

HOW I TAUGHT MY GRANDMOTHER TO READ – SUDHA MURTY

1. “Education is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but a journey towards self-respect and independence.” Critically examine this statement in the light of the grandmother’s transformation in the story.

The grandmother’s journey in the story clearly establishes that education is deeply connected with self-respect and independence rather than just literacy. Initially, she remains content listening to stories, but her inability to read during the narrator’s absence makes her realise her dependence. This dependence hurts her dignity more than her illiteracy. Her decision to learn at sixty-two reflects a strong desire to reclaim control over her life. Through consistent effort, she achieves independence, which restores her confidence and self-worth. The act of touching her granddaughter’s feet symbolises her reverence for knowledge and her personal victory. Thus, education empowers her emotionally and socially, proving that its true value lies in enabling individuals to live with dignity and autonomy.

2. “The story challenges societal assumptions about age, learning, and capability.” Analyse how the narrative redefines these concepts through the grandmother’s character.

The narrative effectively challenges the conventional belief that learning is restricted to youth and that old age signifies decline. The grandmother’s determination to learn at sixty-two breaks this stereotype and redefines capability as a function of willpower rather than age. Initially, even the narrator perceives her ambition as unrealistic, reflecting societal conditioning. However, the grandmother’s dedication and success prove that intellectual growth is possible at any stage of life. Her disciplined learning process and eventual achievement highlight that age is not a barrier but a mindset. By transforming herself, she also transforms the narrator’s perception, reinforcing the idea that learning is lifelong. The story thus promotes a progressive outlook where determination, not age, defines human potential.

SHORT QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the grandmother felt embarrassed to ask someone else to read to her while the narrator was away?

The grandmother likely felt embarrassed because asking others to read would expose her illiteracy, which could be perceived as a personal weakness. Being an elder, she was expected to be wise and self-reliant, so depending on others may have hurt her sense of dignity. She also feared being pitied or judged by others. Her discomfort reflects a deeper emotional struggle between her self-respect and her limitation. Thus, her hesitation was not just about reading, but about preserving her honour and independence.

2. Why does the narrator initially laugh at her grandmother's determination to learn at the age of sixty-two?

The narrator initially laughs because she shares a common belief that learning is meant only for the young. Seeing her elderly grandmother suddenly wanting to study appears unusual and somewhat unrealistic to her. This reaction reflects a societal mindset that underestimates the abilities of older individuals. However, her laughter is not out of disrespect but surprise. As the grandmother proves her determination through consistent effort, the narrator's perception changes, and she begins to admire her, realising that learning has no age limit.

3. What significance does the story of Kashi Yatre have in both the grandmother's life and the story?

The story Kashi Yatre plays a crucial role in shaping the grandmother's emotional and intellectual journey. Initially, it serves as a source of joy and engagement, connecting her to its characters and themes. However, when she is unable to read it during the narrator's absence, it highlights her dependence and creates a sense of helplessness. This realisation motivates her to learn reading. Thus, the story becomes a turning point, symbolising her desire for independence and acting as the driving force behind her transformation.

4. What does the grandmother's desire to learn the Kannada alphabet reflect about her?

The grandmother's desire to learn the Kannada alphabet reflects her strong determination, courage, and self-respect. Despite her age, she refuses to accept her limitations and chooses to improve herself. Her willingness to become a learner shows humility and an eagerness to grow. It also indicates her desire for independence, as she no longer wants to rely on others for reading. Her actions challenge age-related stereotypes and highlight that learning is a continuous process, driven by inner motivation rather than external circumstances.

5. What lessons can we infer from the grandmother's action of touching the narrator's feet?

The grandmother's act of touching the narrator's feet teaches the importance of respecting knowledge and valuing teachers, regardless of age. It symbolises humility and acknowledges that learning is sacred. By treating her granddaughter as her teacher, she breaks traditional norms and shows that wisdom is not limited by age. The gesture also reflects gratitude and her sense of achievement after learning to read. It conveys that true respect is earned through knowledge and effort, and that education deserves the highest honour.

Additional Competency-Based Questions & Answers

6. Dependence is portrayed as more painful than illiteracy in the narrative. Evaluate the statement in the context of the story.

The narrative suggests that dependence causes deeper emotional distress than illiteracy itself. The grandmother had lived without reading skills for years without feeling inadequate, but when she was forced to depend on others during the narrator's absence, she experienced helplessness and frustration. This dependence affected her dignity and self-worth. It was not the inability to read but the reliance on others that troubled her most. This realisation pushed her to learn, showing that independence is a fundamental human need, often valued more than mere knowledge.

7. Education is presented as a means of empowerment rather than just literacy. Discuss.

In the story, education goes beyond the ability to read and write, becoming a source of empowerment and independence. For the grandmother, learning to read allows her to engage with stories and information without relying on others. This independence boosts her confidence and restores her dignity. Education thus transforms her from a passive listener into an active participant in her own life. The narrative highlights that true education empowers individuals emotionally and socially, enabling them to make their own choices and live with self-respect.

8. The relationship between the narrator and her grandmother contributes significantly to the narrative. Analyse.

The affectionate bond between the narrator and her grandmother is central to the story's development. Their relationship begins with shared storytelling sessions, creating emotional closeness. This bond later enables the grandmother to trust the narrator as her teacher, despite the reversal of roles. The narrator, in turn, supports her grandmother's learning with patience and care. This mutual respect and affection make the learning process meaningful and successful. The relationship thus acts as the foundation for both the conflict and the resolution in the narrative.

9. The narrator undergoes a change in perception through the course of the story. Examine.

At the beginning, the narrator views her grandmother's desire to learn with amusement, reflecting a limited understanding of age and learning. However, as she observes her grandmother's dedication and success, her attitude changes to admiration and respect. This transformation indicates her emotional and intellectual growth. She learns to appreciate perseverance and realises that learning is not restricted by age. The experience becomes a valuable lesson for her, shaping her outlook on education and human potential in a more mature and respectful way.

10. The narrative promotes the dignity of self-effort over passive acceptance. Analyse.

The story emphasises that self-effort is essential for maintaining dignity and self-respect. The grandmother does not accept her illiteracy as a permanent limitation but takes initiative to change her situation. Her decision to learn reflects courage and a proactive attitude. Instead of relying on others, she chooses independence through effort and determination. This approach not only improves her skills but also enhances her confidence. The narrative thus conveys that individuals should strive to overcome their weaknesses rather than accept them passively.