

CLASS IX ENGLISH



*Lessons
from
The Last Leaf*



**TAGORE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL
NEW DELHI
(Affiliated to C.B.S.E.)**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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PREFACE

“In the depth of winter, I finally learned there lay within me an invincible summer.”

Albert Camus

This graphic novel is an attempt to make readers and learners not only appreciate life and count their blessings but also help develop their ability to interpret characters, theme and literary devices. This carefully selected piece by O. Henry would not only cater to the needs and interests of adolescents but also hold the mirror up to different aspects of life and people.

This novel is different from the other versions of the story, as an effort has been made to illustrate the theme of the story by relating it to the Coronavirus pandemic which hit the world in 2020. The story shows the journey of a young boy, from hopelessness to hope and take lessons from the story, *The Last Leaf*. The two narratives in the novel have been carefully juxtaposed with interesting activities. An effort has been made to help students hone their analytical skills and creative thinking.

We sincerely hope that this vivid illustration not only improves the students’ understanding of the story but also helps them become perspicacious learners who can comprehend well and critically analyse the characters and the message given in the story. The activities given at the end of the novel will not only help students to deepen their understanding of the story, but also integrate art with their learning.

STORY BOARD

Lessons from *The Last Leaf*



Pandemic induced anxiety :
Arjun is not willing to attend online classes due to mental anxiety caused by Coronavirus pandemic.



Similarities between Arjun and Johnsy: Mrs. Bose feels Arjun bears similarities with Johnsy's character in the story, *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry.



Dealing with mental health and depression: Mrs. Bose helps Arjun overcome his anxiety by suggesting him to read *The Last Leaf* by O. Henry. The characters come to life in his imagination.



Behrman's supreme sacrifice:
A surprise act by Behrman helps Johnsy to regain her interest in life.



Sue's role as a true friend:
Sue tries her best to motivate Johnsy and make her appreciate life.



Johnsy's strange supposition:
Johnsy feels that when the last leaf of the ivy creeper outside her window falls, she will die too.



Choosing hope over hopelessness: Johnsy becomes hopeful about life and so does Arjun.



Symbolism in the story: Taking lessons from *The Last Leaf*, Arjun overcomes his anxiety and brings out the symbolism hidden in the story, *The Last Leaf*.



Importance of art in human life:
Mrs. Bose makes Arjun realize how Behrman's masterpiece inspired Johnsy and also gives an art integration activity to Arjun.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

❖ **The readers will be able to:**

- interpret the feelings of the characters at each stage.
- extract key information from the story and relate it to real life incidents.
- explain the significance of the title.
- read the text for enjoyment/pleasure and compare, interpret and appreciate characters, themes, plots, and incidents.
- correlate incidents in the story to situations in real life.
- understand and elicit meanings of the words in different contexts and by using dictionary, thesaurus and digital facilities.
- identify and appreciate significant literary elements, such as, metaphor, imagery and symbolism.
- analyse the relationship between the characters and events in the story using these literary devices.
- use creativity and imagination and connect the discourse with real life contexts, expressing themselves through speech and writing.
- create a short story on a given theme.

Know the characters



Ms. Bose (English Teacher): A thirty year old, present day, English teacher fond of reading and writing. She is patient, calm and knowledgeable and is always ready with a smile to cater to her student's queries.

Arjun: A fourteen year old young boy of class IX, who loves playing football. He is an outgoing boy who is currently affected mentally and is depressed because of the Coronavirus pandemic. His parents are doctors.



Johnsy: A young artist belonging to Greenwich village in New York. She has been suffering from pneumonia and is depressed owing to her illness.

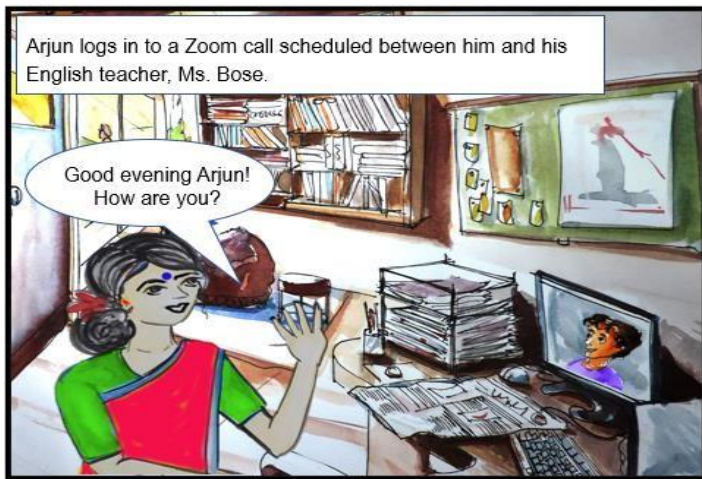
Sue: A young artist belonging to Greenwich village in New York. She is kind-hearted, practical and loves her friend, Johnsy dearly.



Behrman: A sixty year old painter who lives in the same building as Sue and Johnsy. He lives a Bohemian lifestyle and is not successful commercially. He usually earns his living by either selling his paintings or acting as a subject for his fellow painters.

Johnsy's doctor: A middle aged doctor who attends to Johnsy and Behrman. He makes Sue realise that no amount of medicines can heal Johnsy except an inborn desire and will to live.





