, deserted, and lifeless.

His Mother Mentions Runtu

Hearing Runtu's name immediately brings back memories of their childhood friendship.

Childhood Memories Are Recalled

The narrator remembers playing, hunting, exploring nature, guarding watermelon fields, and sharing stories with Runtu.

Runtu Visits

The narrator sees how poverty, responsibilities, and social inequality have transformed his old friend.

The Narrator Helps Runtu

Before leaving, the narrator gives Runtu useful household items from the old house.

The Hopeful Ending

While sailing away, the narrator reflects on how hope is created through human effort and collective action.

Difficult Vocabulary

Nostalgia: A feeling of missing the past.

Deserted: Empty and abandoned.

Servant: A person who works for another family.

Feudal: Relating to an old social system based on class.

Aristocracy: A wealthy and powerful upper class.

Obligation: A duty or responsibility.

Timid: Shy and lacking confidence.

Compasses: A geometry instrument used for drawing circles.

Zha: A fictional creature that attacks watermelons.

Superstition: A belief not based on reason or evidence.

Solitude: The state of being alone.

Resilience: The ability to recover from difficulties.

Key Message and Main Idea

The story teaches that time changes people, places, and relationships, but hope for a better future can still exist if people work together to create it. Lu Xun also criticizes social inequality by showing how poverty and class divisions destroy even the purest childhood friendships.

Textbook Exercise and Answers

Understanding the Text

a. How does the narrator describe his feeling at the arrival of his old home?

The narrator experiences mixed emotions when he arrives at his old home. He feels happy and nostalgic because he is returning to a place

filled with childhood memories, but he also feels sad because he knows he must leave it forever after the family sells the property.

As his boat approaches the shore, he notices that the landscape looks dull, deserted, and lifeless. This disappoints him because he had expected some positive changes in his hometown. The contrast between his memories and reality fills him with uneasiness and emotional conflict.

b. What were the three kinds of servants in China then? What does it indicate about contemporary Chinese society?

There were three kinds of servants in China during that time. The first were day workers, who worked for only one day whenever needed. The second were yearlong servants, who worked continuously for the same family throughout the year. The third were busy mothers, who worked temporarily during special occasions such as New Year celebrations or when rent payments were due.

This system shows that contemporary Chinese society was deeply divided by social class. People's work, opportunities, and status depended heavily on their economic background. It reflects a feudal society where inequality and class divisions shaped everyday life.

c. What makes the narrator nostalgic? What did he do with Runtu in his teenage years?

The narrator becomes nostalgic when his mother tells him that his childhood friend Runtu may come to visit. Hearing Runtu's name immediately brings back memories of the happy days they spent

together as boys.

During their teenage years, the two friends played freely in sandy fields, explored nature, guarded watermelon fields, shared stories, and enjoyed each other's company without caring about social differences. These carefree moments become precious memories that make the narrator long for the past when friendship was innocent and uncomplicated.

d. How did Runtu hunt a Zha in his young age?

When Runtu was young, he guarded watermelon fields near the beach to protect them from a creature called a Zha. Whenever the creature appeared, he courageously attacked it with his knife, using all his strength without showing fear.

This story impressed the narrator because it revealed Runtu's bravery, confidence, and adventurous spirit during childhood, making him appear almost heroic in the narrator's memories.

e. How does the narrator make a humorous picture of Mrs. Yang?

The narrator creates a humorous image of Mrs. Yang by describing her appearance in an exaggerated way. He says that her narrow cheekbones and lips make her face resemble two compasses placed together in a geometry box.

He also recalls that she was once known as Beancurd Beauty because her attractive appearance helped attract many customers to the shop. The contrast between her former reputation and her present appearance makes the description amusing while also showing how time changes

people.

f. According to the narrator, what were different factors that made Runtu a poor man throughout his life?

According to the narrator, Runtu remains poor because several difficulties continue affecting his life. Heavy taxes, family responsibilities, social discrimination, limited opportunities, a weak economic background, and an unfair social system all prevent him from improving his condition.

Instead of enjoying the cheerful life he had as a child, Runtu spends adulthood struggling to support his family while facing continuous exploitation and hardship.

g. How does the narrator help Runtu before leaving the old home?

