

4-THE RATTRAP

-Selma Lagerlof

Selma Lagerlof talks about the universality of human goodness that can be awakened through understanding love, compassion and belief. Experience is the best of school masters and the peddler was able to get a vital lesson after his encounter with situation and people both. Finally his goodness surfaces and temporary phase of his bad practices ends. The world turns to be a good place to live.

Gist of the lesson:

□ The peddler was a vagabond who sold rattraps with a little thievery on the side to make both ends meet. Had no worldly possession to call his own, not even a name. It amused him to think of the world as a rattrap and all the material possessions as bait as the world, he felt was never kind to him. Moreover, he prided himself in the fact that he was out of it.

□ Takes shelter at a crofter's cottage. The crofter welcomed him, gave him dinner, shared his pipe, played mjolis with him also confided in him about his income and showed him where he put it. Next morning, the Peddler steals the money and takes the back roads to keep away from people and gets lost in the jungle at night. While he

wanders in the forest he realizes that he has also got caught in the rattrap and that the money was the bait.

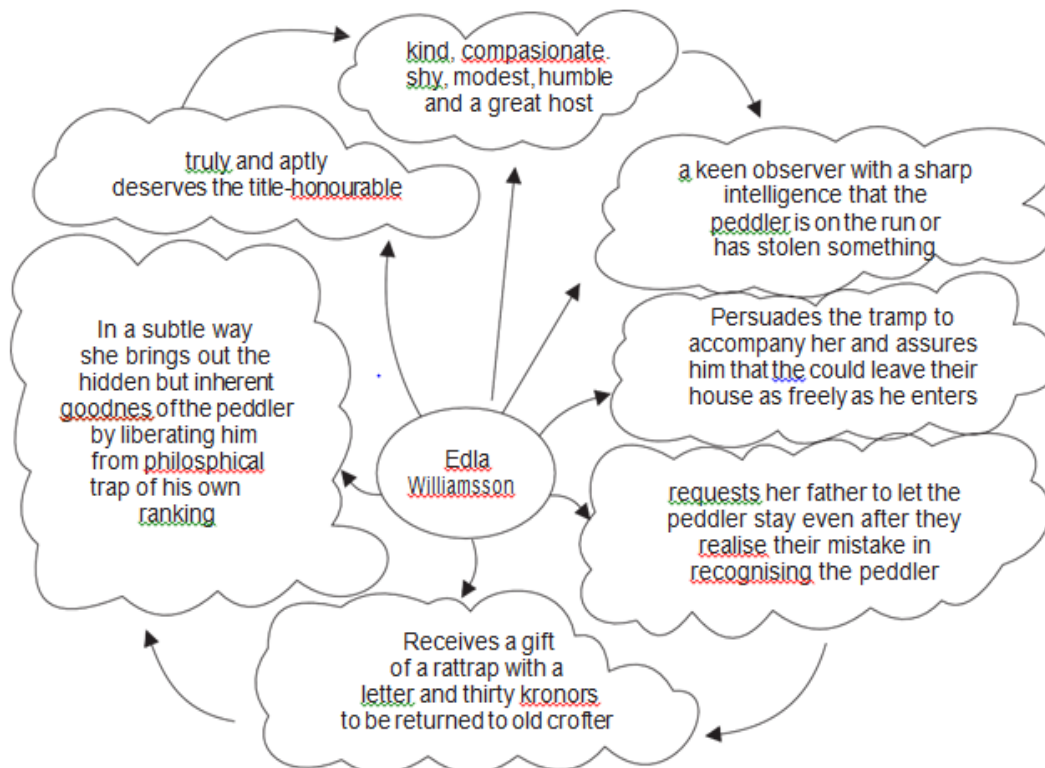
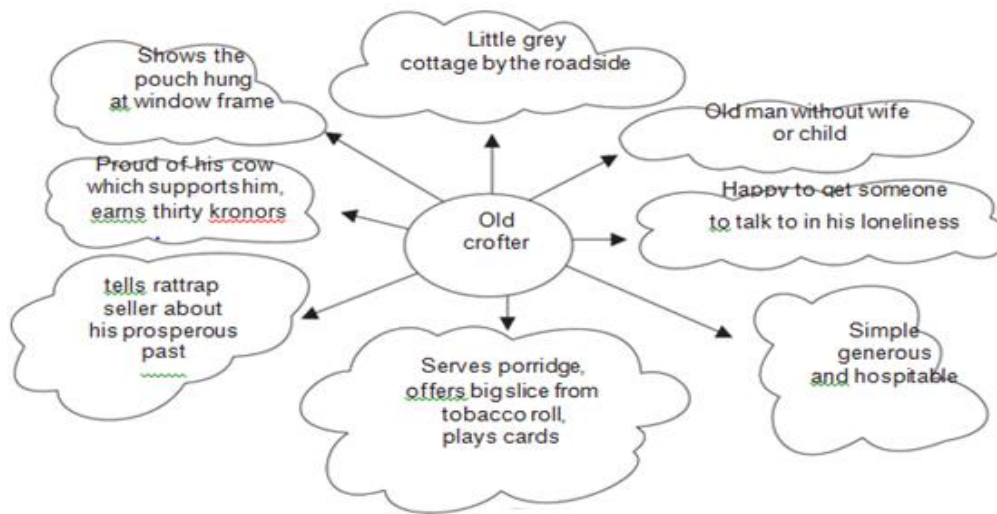
□ Finally reaches Ramsjö ironworks, where he takes shelter for the night. The blacksmith and his assistant ignore him but the master mistakes him to be an old acquaintance and invites him home. Though the Peddler does not correct the ironmaster, hoping to get some money out of him, he declines his invitation. The ironmaster then sends his daughter who persuades him to go home with her. She notices his uncouth appearance and thinks that either he has stolen something or he has escaped from jail.