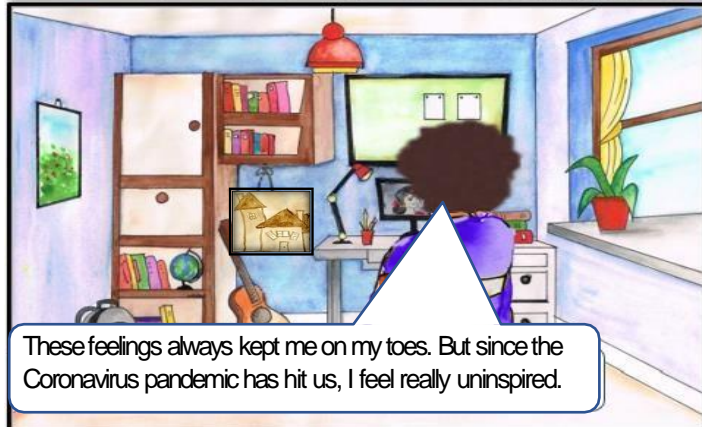
Arjun logs in to a Zoom call scheduled between him and his English teacher, Ms. Bose.

Good evening Arjun!
How are you?

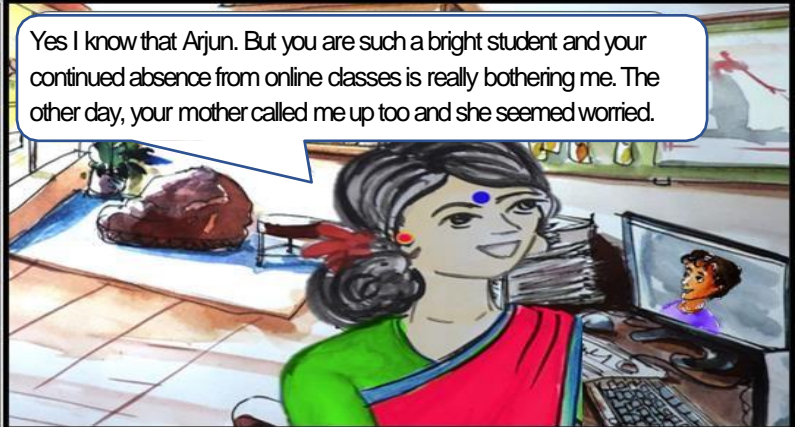


Good evening Ma'am. I am doing fine.

But I really miss coming to school. That ever buzzing school ground, the adventure and thrill surrounding those football matches, the excitement of those inter school competitions.



These feelings always kept me on my toes. But since the Coronavirus pandemic has hit us, I feel really uninspired.



Yes I know that Arjun. But you are such a bright student and your continued absence from online classes is really bothering me. The other day, your mother called me up too and she seemed worried.



Is it Ma'am? My mother called you up? I thought my parents had no time for me.



I can understand the fear surrounding the pandemic and I must admit, that my parents' contribution in the society as doctors is commendable. But amidst all this, they have forgotten about their only son.



What makes you think on those lines, Arjun?



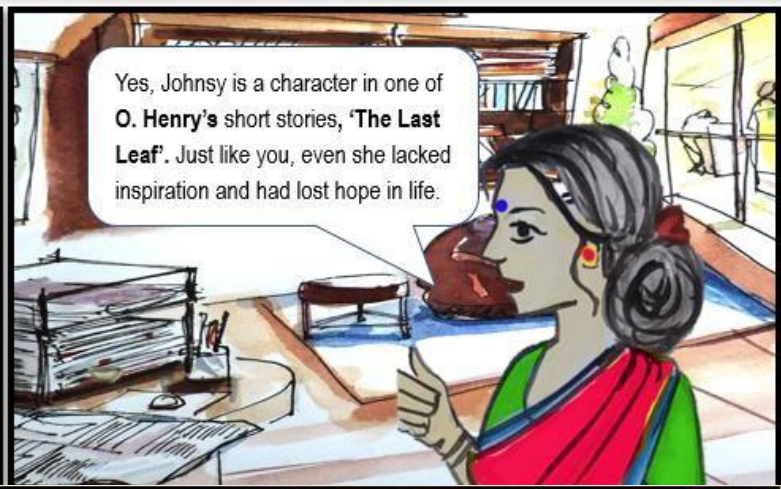
They are so occupied with their patients. I don't even realise when they leave home or when they are back. Moreover, watching them deal with COVID patients makes me perturbed about everything. I feel the end is near.

Glossary - perturbed: anxious; nervous.

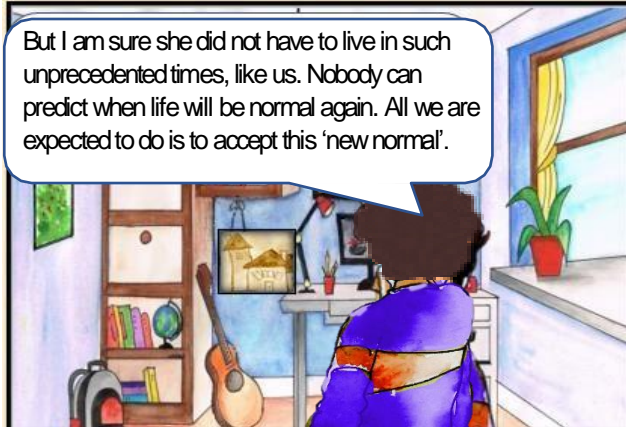


Call it a co-incidence Arjun!
But you remind me of **Johnsy**.