Before leaving the old home, the narrator helps Runtu by giving him several useful household items that the family no longer needs. He offers two large tables, candles, an incense burner, a set of scales, and other basic belongings from the house.

This generous act reflects his sympathy for Runtu's difficult financial condition and his desire to support his childhood friend despite the emotional distance that has developed between them.

h. How does the author differentiate two kinds of idols?

The author distinguishes between superstitious idols and hope. Superstitious idols are worshipped by people who expect immediate

benefits or quick solutions to their problems. Such beliefs focus on short term rewards without real effort.

Hope is different. It is uncertain and cannot be seen immediately, but it becomes meaningful when people continue working toward a better future. Through this comparison, the author suggests that genuine hope is created by human action rather than blind belief.

Reference to the Context

a. While reading the friendship between the narrator and Runtu, Hindu readers remember the friendship between Krishna and Sudama. Which particular description reminds you of the mythological example?

The friendship between the narrator and Runtu strongly reminds Hindu readers of the famous friendship between Krishna and Sudama because both relationships are based on genuine affection rather than wealth or social status.

Like Krishna and Sudama, the narrator and Runtu become close friends during childhood and enjoy spending time together without caring about differences in their family backgrounds. As adults, Runtu and Sudama become poor and feel shy when meeting their wealthy childhood friends. Runtu becomes timid while visiting the narrator, just as Sudama feels embarrassed when visiting Krishna.

Another similarity is the warm welcome both friends receive. Krishna greets Sudama with love and respect, while the narrator also treats Runtu kindly despite the social distance that has developed between them. Before leaving, the narrator helps Runtu by giving him useful

household items, just as Krishna helps Sudama by improving his difficult life.

Both stories teach that true friendship is built on love, trust, and kindness rather than money or social position. They remind us that real friends continue caring for each other even when life changes their circumstances.

b. How does the story support the proposition that the relationships of childhood are innocent, impartial and disinterested?

The story strongly supports the idea that childhood relationships are innocent, impartial, and free from selfish motives through the friendship between the narrator and Runtu.

Although Runtu's family worked for the narrator's family, the two boys never allowed social differences to affect their friendship during childhood. They played together in the fields, guarded watermelons, hunted the Zha, shared stories, and explored nature without thinking about class or wealth. Their friendship was based entirely on happiness, curiosity, and mutual trust.

As children, they treated each other as equals. They did not understand or care about the master servant relationship that existed between their families. Their conversations were open, natural, and full of excitement, showing that childhood friendships can remain untouched by social prejudice.

The painful contrast appears only when they meet again as adults. Poverty, social status, and life's hardships create distance between

them, proving that society can change relationships that were once pure. Through this comparison, Lu Xun suggests that childhood friendships are naturally honest and unbiased, while adulthood often becomes influenced by social divisions and responsibilities.

c. After reading the story, what inferences can you make about the contemporary Chinese economic and social system?

The story presents a clear picture of the economic and social conditions of contemporary China during that period. It reveals a society deeply divided by class differences, poverty, and the feudal system.

People belonged to different social classes, and these divisions affected their opportunities and relationships. The existence of day workers, yearlong servants, and busy mothers shows that labor was organized according to social status. Poor farmers like Runtu worked extremely hard but remained trapped in poverty because of heavy taxes, family responsibilities, and exploitation by officials.

The story also shows that genuine friendships could not easily survive social inequality. Although the narrator and Runtu shared a close bond as children, adulthood forced them into different positions within society. Runtu became a struggling farmer, while the narrator belonged to a more comfortable family background.

Through these experiences, Lu Xun criticizes the feudal system for creating inequality, limiting opportunities, and making ordinary people's lives full of hardship and disappointment.

d. What does the story indicate about the geographical features of the

narrator's hometown?

The story describes the narrator's hometown as a coastal area with beautiful natural scenery during his childhood. The place had green fields, sandy beaches, watermelon farms, rivers, trees, and open spaces where children could play freely. The peaceful environment made the hometown feel lively and enjoyable.