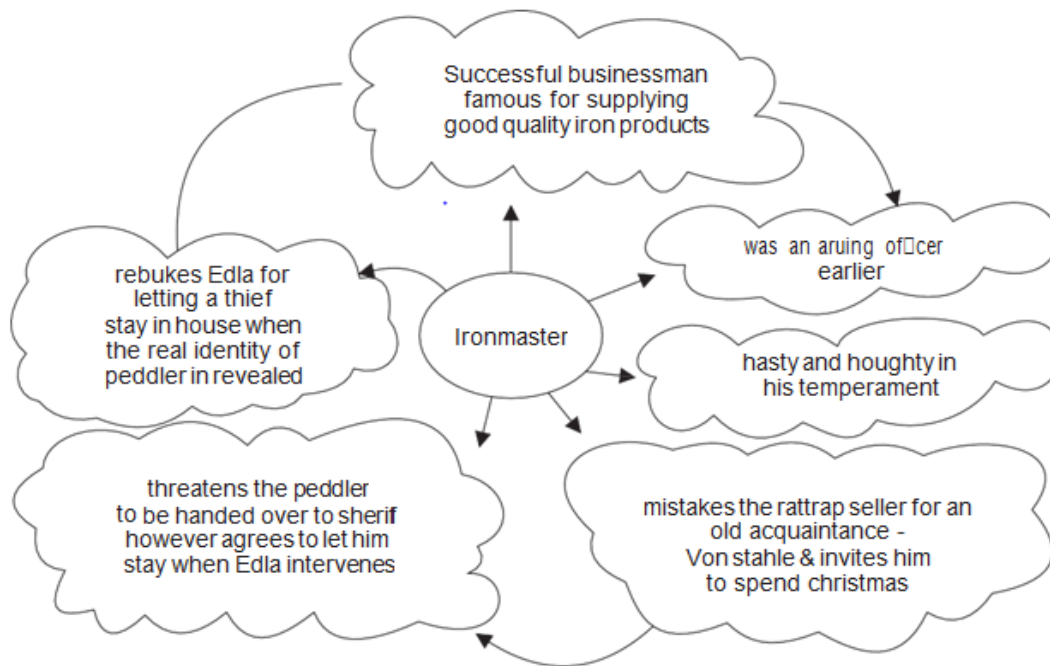
□ The Peddler is scrubbed, bathed, given a haircut, a shave and a suit of old clothes of the ironmaster. In the morning light, the iron master realizes he is mistaken and that he is not the Captain. He wants to call the Sheriff. The peddler is agitated and breaks out that the world is rattrap and he too is sure to be caught in it. The ironmaster is amused but orders him out. The compassionate Edla convinces her father that he should spend the Christmas day with him.

□ The Peddler spends the whole of Christmas Eve eating and sleeping. The next day at church, Edla and her father come to know that the Peddler is a thief who stole thirty kroners from the poor crofter. Back home, they found a letter addressed to Edla, signed as Captain Von Stahl and a rattrap as a gift from the crofter. In the rattrap were the three ten kroner notes

LESSON AT A GLANCE







EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS :

1. "His guest was now so well groomed, the ironmaster did not seem pleased"

- (a) Who is the guest ?
- (b) Why was the ironmaster not pleased ?
- (c) Why did the guest keep quiet earlier ?
- (d) How would you react if you were the ironmaster ?

2. "I never pretended to be anything but a poor trader, and I pleaded and begged to be allowed to stay in the forge."

- (a) Who is the speaker ?
- (b) Why was he in the forge ?
- (c) How would you react if you were in his place ?
- (d) What do you mean by 'pleaded' ?

3. "It was all a mistake of course," she continued. 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."

- (a) Who is the speaker ?
- (b) What was the mistake?
- (c) What did she do then ?

(d) What would you do if you were in place of ironmaster ?

4. "That was a fine fellow you let into the house," said her father. " I only wonder how many silver spoons are left in the cupboard by this time."

- (a) Who is the fine fellow?
- (b) Whose father said these words ?
- (c) Why did he doubt him ?
- (d) What did the father wonder ?

5. "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.

Written with friendship

And high regard ,

Captain Von Stahle."

- (a) What is the Christmas present ?
- (b) Where would he have been caught ?
- (c) How did he get the power to clear himself?
- (d) Why did he sign as Captain Von Stahle ?

