

CHAPTER 1

A LETTER TO GOD

G L Fuentes

G L Fuentes was a Mexican novelist, poet and journalist and was one of the leading chroniclers of the Mexican Revolution. His stories were exciting as well as humorous and most of his works dealt with the oppression of Native Americans.

A Letter to God is the story of a humble farmer's unflinching faith in God

Theme:

The story is about the unshakeable faith that a poor man has in God. While the story deals with the man's ultimate belief in God, it also portrays his distrust for fellow human beings. The irony of the story is that the farmer, who complains to God regarding the fraudulence of the Post Office officials, is ignorant of the fact that his wish was granted by the good will of those officials.

Oral comprehension check 1

1. What did Lencho hope for?

Lencho hoped for a good shower that would benefit his crops.

2. Why did Lencho say that the raindrops were like 'new coins'?

Lencho referred to the raindrops as 'new coins', as it would benefit his crops, enabling a good harvest, which in turn would give him a good profit.

3. How did the rain change? What happened to Lencho's fields?

The rain suddenly changed into a hailstorm which completely covered Lencho's fields, ruining his crops.

4. What were Lencho's feelings when the hail stopped?

Lencho was shattered and his soul was filled with sadness when the hail stopped.

Oral comprehension check 2

1. Who or what did Lencho have faith in? What did he do?

Lencho had full faith in God. He wrote a letter to God asking for a hundred pesos.

2. Who read the letter?

The postmaster read the letter which was given to him by one of the postmen.

3. What did the postmaster do then?

The postmaster decided to collect the money requested by the writer of the letter and send it to him in the name of God, in order not to shake the writer's faith in God.

Oral comprehension check 3

1. Was Lencho surprised to find a letter for him with money in it?

No, Lencho was not in the least surprised as he had utmost confidence in God and knew that God wouldn't deny his request.

2. What made him angry?

He had requested God for a hundred pesos. However, when he counted the money, he realised that only seventy pesos had reached him, and was angry as he felt that the post office employees had stolen the rest of the money.

Thinking about the text.

1. Who does Lencho have complete faith in? Which sentences in the story tell you this?

Lencho has complete, unflinching faith in God, which is revealed through lines like: (i) 'All through the night, Lencho thought of his only hope: the help of God, whose eyes, as he had been instructed, see everything, even what is deep in one's conscience', (ii) he requests God to send him a hundred pesos to sow his field again, (iii) he writes 'to God' on the envelope, (iv) when he gets the money, he is not at all surprised, which depicts his confidence, and finally, (v) when he finds the money to be less, he is sure that God could not have made a mistake or denied him the full amount that he had requested for.

2. Why does the postmaster send money to Lencho? Why does he sign the letter 'God'?

The postmaster is touched by Lencho's faith in God which prompts him to start a correspondence with God. Therefore he sends him money, so that the man's faith in God is not shattered. He signs the letter 'God' so as to make the letter seem genuine.

3. Did Lencho try to find out who had sent the money to him? Why/why not?

No, Lencho did not try to find out who had sent him the money because he had complete confidence in God and never doubted that God would deny him what he had asked for.

4. Who does Lencho think has taken the rest of his money? What is the irony in the situation?

When Lencho counts the money at the Post Office, he realises that it was short of thirty pesos. There was only seventy, instead of the hundred pesos that he had requested for. He knew that God couldn't have made a mistake, or denied him the money. And since he had ultimate faith in God, he suspected that the Post Office officials had stolen the money.

The irony of the situation is that the money was given to him by the Post Office officials and Lencho suspects the very people who helped him.

5. Are there people like Lencho in the real world? What kind of a person would you say he is?

There are not many people in the real world, who are as simple and innocent as Lencho. He is naive and unquestioning. Though he writes a letter to God asking for money, he cannot be considered as stupid or comical. His actions are the result of his unflinching faith in God, which unfortunately the so called educated people lack. He is not greedy or selfish because, as a hardworking person, he believes that he has the right to seek God's help in times of trouble. He is neither ungrateful when he suspects the Post Official employees as he was unaware of the fact that they had helped him.

Extra questions:

Extract Based Questions:

1. *“Throughout the morning Lencho, who knew his fields intimately, had done nothing else but see the sky towards the north-east.”*

a) Where was Lencho at the moment?

- i). in his fields.
- ii). In front of his house
- iii). in the valley
- iv). None of the above

Ans: (ii)

b) Lencho’s house was situated _____

- i). by the river side
- ii) in the middle of the valley
- iii). On the crest of a low hill
- iv). At the foothill of the hill.

c) The only thing that the earth needed was a _____ (downpour or shower)

d) The field of ripe corn with the flowers promised a _____ (good harvest)

2. *“The man went out for no other reason than to have the pleasure of feeling the rain on his body.”*

a) What had Lencho predicted earlier in the story?

- i). that there would be rain
- ii). That the crops didn’t need water
- iii). That it would not rain
- iv). None of the above.

Ans) (i)

b) Lencho’s older boys were:

- i). playing near the house
- ii). Playing in the fields
- iii). Working in the fields
- iv). Swimming in the river

Ans) (iii)

c) When did the big drops of rain begin to fall?

The big drops of rain began to fall when the family was having their meal.

d) Lencho considered the raindrops as _____ (silver coins).

3. *"Now we are really going to get some water woman."*

a) Who is the woman?

- i). Lencho's sister
- iii). Lencho's wife

- ii). Lencho's daughter
- iv). None of the above.

Ans) (iii)

b) What was the woman doing?

