

**GIST:**

In this story, the author tries to present a world as seen from a child's perspective. The main character of this story is an eight year old girl who lives near a bus stop in a village. For major part of the day, she enjoys standing in her doorway; watching frenetic activities at the bus stop. Valli develops a desire to enjoy a ride on the bus but she needs to plan meticulously to realize her dream. She has to curtail her expenses so that she can save enough money for two-way fair. She also has to make the journey during the time when her mother takes afternoon nap. While on her journey, Valli does not want anybody's help and wants to feel independent. She enjoys every bit of her journey to the town. But she is careful enough not to get off the bus in the unknown environs of the town. On her return journey, a sad accident spoils her mood and she just keeps to herself throughout the journey. She does not seem to be satisfied with one ride and wishes to make another attempt in future. She is also quite mischievous when she is sure that her mother did not know about her journey.

**EXTRACT BASED COMPREHENSION QUESTION EXERCISES:**

1. Day after day she watched the bus, and gradually a tiny wish crept into her head and grew there: she wanted to ride on that bus, even if just once. This wish became stronger and stronger until it was an "overwhelming desire. Valli would stare wistfully at the people who got on or off the bus when it stopped at

the street corners. Their faces would kindle in her longings, dreams and hopes. If one of her friends ride the bus and tried to describe the sights of the town to her, Valli would be too jealous to listen to tug shout, in English: 'Proud! Proud' Neither she nor her friends really understood the meaning of the word but they used it often as a slang expression of disapproval.

**Questions:**

- (a) What was Valli's 'tiny wish'?
- (b) What would Valli wistfully stare at?
- (c) When were Valli's longings, hopes and dreams kindled?
- (d) When would Valli be jealous?
- (e) Find a word from the passage which means 'excite'.

**Answers:**

- (a) Valli's tiny wish was to travel by bus.
- (b) She would stare wistfully at the people who got on or off the bus.
- (c) The sight of the bus passengers would kindle in her longings, dreams and hopes.
- (d) She felt jealous when one of her friends described the sights of the town to her.
- (e) 'Kindle.'

2. The bus rolled on now cutting across a bare landscape, now rushing through a tiny hamlet or past an odd wayside shop. Sometimes the bus seemed on the point of gobbling up another vehicle that was coming towards them or a pedestrian crossing the road. But lo! Somehow it passed on smoothly leaving all obstacles safely behind. Trees came running towards them but then stopped as the bus reached them and simply stood there helpless for a moment by the side of the road before rushing away in the other direction.

**Questions:**

- (a) From which story have these lines been taken?
- (b) What did the bus pass by?
- (c) How does the author describe the landscape?
- (d) How did the trees appear from the moving bus?
- (e) Find a word from the passage which means 'village'.

**Answers:**

- (a) These lines have been taken from the story, 'Madam Rides the Bus.'
- (b) The bus passed by a bare landscape, a tiny hamlet or an odd wayside shop.
- (c) The author says that the landscape was bare.
- (d) The trees appeared to be coming towards the moving bus.
- (e) Hamlet

3. Suddenly Valli clapped her hands with glee. A young cow, tail high in the air, was running very fast, right in the middle of the road, right in front of the bus. The bus slowed to a crawl, and the driver sounded his horn loudly again and again. But the more he honked, the more frightened the animal became and the faster it galloped—always right in front of the bus. Somehow this was very funny to Valli. She laughed and laughed until there were tears in her eyes.

**Questions:**

- (a) Why did Valli clap her hands with joy?
- (b) What did the bus driver do when there was a cow on the road ahead of him?
- (c) What was the effect of honking of the horn on the cow?
- (d) What seemed very funny to Valli?
- (e) Find a word from the passage which means 'ran very fast'.

**Answers:**

- (a) Valli clapped her hands with joy to see a young cow, tail high in the air, running very fast, right in front of the bus.
- (b) He sounded the horn loudly again and again.
- (c) The cow was more frightened and it ran faster.
- (d) The running of the cow just in front of the bus was very funny to Valli.
- (e) Galloped.

4. Her first journey—what careful, painstaking, elaborate plans she had to make for it; she had thriftily saved whatever stray coins came her way, resisting every temptation to buy peppermints, toys, balloons, and the like, and finally she had saved a total of sixty paise. How difficult it had been, particularly that day at the village fair, but she had resolutely stifled a strong desire to ride the merry-go-round, even though she had the money.