However, when the narrator returns after more than twenty years, he notices a completely different picture. The landscape now appears dull, cold, deserted, and lifeless. The once familiar seaside town seems empty, with very little sign of improvement or prosperity.

This contrast between the beautiful memories of childhood and the disappointing present reflects both physical decline and emotional loss. The geographical setting becomes a symbol of changing times, showing how both nature and human society have been affected by hardship and neglect.

Reference Beyond the Text

a. Human beings are on the road from time immemorial, always migrating to new places. Write an essay on The Trend of Migration in Nepal in about 300 words.

The Trend of Migration in Nepal

Migration has become an important part of Nepali society as people continue moving from one place to another in search of better opportunities. People migrate within the country as well as to foreign

countries for education, employment, business, and a better quality of life. Like many other countries, Nepal has experienced a growing trend of migration over the past few decades.

One of the main causes of migration is the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas. Many young people leave their villages because farming alone cannot provide enough income to support their families. Others migrate because of poverty, political instability, limited educational opportunities, or natural disasters that affect their livelihoods.

Nepal experiences both internal and external migration. Internal migration usually takes place from villages to cities such as Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Bharatpur, where people hope to find better jobs and education. External migration mainly takes people to Gulf countries, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Australia, Europe, and other destinations where they seek higher wages and improved living standards.

Migration has both positive and negative effects. Remittances sent by Nepali workers abroad contribute significantly to the national economy and help improve education, healthcare, and family incomes. Many returnees also bring valuable skills and experience back to Nepal.

However, migration also creates challenges. Families often remain separated for long periods, skilled workers leave the country, and rural communities lose many of their young people. These problems can weaken both family relationships and local development.

The government has introduced skill development programs and agreements with foreign countries to protect migrant workers. At the

same time, creating more jobs within Nepal remains essential for reducing unnecessary migration.

Overall, migration has become an important reality of Nepali life. With proper policies and balanced development, its benefits can be increased while its challenges are reduced.

b. Find one of your relatives or friends, who has migrated to a new place leaving his or her old home. Talk to him or her and prepare a report on what he or she felt while leaving the old home.

Report on a Friend's Migration Experience

Introduction

I interviewed my friend Maya, who recently migrated from Nepal to Canada, to understand her feelings and experiences while leaving her old home for a new country.

Background

Maya moved to Canada in search of better career opportunities and a higher standard of living. Leaving Nepal meant saying goodbye to her family, relatives, friends, and the familiar environment where she had spent most of her life.

Feelings While Leaving

Maya said she experienced mixed emotions before leaving. She felt excited about the opportunities waiting for her abroad, but she also felt

sad about leaving her loved ones behind. The most emotional moment was saying goodbye to her parents, which made her realize how difficult migration could be.

Challenges

After arriving in Canada, Maya faced several difficulties. She had to adjust to a new culture, improve her communication skills, find suitable housing, and understand unfamiliar customs. Living away from her family also made the early days more challenging.

New Beginnings

Despite these difficulties, Maya remained hopeful about building a better future. She believed that migration would help her grow personally and professionally while giving her valuable new experiences.

Conclusion

Maya's experience shows that migration is both exciting and emotionally challenging. Although leaving one's old home is painful, determination, resilience, and hope help people adjust to new beginnings and create better opportunities for the future.

Simple Question Explanations

Why does the narrator feel disappointed after returning home?

The narrator feels disappointed because the hometown he remembered from childhood no longer matches reality. The once beautiful and lively

place now appears dull, deserted, and lifeless. This contrast between memory and reality makes him realize that time has changed both the place and the people he once knew.

Why is Runtu important in the story?

Runtu is important because he represents the tragic effects of poverty and social inequality. His transformation from a cheerful, fearless boy into a tired and struggling farmer shows how difficult life under the feudal system could become. He also symbolizes the loss of innocent childhood friendship.

What does the road at the end of the story symbolize?

The road symbolizes hope. The narrator explains that roads are not born naturally but are created when many people walk the same path repeatedly. Similarly, hope is created through human effort, determination, and collective action rather than simply waiting for change.

Why is Hong'er's friendship significant?

Hong'er's friendship with Runtu's son suggests that future generations may build relationships without repeating the social divisions that separated their fathers. It gives the story a hopeful ending despite its sadness.