Johnsy?



Yes, Johnsy is a character in one of **O. Henry's** short stories, '**The Last Leaf**'. Just like you, even she lacked inspiration and had lost hope in life.



But I am sure she did not have to live in such unprecedented times, like us. Nobody can predict when life will be normal again. All we are expected to do is to accept this 'new normal'.



Well Arjun! Johnsy is a melancholic character.



She acquired pneumonia which was an epidemic in the Greenwich village in New York back in 1900's, just like Coronavirus is a pandemic all over the world now.

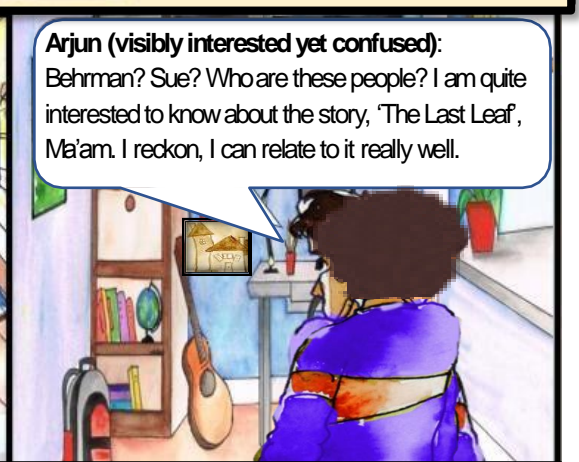
The illness had affected her mentally and she had a strange supposition that when the last leaf of the ivy creeper outside her house falls, she will die too.



Arjun (smirking): What a ludicrous thought! How could she co-relate her life to falling leaves of a tree?



Ms. Bose (with a smile on her face): That's exactly how Behrman felt about her, the first time he heard about Johnsy's situation from Sue.



Arjun (visibly interested yet confused): Behrman? Sue? Who are these people? I am quite interested to know about the story, 'The Last Leaf', Ma'am. I reckon, I can relate to it really well.

Glossary - unprecedented: unexampled or unparalleled; never known or experienced before.

pandemic: (of a disease) prevalent throughout an entire country, continent or the whole world.

supposition: an assumption believed to be true; hypothesis.

ludicrous: ridiculous; foolish.



(Arjun anxiously waits for the mail. His excitement is back. Finally, there is something for him to look forward to. He receives the mail and starts reading the story. As he is reading the story, the characters come to life in his imagination.)



ACTIVITY TIME

Check your understanding!

Tick the words which describe Arjun.

- anxious
- happy
- depressed
- disrespectful

Tick the words which best describe Mrs. Bose.

- naive
- comforting
- strict
- compassionate

Johnsy's Bedroom

Place: Greenwich Village, New York

Sue (anxiously):
Doctor, how is
Johnsy?

Doctor: (lowers his voice): I can't help her
anymore. Her illness seems to have taken
over her. She has lost the will to live.
Someone must make her happy again.
What is she interested in?

She's an artist. I think, art and
painting is what truly makes
her happy.

Doctor (doubtfully): Well! I seriously doubt
if it is helping her. (Pause). You see, Sue! I
can help my patients with medicines only to
an extent. The patients, too need to exhibit
a desire to live. I am afraid to say, Johnsy
has lost that desire.

(Sue is disheartened
to hear this)

You must work on rekindling her interests and hobbies. All
you can do is, give her hope and encouragement. May be
that would bring back her desire to live.

What can I do to help her?

Oh! I understand doctor.

(Sue stays in silence and the doctor leaves the apartment.)

Sue tried to make Johnsy interested in things she liked. She tried talking
to her about clothes and fashion but that didn't help her.

Sue starts working on a painting for a magazine in order to make funds for Johnsy's
treatment. Johnsy suddenly starts speaking.

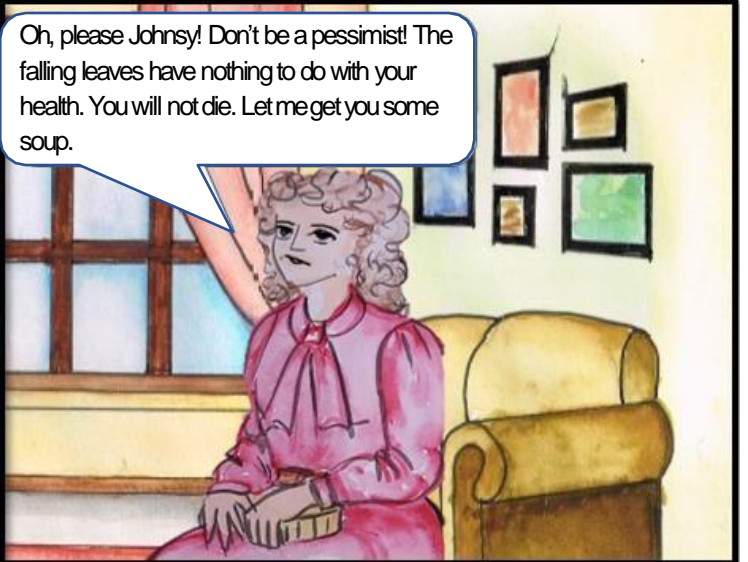
Johnsy (looking at the ivy creeper):
Twelve, eleven, ten, nine, eight, seven, six
(anxiously). They are falling even faster now.