**Questions:**

- (a) Who does 'her' refer to in the passage?
- (b) Where was her first journey made to?

- (c) What did she do to make it a reality?
- (d) How did she save the money for the bus fare?

**Answers:**

- (a) Valli.
- (b) Town.
- (c) She made careful, painstaking and detailed plans to make it a reality.
- (d) She thriftily saved every penny, resisted temptation to buy things for her liking or taking a ride on the merry-go-round.

**Character Sketch**

Valliammai: She emerges as a very clever, sensitive, self-respecting and fun-loving girl. She was just eight years old. She was a determined girl with a commanding nature. She was very curious about things. Her favourite pastime was standing in the front doorway of her house. She was mature, clever and practical beyond her years. Saving sixty paise was not an easy job for a girl of her age. She was determined to resist any temptation that came in her way. Valli didn't like being called 'madam' or 'child'. She was a great planner and planned things after knowing all the necessary details about them.

**SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS: (30-40 Words)**

Q1. What was the favourite pastime of Valli?

Ans. Valliammai or Valli was eight years old. Her favourite pastime was standing in the front doorway of her house. From there, she watched what was happening in the street outside. For her, standing at the front door was as enjoyable as any of the games other children played.

Q2. Why did Valli find the elderly woman absolutely repulsive?

Ans. The elderly woman who was sitting beside Valli in the bus looked absolutely repulsive to Valli. She had big holes in her ears and had ugly earrings in them. She didn't relish the smell of the betel nut that she was chewing. The betel juice was about to spill over her lips at any moment. She couldn't be social with such a woman.

Q3. What dampened Valli's enthusiasm during the return journey?

Ans. During her return journey, Valli saw a young cow lying dead by the side of the road. She was the same lovable and beautiful cow that she saw only a little while ago. Now, it looked so horrible and frightening as it lay there. There was a fixed stare in her lifeless eyes and she was smeared with blood. The sight dampened her enthusiasm and she stopped looking outside.

Q4. Give examples from the text to show that Valli was a meticulous planner.

Ans. Valli was a meticulous planner. She listened carefully to the conversations between her neighbours and people who regularly used the bus and also asked discreet questions. She picked up various small details about the bus journey and then planned.

**LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 Words):**

Q1.” Never mind,” she said, “I can get on by myself.” “You don’t have to help me,” said Valli to the conductor. She shows extraordinary courage in making the bus journey all alone. Taking inspiration from Valli’s character, write how the ability and courage to take risk are essential to fulfilling one’s dream. Or Valli nurtures a strong desire to travel by bus and visit the city. She works hard for it and finally, she is successful. Based on this incident, analyse what values of life do you need to nurture to attain your goals in life?

Ans. Valli is an eight-year-old village girl. She is fascinated by the bus that comes to the village every hour. She develops a desire and then a longing turning into a firm determination to ride the bus. She meticulously plans for it and saves money for the bus journey. Then she boards the bus without anyone’s help. She travels all alone, confidently and independently and finally returns home successfully. Her self-dependence and self-respecting nature help her to nurture her goal. She enjoys her journey. Similarly, to achieve goals in life, we need to have such values in us. One should be confident and self-dependent. Proper planning and strong determination lead to success. Enthusiasm and excitement to achieve the goal are also needed to nurture our goals in life.

Q2. Justify the statement with instances that Valli was a mature girl and ahead of her age?

Ans. Valli was an eight-year-old village girl. She had no playmates. Her favourite pastime was to stand at the doorstep and watch things and people. She not only satisfied her curiosity but also gained new experiences. Her strongest desire was to make a bus-ride. She meticulously planned for it gathered information about the distance, time and ticket money. Showing self-restraint, she resisted the temptation to buy peppermint, toys or a ride on the merry-go-round in order to save 60 paise for the bus journey. She boarded the bus without anyone’s help, refused a free treat by the conductor and didn’t talk to strangers. This shows her commanding, confident and self-dependent nature. This also shows her determination and maturity at such a little age.

Q3. Describe Valli's return journey.