Important Lines and Passages

The Narrator's First View of His Hometown

This passage is important because it immediately establishes the contrast between memory and reality. The gloomy landscape reflects both physical decline and the narrator's emotional disappointment.

Runtu's Changed Appearance

The description of Runtu's pale face, thin body, and exhausted expression highlights how poverty and hardship have transformed his life. It becomes one of the strongest emotional moments in the story.

The Road and Hope

The narrator's reflection about roads becoming paths through repeated footsteps is the story's most important symbolic passage. It expresses the idea that hope becomes real when people work together to create a better future.

The Childhood Memories

The scenes of playing in the sandy fields and hunting the Zha remind readers that childhood friendships are often free from prejudice and social barriers.

Exam Focused Questions

1. How does Lu Xun present nostalgia in *My Old Home*?

Lu Xun presents nostalgia by comparing the narrator's beautiful childhood memories with the disappointing reality he finds after returning home. The emotional contrast between the lively past and the

gloomy present creates a powerful feeling of loss.

2. How does Runtu's character change from childhood to adulthood?

As a child, Runtu is energetic, fearless, curious, and cheerful. As an adult, poverty, taxes, family responsibilities, and social inequality turn him into a tired, quiet, and emotionally distant farmer.

3. What role does social inequality play in the story?

Social inequality destroys the natural friendship between the narrator and Runtu. Their childhood bond remains pure, but adulthood forces them into unequal social positions that create emotional distance.

4. Why is the ending of the story considered hopeful?

The ending becomes hopeful because the narrator believes that hope can be created through human effort, just as roads are formed by people walking together repeatedly.

5. What is the significance of the title *My Old Home*?

The title represents more than a physical house. It symbolizes childhood memories, lost friendships, changing society, and the emotional connection people have with their homeland.

6. How does Lu Xun criticize the feudal system?

He criticizes the feudal system by showing class divisions, poverty, servant categories, exploitation of peasants, and the unequal

opportunities that shape Runtu's difficult life.

7. Compare the narrator and Runtu.

The narrator receives better opportunities and education, while Runtu struggles as a poor farmer. Despite their different lives, their childhood friendship shows that social status did not matter when they were young.

Commonly Confusing Points

Who is Hong'er?

Hong'er is the narrator's young nephew, not his son.

Why does Runtu become distant?

Runtu does not stop caring about the narrator. Instead, years of poverty, responsibilities, and social expectations make him more reserved and formal.

What does the Zha represent?

The Zha is simply a creature from Runtu's childhood story that demonstrates his bravery and adventurous nature.

Why does the narrator help Runtu?

He gives Runtu household items because he feels sympathy for his friend's difficult financial condition before leaving his old home forever.

What is the difference between hope and superstitious idols?

Superstitious idols promise immediate benefits through blind belief, while hope becomes meaningful through continuous human effort and determination.

Quick Revision

Author

Lu Xun

Genre

Realistic Short Story

Main Characters

The Narrator, Runtu, Mother, Hong'er, and Mrs. Yang

Setting

A coastal Chinese hometown after more than twenty years.

Beginning

The narrator returns home by boat to say goodbye after his family sells their old house.

Conflict

He struggles with the painful difference between his childhood memories and the harsh reality of the present.

Climax

The emotional reunion with Runtu reveals how poverty and social inequality have changed their friendship.

Ending

The narrator leaves with his mother and nephew while reflecting that hope is created through human effort.

Major Themes

Nostalgia, social inequality, rural hardship, loss and change, childhood friendship, and hope.

Important Symbols

Old Home: Lost memories and emotional attachment.

Road: Hope created through collective effort.

Runtu: The suffering caused by poverty and class divisions.

Sea Journey: The transition from the past toward the future.

Key Lesson

The story teaches that time changes people and places, but hope for a better future can still be created when people continue moving forward together.

One Minute Revision

After more than twenty years, the narrator returns to his old hometown, only to find that both the place and his childhood friend Runtu have changed dramatically. Their once innocent friendship has been damaged by poverty and social inequality. Before leaving, the narrator helps Runtu and reflects that hope is like a road, created when people continue walking forward together.

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