It is the autumn season Johnsy! It is absolutely
normal for the leaves to fall.

Glossary -rekindling: to stir up; to rouse.



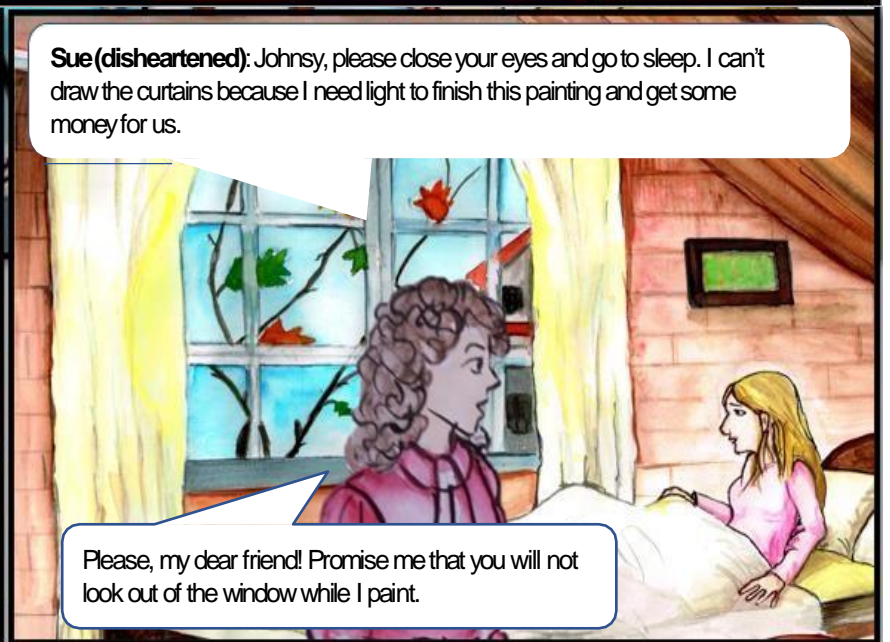
When the last leaf falls, I too, will die. My life is passing away just like the falling leaves of this creeper. I will not survive this illness. It has already taken so many lives. I am next.



Oh, please Johnsy! Don't be a pessimist! The falling leaves have nothing to do with your health. You will not die. Let me get you some soup.



I don't want any soup. I am not hungry... Now, there are only four leaves left. I want to see the last one fall before it gets dark and then I will sleep forever.



Sue (disheartened): Johnsy, please close your eyes and go to sleep. I can't draw the curtains because I need light to finish this painting and get some money for us.

Please, my dear friend! Promise me that you will not look out of the window while I paint.



Johnsy (Closed her eyes, but talking softly) (Coughing): I am so tired of this illness and watching you working so hard to support me. I want to rest and drift away quietly, just like those falling leaves.

Oh Johnsy! Please try to sleep. I'm going to talk to Behrman for a minute. He will be my subject for the painting, as I have to draw an old miner. Now! Promise me, you won't move till I come back.

Glossary -pessimist: a person who anticipates the worst of everything.

Behman is drawing a picture in his room. Sue suddenly enters his room. Sue sits in a chair and Behman stops drawing. Sue's eyes are filled with tears.

I am so worried about Johnsy. She believes that when the last leaf of the ivy creeper outside our house will fall, she too will die.

What a ludicrous thought to have! How can she be so unwise to link her life to the falling leaves of an ivy creeper? I will come with you and see Johnsy.

Thank you for understanding. Her illness has affected her mentally. The epidemic induced anxiety has filled her mind with strange and morbid thoughts.

(Holding herself together.)

Sir! Will you pose for my painting?

Of course, I will! You see Sue! I may not have been commercially successful. But I am very sure that, someday, I will make a masterpiece. Let's move to your room.

Johnsy is sleeping when Sue and Behman reach the room. They look at each other, but neither speaks.

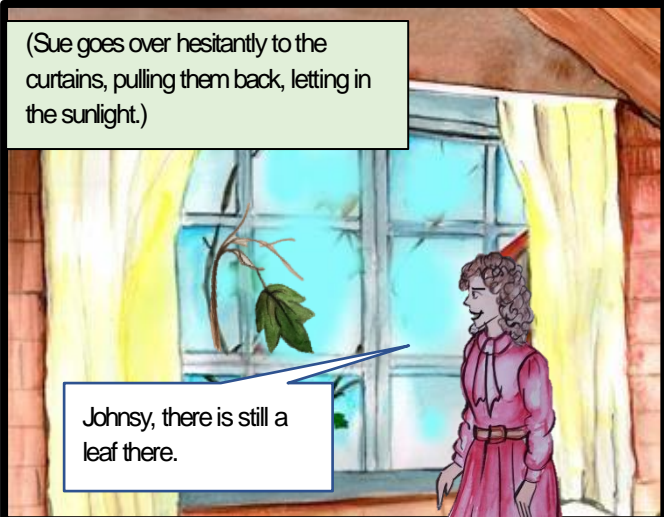
Behman moves closer to the window and looks out of the window to see the leaves of the ivy creeper.

Sue continues painting Behman's sketch. Old Behman sits down and keeps noticing Johnsy, feeling sorry for her.