Ans. The bus resumed its return journey. There were the same wonderful sights. Valli enjoyed the scene again. But suddenly she saw a young cow lying dead, by the roadside. It had been struck by a fast moving vehicle. She asked the conductor if it was the same cow they saw earlier. The conductor nodded. Valli became sad. It had been a lovable, beautiful creature just a little ago. But now the cow was without its charm and its life. The bus moved on. The memory of the dead cow haunted Valli. She no longer wanted to see out of the window. She kept sitting on her seat until her village came. She got down and wished the conductor to see him again. The conductor smiled. He told Valli that whenever she felt like riding the bus she could come and join them.

Q.4. Why does Valli refuse to look out of the window on her way back?

Ans. On her way to the town, Valli laughed heartily to see a young cow running at high speed in the middle of the road just in front of their bus. But on her way back, she saw a young cow lying dead near the road. She asked the bus conductor if it was the same cow that was running in front of the bus. The bus conductor nodded. She was shocked and sad. So she refuses to look out of the window on her way back because what was so beautiful a little while ago now looked so horrible. The memory of the dead cow haunts her. It dampens her enthusiasm.

### **UNSOLVED QUESTIONS:**

#### **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS: (30-40 Words)**

1. What details did Valli pick up about the bus journey? How did she pick up these details?
2. What was the most fascinating thing for Valli?
3. How did Valli manage to leave the house?
4. How did Valli react when the conductor called her "a very grown-up madam?"

#### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 Words):**

1. Do you think that Valli enjoyed her first ride on a bus? Give examples in support of your answer.
2. Valli was so overcome with sadness to see the dead cow that she lost all enthusiasm. Do you feel the same way? If you feel concerned about the plight of animals falling prey to the fast-moving traffic, what efforts will you make to make travelling on roads a safer activity?
3. How did Valli save up money for her first journey? Was it easy for her? Justify.
4. How can you say that the conductor was a good-natured jolly fellow? Support your answer with examples.

## **The Tale of Custard the Dragon (POEM)**

### **GIST**

The Tale of Custard the Dragon' is a whimsical fantasy. Belinda lives alone in her house with four pets, a dog, a cat, a mouse and a dragon named Custard. All other dwellers of the house except Custard, pride themselves on their fearlessness. They mock poor Custard for his timidity. However, when the real danger comes all others run away in a panic except Custard. Only Custard fights ferociously and swallows the pirate. The poem ends ironically. After the danger is past, everyone begins to boast again about their courage. Ironically, Custard who fought like a hero against the pirate agrees that everyone else is braver than he is. So, appearances may be deceptive. And even your merit and real value may not be recognised by your unwilling rivals.

### **Extract Based Comprehension Questions:**

- 1- Custard the dragon had big sharp teeth, And spikes on top of him and scales underneath, Mouth like a fireplace, chimney for a nose, And realio, trulio, daggers on his toes.

### **Question**

- (a) What did the dragon look like?
- (b) Why is the dragon's mouth called a chimney?
- (c) Which word in the stanza means the same as "a small sword"?
- (d) Find from the passage a word which means a structure through which smoke or steam is carried up away from a fire.

### **Answer**

- (a) The Dragon had spikes on top and scale underneath. His mouth was like a fireplace and nose was like a chimney. He looked dangerous as his toes looked like daggers.
- (b) Dragons can spit fire, therefore Custard's mouth has been called a fireplace.
- (c) The word is 'Dagger'.
- (d) The word is 'Chimney'.

- 2- Suddenly, suddenly they heard a nasty sound, And Mustard growled, and they all looked around. Meowch! cried Ink, and Ooh! cried Belinda, For there was a pirate, climbing in the winda.

### **Question**

- (a) Which poetic device is used in these lines?

- (b) Why was everyone frightened?
- (c) Which word in the stanza means “unpleasant”?
- (d) What does a ‘nasty sound’ refer to? Answer:

### Answer

- (a) In the first line, the poet has used repetition in ‘Suddenly, suddenly’.
- (b) Everyone was frightened because a pirate was climbing up the window.
- (c) The word is ‘Nasty’.
- (d) A nasty sound refers to the entry of a pirate into the house.

3- Belinda paled, and she cried, Help! Help! But Mustard fled with a terrified yelp, Ink trickled down to the bottom of the household, And little mouse Blink strategically mouse holed.