6. "But even so, the business was not specially profitable, so he had to resort to both begging and petty thievery to keep body and soul together."

- (a) Who is he in the above lines ?
- (b) What business is being talked about ?
- (c) Why 'he' had to resort to both begging and petty thievery ?
- (d) What does the word 'resort' mean ?

7. "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."

- (a) What does the rattrap offer to anyone ?
- (b) How did everything come to an end ?
- (c) Cheese and pork are referred to as what in the extract ?
- (d) Give synonym for 'tempted'.

8. "Then he carved off such a big slice from his tobacco roll that it was enough for the stranger's pipe and his own."

(a) Who carved off a big slice from his tobacco roll ?

(b) Who is the stranger in the extract ?

(c) What quality of the person is being revealed from the extract ?

(d) What does 'carved off' mean ?

9. "She entered, followed by a valet, carrying on his arm a big fur coat. She was not at all pretty, but seemed modest and quite shy."

(a) Who is she in the given lines ?

(b) What was the valet carrying ?

(c) Mention a character trait of the lady from the extract.

(d) Give the antonym of 'pretty'.

10. "She looked at him compassionately with her heavy eyes, and then she noticed that the man was afraid."

(a) Who is the man in the extract?

(b) Why was he afraid?

(c) Why did the lady look at the man compassionately ?

(d) What does 'heavy eyes' mean ?

SHORT ANS. TYPE QUESTIONS-SOLVED 30-40 WORDS.

1. How did the rattrap seller manage to survive?

Ans He made rattraps of wire and went around selling them. Since the business was not much profitable, he would beg or steal in order to survive.

2. How did the peddler repay the kindness and hospitality of the roadside owner ?

Ans. The peddler left the cottage but returned again, broke the window pane and stole the thirty kroners from the pouch hung there. 3. Why could the peddler not come out of the forest?

The forest was big and confusing. The paths turned back and forth. He realised that he had been walking around in the same part of the forest.

4. Why did the peddler decline the invitation of the iron master?

The iron master mistook the peddler to be an old acquaintance. The peddler did not want to clear his identity in expectation of money. He realised going to the manor house would be inviting danger.

5. What hospitality did the peddler enjoy at the manor house?

The peddler was bathed, shaved, cleaned, dressed in a good looking suit, was supplied with shoes. He was served meals and allowed to share Christmas festivities.

SHORT ANS. TYPE QUESTIONS-UNSOLVED (Word limit 30-40 words)

Q 1. What thought took hold of the tramp's fancy?

Q 2. What was the ambition of the Ramsjo iron mill owner? what did he do to achieve it?

Q 3. What was the sentiment expressed by the tramp in the letter that he left for Edla? Why did he sign himself Captain Von Stahle?

LONG ANS. TYPE QUESTIONS (ABOUT 125 WORDS) SOLVED.

1. The story 'The Rattrap', explores the idea that human beings possess the innate tendency to redeem themselves from their dishonest ways if motivated. Discuss.

Ans. The inherent goodness can be aroused by love, compassion and understanding as in the case of the rattrap seller, who made his living by stealing, thieving and begging. Once he happened to stay at night in a crofter's cottage who was very nice and hospitable to him but he stole the crofter's money and escaped into the forest. He somehow reached the iron mill, where the iron master mistook him for an old acquaintance and asked his daughter to bring the peddler home. She took great pains, looked after the peddler, fed him well and was kind to him. She gave him a suit and invited him for the Christmas next. All this gave rise to the virtues and humaneness innate in him and also helped him to redeem himself from his dishonest ways of stealing and begging.

LONG ANS. TYPE QUESTIONS

1. What rattrap was the peddler trapped in? How did he come out of it?

Key points

- The whole world a rattrap
- world full of temptations
- shelter food, joy and riches – are the baits.
- the bait that he fell for was at the crofter's house
- blamed the crofter for having tempted with his bait.
- initially refused the offer of iron master thinking it to be another bait.
- after meeting with Edla, he got reformed and returned the thirty kronors in a rattrap.

2. Describe how the story, "The Rattrap" shows that basic human goodness can be brought out by understanding and love.

Ans. The story 'The Rattrap' highlights the fact that compassion and concern can awaken the essential goodness in a man. The peddler, who had been resorting to begging and thievery all the time, never bothered to clear his identity befuddled the ironmaster too. But, Edla gave him a royal treatment, served him delicious supper, gifted her father's dress to him.

The kind of unconditioned love and compassion from Edla made him realise his mistake and he confessed his guilt too.

This way, she made a lot of difference in his life and he got transformed into a much better person. He left the stolen money behind, even a letter and a gift for Edla.

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. The peddler betrayed the trust of the crofter and was caught in the trap of the world. Temptation to bait should be restricted at all cost. Write a note on "Strength of Character".

2. How are the attitudes of the iron master and his daughter different? Support your answer from the text.

3. The story 'The Rattrap' has many instances of unexpected reactions from the characters to others' behaviour. Pick out instances.