Glossary - morbid: an unhealthy mental state or attitude: unwholesomely gloomy.



Sue! Will you draw open the curtains? I want to see the ivy creeper.



(Sue goes over hesitantly to the curtains, pulling them back, letting in the sunlight.)

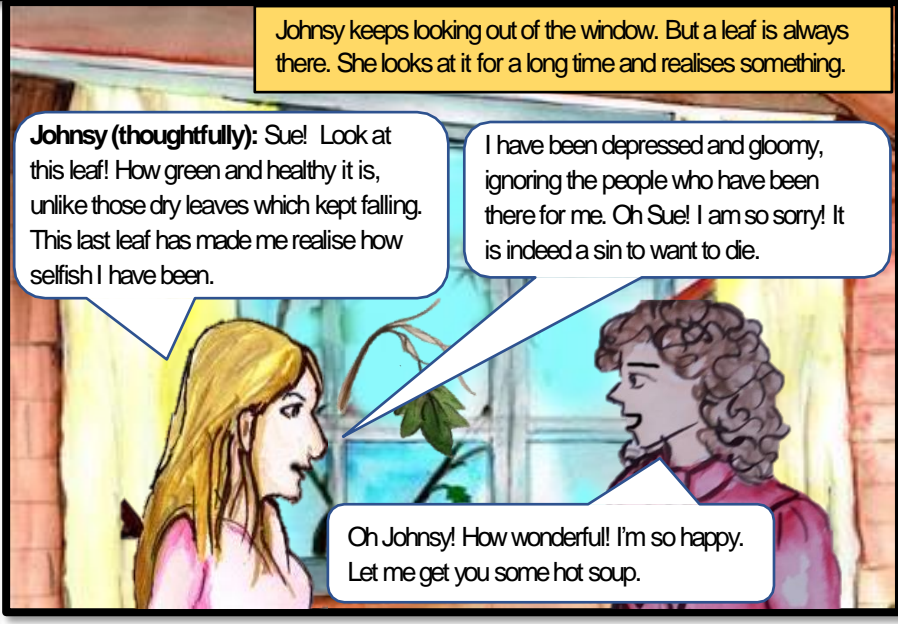
Johnsy, there is still a leaf there.



It's the last one. It will fall today and I'll die at the same time.



You can't die Johnsy! Think about me! What will happen to me if you die?



Johnsy keeps looking out of the window. But a leaf is always there. She looks at it for a long time and realises something.

Johnsy (thoughtfully): Sue! Look at this leaf! How green and healthy it is, unlike those dry leaves which kept falling. This last leaf has made me realise how selfish I have been.

I have been depressed and gloomy, ignoring the people who have been there for me. Oh Sue! I am so sorry! It is indeed a sin to want to die.

Oh Johnsy! How wonderful! I'm so happy. Let me get you some hot soup.

Johnsy is no longer looking depressed. Her will to live is back. She picks up the mirror, combs her hair and smiles brightly.

The doctor comes to check on Johnsy and is happy with her recovery.



Doctor (smiles): I am so glad to see her now. You don't need to worry. All she needs now is good food and nursing. You have been a good friend, Sue!

Sue (smiles): Thank you Doctor! I can't explain how relieved I am.

Good! And now I must see another case in this building. His name is Behrman.

Sue (worried): Behrman? You mean the old painter? What happened to him?

Pneumonia. His condition is quite bad. I am afraid to say, there is no hope for him.

The doctor leaves Sue's apartment and moves to Behrman's flat. Sue is in a state of shock and disbelief.

Its daytime. Sue comes and starts talking to Johnsy.

Sue (taking Johnsy's hand in her hand): I have something to tell you Johnsy. Mr. Behrman died of pneumonia today.

Johnsy (shocked): Oh, dear God, no! Are you referring to the artist who posed as a miner for your painting? This is indeed shocking. He was a very good man.

Sue (lowers her voice): He'd been ill for only two days. On the morning of the first day, the janitor found him in his bed in wet clothes. He was shivering.

At first, they couldn't imagine that he had been out in a stormy night. But then they found a lantern and a ladder that had been dragged from its place, and in his room, they found brushes and green and yellow paints on the floor.

Sue (continued): Look out of the window, at the last leaf on the ivy creeper. Haven't you wondered why it never flutters or moves when the wind blows?

Sue and Johnsy hold their hands together and move closer to the window.

That leaf is Mr. Behrman's masterpiece. He painted it the night, the last leaf fell.

Sue and Johnsy look at the last leaf for a few moments with tears in their eyes and they draw the curtains.

Glossary - Janitor: A person employed to clean, maintain and take care of a property.

ACTIVITY TIME

Check your understanding about setting and characters.

- **Tick the words which describe Greenwich village.**

- urban
- secluded
- modern city
- countryside

- **Tick the words which describe Sue.**

- hard working
- vibrant
- creative
- melancholic

- **Tick what Johnsy lacks in the beginning.**

- friendship
- love
- money
- a strong will

Write whether the following statements are true or false:

1) Johnsy's ailment affected her mentally.

2) Sue thought of Johnsy as a burden.

3) The doctor hoped that Johnsy would get better with time.

4) Johnsy is a workaholic while Sue is a dreamer.

5) Behrman's dream is to paint a masterpiece.

Arjun logs in to a Zoom call scheduled between him and his English teacher, Ms. Bose.

Good evening Ma'am.