### Question

- (a) How did the people in the house react on seeing the pirate?
- (b) Why did everyone cry for help?
- (c) What does ‘mouseholed’ mean?
- (d) Write the antonym of ‘bottom’. Answer:

### Answer

- (a) Belinda became pale with fear and the Mustard fled the scene. Ink went to the bottom of the house and Blink vanished in a mouse hole. They all cried for help.
- (b) Everyone cried for help because they all got frightened of the pirate.
- (c) Mouseholed has been used by the poet to mean the hole made by the mouse in which it disappeared.
- (d) The antonym of bottom is ‘brim’.

### SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS: (30-40 Words)

Q1. How did Custard the dragon face the pirate? What was the outcome of their fight?

Ans: Custard the dragon jumped up snorting. He clashed his tail. Thus, he prepared himself to face the pirate. The pirate was amazed at this heroic gesture of the dragon. He gulped some wine to cheer up his drooping spirits. He fired two bullets but missed the aim. In the meantime, Custard the dragon swallowed him.



Q2. How did Belinda and her pets behave when the pirate had been killed by Custard?

Ans: When the pirate had been killed by Custard, Belinda embraced him, Mustard licked him and Ink and Blink gyrated around him.

Q3. How did all boast of their false bravery?

Ans: After the pirate had been killed, Mustard boasted that he would have been twice as brave if he had not been confused. Ink and Blink said that they would have been thrice as brave.

Q4. How is 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon' a ballad?

Ans. A ballad is a poem that tells a story. The theme of a ballad is an adventure, bravery, romance, etc. Then it is highly musical due to its rhyme scheme. This poem has these qualities. But it is a parody of a ballad. The poet shows these qualities in a humorous way.

### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 Words)**

Q1. The dragon, Custard was considered a coward. The humble dragon proved his bravery in adversity. Analyse that certain qualities like bravery and courage are situational and spontaneous. Express your views with reference to the poem.

#### **Answer**

Custard's humbleness won every reader's heart as he showed true bravery and did not boast like Belinda and her other pets. Everyone boasted of their bravery but when they faced real danger, it was only Custard, who had the courage to face it. And he proved his bravery by not running away and facing the pirate and killing him. Qualities like bravery and courage can only be tested when someone is actually put in a dangerous situation. Therefore, these qualities are situational as becomes clear from Custard's example. Custard looked for comfort all the time but this did not mean that he was a coward.

Q2. Do you think that one should be made fun of because of their 'preferences and choices in life'? Explain in the context of Custard, the dragon.

#### **Answer**

It is not right to make fun of anyone on the basis of their life style and their choices. Custard, the dragon, always wanted comfort and safety for him and therefore always cried for a nice safe cage. Belinda and other pets of the house made fun of him because they thought that he was a coward. Custard proved that just

because he likes comfort, he is not a coward. In fact, he was the only one, who had the courage to face the pirate and kill him.

Q3. Evaluate Ogden Nash's 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon' as a ballad. What message does the poet give to the readers in this poem?

Ans. Ballads are stories told in verse. Generally, ballads are tales of adventures and heroism. In the poem, the poet does present the encounter of Custard and the pirate in the typical spirit of a ballad. The four-line stanzas have the rhyme scheme: aa, bb throughout the poem.

Ogden Nash gives a subtle message to the readers through the fate of Custard, the dragon. In this world of deceit, self-confidence, self-dependence and self-respect are essentials to earn your rightful place among your peers. The mere presence of physical strength is not enough. The more important point is that you must be conscious of your strength. You must be fully aware of the fact that many others who are far inferior in strength and power should have no right to taunt and ridicule you.

## **UNSOLVED QUESTIONS**

### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS (100-150 Words)**

1. Why do you think Custard, the dragon, was called a coward? How was Custard able to save all his house-mates from the pirate? What values should Belinda have possessed so that Custard too could have been among her favourites?
2. Describe the fight between the dragon and the pirate.
3. Was everyone really as brave as they claimed? What did everyone do When the pirate came?

### **SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS: (30-40 Words)**

1. Who all lived in a white house with Belinda?
2. Why did everyone make fun of the dragon?
3. Why did Ink and Blink gyrate in glee?
4. Did Custard accept his cowardice and their bravery