- i). knitting
- iii). Cleaning the house

- ii). Preparing supper
- iv). Washing clothes

Ans) (ii)

c) What was the woman's reply?

Ans) Yes, God willing

d) Throughout the morning, Lencho, who knew his fields intimately, had done nothing else but _____
(see the sky towards the north-east)

4. *"The boys exposing themselves to the rain, ran out to collect the frozen pearls."*

a) What were Lencho's smaller boys doing before the rain?

- i). playing near the house
- iii). Studying

- ii). Playing in the fields
- iv). Helping the elder brothers

Ans) (i)

b) What are the frozen pearls?

- i). rain drops
- iii). Sugar cubes

- ii). Hailstones
- iv). None of the above.

Ans) (ii)

c) For an hour, the hail rained on the house, the garden, the cornfield and on the whole valley and the field was white as if _____ (covered with salt)

d) What is meant by 'plague of locusts'?

Destruction caused by the attack of a group of locusts.

5. *“But in the hearts of all those who lived in that solitary house in the middle of the valley, there was a single hope: help from God.”*

a) What is the meaning of the word ‘solitary’?

i). single

ii). Sole

iii). Crowded

iv). Both (i) and (ii)

Ans) (iv)

b) Why did the family need help from God?

i). the family was ill

ii) the family was poor

iii) hailstone destroyed their crops

iv) none of the above

Ans) (iii)

c) What did Lencho do next?

He wrote a letter to God.

d) Lencho requested God to give him _____ (100 Pesos)

6. *“But when he opened it, it was evident that to answer the letter, he needed something more than goodwill, ink and paper.”*

a) Who is ‘he’?

i). post man

ii) Lencho

iii) post master

iv) none of the above

Ans) (iii)

b) To whom was the letter addressed?

i). to the post master

ii) to the bank manager

iii) to God

iv) to Lencho’s friend

Ans) (iii)

c) The synonym of the word ‘obvious’ as given in the passage is _____ (evident)

d) What else did the post master need apart from goodwill to answer the letter?

The post master needed hundred Pesos to answer the letter.

Answer in 30-40 words:

1. What was Lencho's reaction when it started to rain?

Lencho went out into the rain to enjoy the feeling of the rain on his body, exclaiming that those weren't raindrops, but new coins. He regarded his ripe cornfield with a satisfied expression, as he hoped to get a good harvest and great profit.

2. How did the hailstorm affect Lencho's field?

The hailstorm completely ruined Lencho's field. The field was white as if covered with salt and not a leaf remained on the trees. The corn was totally destroyed and the flowers were gone from the plants. The hail left nothing.

3. What was the content of Lencho's letter to God?

Lencho explained how his crops were destroyed by the hailstone, and requested God to send him a 100 Pesos in order to sow his fields again and to live until the new crops came. After addressing 'To God' on the envelope, he posted it.

4. How did the postal officials react, when they saw Lencho's letter?

On seeing Lencho's letter, one of the postmen, laughing heartily, took it to the postmaster, who also broke out laughing. However, he immediately stops laughing and admiring the man's faith in God, wishes that he too had the same faith: the faith to start up a correspondence with God.

5. Why did the post master decide to help Lencho? How did he do it?

The postmaster was deeply moved by Lencho's faith in God and decided to reply to the letter in order to retain the man's faith in God. When he realised that he needed a hundred Pesos to do so, he gave a part of his salary, and persuaded his friends and employees to contribute for charity. Thus he was able to collect seventy Pesos, which he placed in an envelope addressed to Lencho, along with a paper signed 'God'.

6. Why wasn't Lencho surprised on seeing the money? How did he react when he counted the money?

Lencho was not surprised on seeing the money as he had full confidence in God. When he found that thirty Pesos were missing, he became very angry. Since he knew that God couldn't make a mistake or deny him his request, he suspected the postal officials of stealing the money.

7. What does Lencho do when he finds that there is only seventy Pesos?

Suspecting the postal officials of stealing the money, Lencho immediately writes another letter to God, informing him of the shortage, and requesting him to send it fast as he needed it very much. He also warned God not to send it through mail as the postal officials were crooks.

Write in 100-120 words:

1. There are two kinds of conflicts in the story: between humans and nature and between humans themselves. How are these conflicts illustrated?

Man is in constant conflict with nature and is often helpless before its destructive force. While nature can bless the crops with a good shower, it can also ruin the crops with its fury. The conflict between humans and

nature is beautifully explained with the example of Lencho's crops being destroyed by the storm. Lencho, a hard working farmer, relies on the weather for a good harvest. He dances with joy when he receives the beneficial rains. However, his joy is short lived, as the rain turns into a hailstorm which completely destroys his crops. His whole field is covered with hailstones and the corn is totally ruined.

Humans are also in conflict with each other. We are always suspicious of our fellow men and never trust them. In the story, Lencho blames the post office employees of stealing the money send by God, whereas it was a contribution of their kindness. Unaware of this Lencho considers them as crooks.

2. "Faith can move mountains." Elucidate with the example of Lencho.

Lencho, the poor farmer, was totally ruined when a hailstorm completely destroyed his ripe corn field. The whole family was upset as they would have to starve that year. However, they had a single hope: help from God. Lencho consoled his family saying that no one died of hunger as God's eyes saw everything.

So he wrote a letter to God explaining his condition and requesting a hundred Pesos in order to sow his field again, and to live till the next harvest. His unflinching faith in God is rewarded through the medium of the post master, who is impressed by Lencho's faith. Thus we can say that God worked through the post office officials and satisfied Lencho's request, thereby sustaining his faith.