I couldn't wait for the meet today. Thank you for suggesting such a thought-provoking story.

You are welcome Arjun! I hope you no longer feel uninspired.

Indeed Ma'am. I am now hopeful about life.

I am glad! Now, I have something to show you. (shows Arjun a dry leaf and a green leaf).

So Arjun! Now that you have read the story. Can you tell me what are these two leaves symbolic of?

Ma'am, I feel that the dry leaf symbolizes death and depression, while the green leaf is symbolic of hope and life.

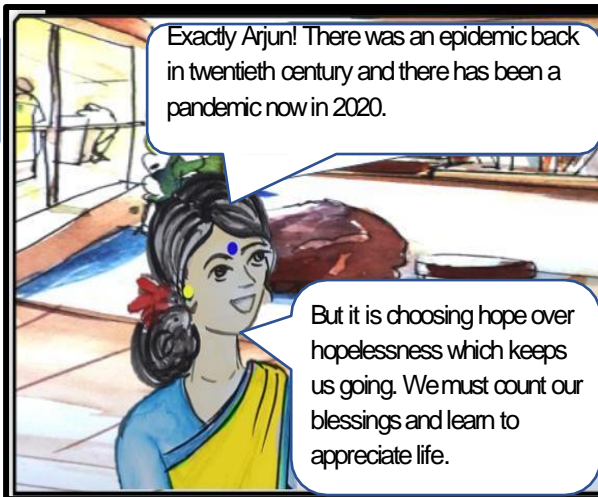
Wow! That's exactly the purpose the leaves serve in the story.

You surely have understood the symbolism the author tried to convey. I am sure you can now understand, why the story is titled, *The Last Leaf*.

Glossary - symbolic : used or seen to represent something.



Yes Ma'am. It was the last leaf after all, which re-ignited the hope to live in Johnsy.



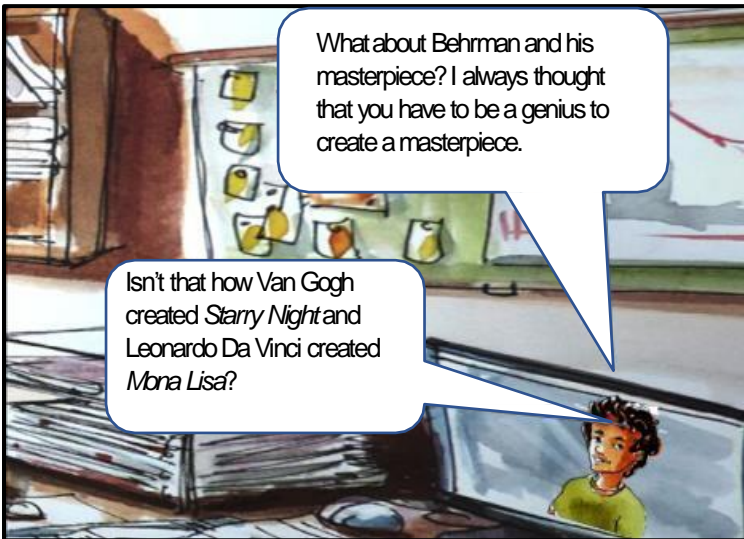
Exactly Arjun! There was an epidemic back in twentieth century and there has been a pandemic now in 2020.

But it is choosing hope over hopelessness which keeps us going. We must count our blessings and learn to appreciate life.



I agree with you Ma'am. But I have a doubt.

Sure! Go ahead!



What about Behman and his masterpiece? I always thought that you have to be a genius to create a masterpiece.

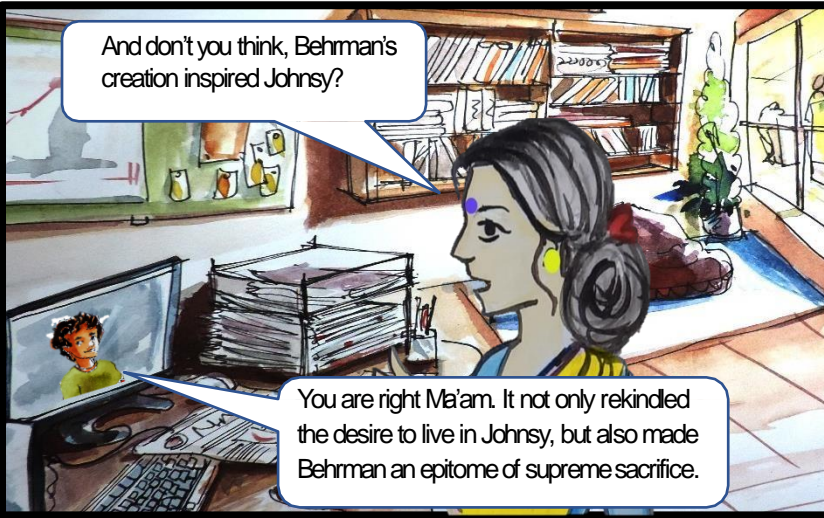
Isn't that how Van Gogh created *Starry Night* and Leonardo Da Vinci created *Mona Lisa*?



That is a relevant question, Arjun.

Indeed Ma'am.

But don't you think an art form becomes a masterpiece, when it succeeds to inspire you?



And don't you think, Behman's creation inspired Johnsy?

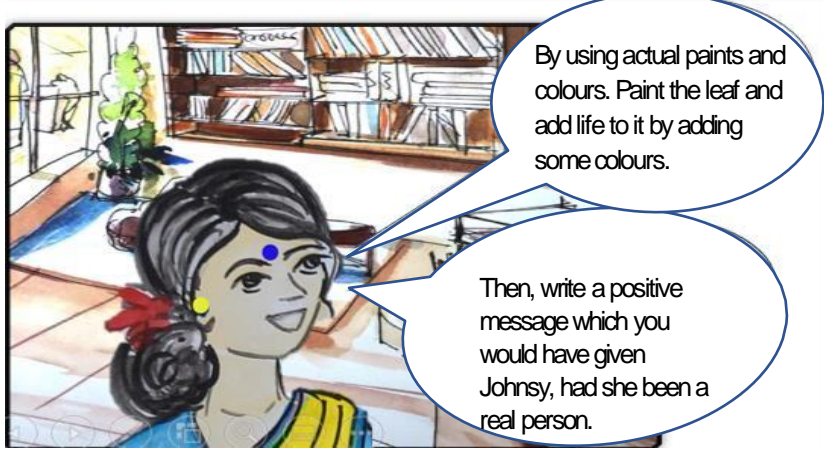
You are right Ma'am. It not only rekindled the desire to live in Johnsy, but also made Behman an epitome of supreme sacrifice.



So lets leave on a positive note today. I have a task for you.

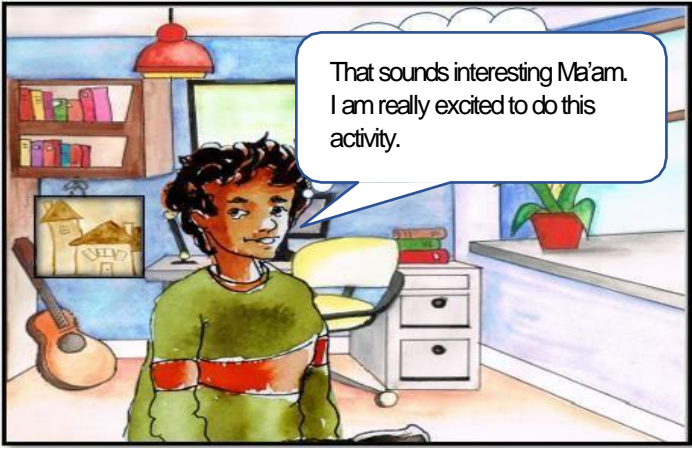
I want you to pick up a dry leaf and add some colour to it.

How can I do that, Ma'am?



By using actual paints and colours. Paint the leaf and add life to it by adding some colours.

Then, write a positive message which you would have given Johnsy, had she been a real person.



That sounds interesting Ma'am. I am really excited to do this activity.

i) Creative Corner

Reviving a life (Leaf Art)

You noticed that Mrs. Bose gave an interesting task to Arjun. Taking ideas from the same, paint a dried leaf, using the art form, 'Leaf painting'. On the flip side of the leaf, write a positive message you may have given Johnsy when she wanted to die.

ii) Think about it:

a) Did you know that O. Henry was the pen name of William Sydney Porter (September 11, 1862 – June 5, 1910), a short-story writer famous for his surprise endings or the 'twists' in his stories. In *The Last Leaf*, Johnsy is the one whose life is at stake but it is Mr. Behrman who dies in the end, while Johnsy survives. Now that we know how Mr Behrman died, think about some points and discuss them with a friend:

- How did Behrman's creation become a masterpiece?
- What made Mr. Behrman an epitome of supreme sacrifice?

b) Literary devices: Reflect on the use of the following literary devices and their usage in the story.

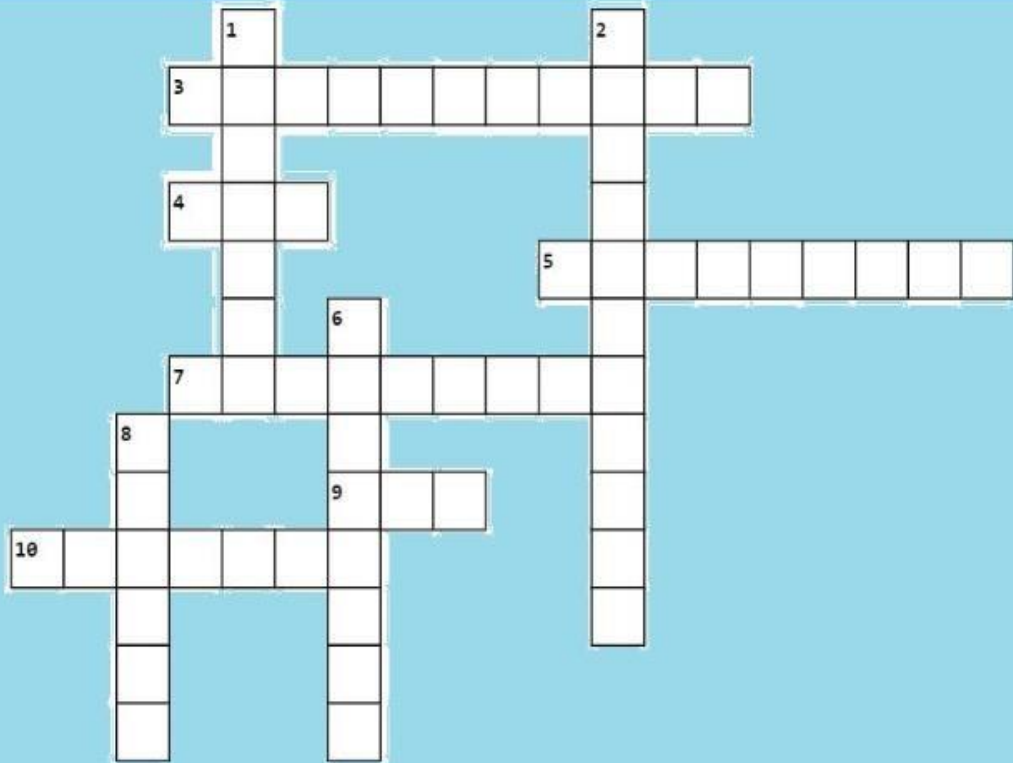
- Symbolism: Something representing something else.
Example. Dove represents peace
- Metaphor: A direct comparison
Example: He was a lion in the battlefield.
- Imagery: When what you read, creates an image in your mind - includes smell, touch, sight etc.
Example. The ice was here, the ice was there, the ice was everywhere.

iii) Pen it down!

a) The spirit of sacrifice: A sacrifice is an act of giving up something for somebody else. We saw how Mr. Behrman gave up his life to help Johnsy in *The Last Leaf*. But sacrifices are not always as great as Mr Behrman's. We make small sacrifices almost every day. How about you? What is the greatest sacrifice you have ever made for your family or friends? Write a short story about something you sacrificed, so that you could help somebody else. (Word Limit: 100-120 words)

b) "Friends are angels who lift us up when our wings forget how to fly". Sue plays an extremely important role in the story. She stands true to the definition of a true friend. Do you agree? Taking ideas from the story, write a brief note on the friendship between Johnsy and Sue.

Crossword



Across

3. What did Behrman want to paint?
4. How many leaves were left on the vine after Johnsy got better?
5. Which epidemic had affected Johnsy?
7. Where did Johnsy and Sue live?
9. What kind of vine were the leaves on?
10. Who was the epitome of supreme sacrifice?

Down

1. What is Old Behrman's profession?
2. According to Mrs. Bose, Johnsy is a _____ character.
6. The doctor wanted Sue to _____ Johnsy's interests.
8. Which character from *The Last Leaf* does Arjun share similarities with?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- *Moments*- Supplementary Reader in English for Class IX published by NCERT.
- http://www.rdlthai.com/ellsa_lastleaf1.html

DISCLAIMER

This novel is published as a supportive reading material to enable the students to have a better understanding of the topic. The characters used in this graphic novel are fictional and resemblance to any character or incident is merely a coincidence. Artwork is a combined effort of the students and the teachers. The graphics have been handled by the IT department of the school.

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FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

Dear readers,

'Change is the only constant', so said a wise man from the past. And so true indeed!

With the coming of the National Education Policy 2020, the focus of education is shifting to more student centric education, and thus the need to produce the content in a way which can be easily understood by the students.

The Central Board of Secondary Education has also brought in alterations in the way education was being imparted in the classrooms of the nation. Art Integration with the curriculum, competency based education, stress on Physical Fitness are all endeavours to prepare the students for the necessities of the future. One such endeavour is also changing the curriculum to graphic novels.

Conceived and directed by Mr. Sandeep Sethi, his passion rubbed on to the teachers as well. He lent support through constant guidance.

I am also grateful to Ms. Anita Karwal, Secretary, Department of School Education, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, whose valuable inputs and constant motivation has encouraged teachers to curate the concepts in the form of interesting graphics. I am very sure that this will change the way topics are taught in the classrooms. Using comic strip as a tool, concepts will be explained in a simple way, more relatable to the students.

Our sincere thanks to the worthy team of Ms. Anita Karwal, Secretary, Department of School Education, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Mr. Manoj Ahuja, Chairman, Central Board of Secondary Education and Mr. Sandeep Sethi, the pilot of the project.

My sincere thanks are also due to the team of gifted teachers and students who in a time-bound frame produced creatively endowed content which will be a visual extravaganza for the students.

Enjoy reading!

Mallika Preman
Principal

SUMMARY

“Wake at dawn with a winged heart and give thanks to another day of loving.”

-Kahlil Gibran

This carefully constructed graphic novel, works on the above idea by Gibran and motivates the learners to not only not lose hope but also be grateful for the life they have. The novel juxtaposes two narratives and talks about an outgoing boy named Arjun, who is mentally affected because of the COVID pandemic. His teacher Mrs. Bose tries to help him by narrating the famous story, ‘The Last Leaf’ by O. Henry.

‘The Last Leaf’ takes the readers back to the early twentieth century in Greenwich village, New York. This literary delight by O. Henry talks about Johnsy, a young artist who suffers from pneumonia and loses the hope to live. It is only with the help of her friend Sue and a surprise act by Behrman that she learns to appreciate life.

The story leaves a lasting impact on Arjun, who makes his own journey from hopelessness to hope and from pessimism to gratitude.

Printed and Published by:
Tagore International School
E Block, East of Kailash
New Delhi-110065
(Affiliated to C.B.S.E.)
E-mail : info.eok@tagoreint.com
Website : www.tagoreint.com