

Homesickness

By – Roald Dahl

A. Answer these questions.

1. Why did the speaker think that he may sound silly? How did he argue that he was not silly?
 - a. The speaker thought that he might sound silly for thinking that as a nine-year old he could make a number of grown-ups believe that he had appendicitis when he did not and thus get sent home from school. He argued that he was, in fact, not silly, by explaining that not long before, one of his sisters had actually had appendicitis, and he had observed closely how she behaved- how she hurt on the lower right side of her tummy, kept being sick and ran a temperature. So he knew exactly how to pretend to be ill so that he would be believed.
2. How did the speaker and his sisters react to the event of an operation inside their home?
 - a. The speakers and his sisters were very excited about the event of an operation inside their home. They lurked in the corridor outside the nursery while the operation was going on. They stood fascinated outside the nursery door, listening to the soft murmurs that could be heard from inside. They could smell the ether through a crack under the door and imagined what the patient might be looking like.
3. Who are the adults in the story? How did the speaker, as a child, feel towards them? Why do you think he felt that way?
 - a. The adults in the story are the speaker's nanny, the school matron, the school doctor, the speaker's mother and Dr Dunbar. The speaker, as a child, admired nanny as being very wise, and believed everything she told him. This could be because she had a ready reply for every question. He was rather afraid of the school matron. It could be because she was rather stern with him. He loved his mother and wanted to go home to her. He also admired Dr Dunbar greatly because Dr Dunbar was a skilful doctor as well as a wise and kind person. He listened to his advice and was grateful to Dr Dunbar for helping him.

4. Dr Dunbar taught the speaker a lesson, but he also helped him. How did he do that?
 - a. Dr Dunbar taught the speaker a lesson by pointing out that life is tough and the sooner he learned to cope with it, the better it would be for him. He explained why the speaker needed to face his homesickness. At the same time, he was kind, understanding and sympathetic. He told the school that the speaker had to stay at home for a few days so that the speaker's plan was not a complete failure and he did get to spend some time with his family.
- B. Read these lines and answer the questions.
 1. For years after that, I used to get nervous whenever I found a toothbrush bristle on my tongue.
 - A. Why did the speaker get nervous on finding a toothbrush bristle on his tongue?
 - a. The speaker had asked his Nanny what causes an attack of appendicitis and she had said that if loose toothbrush bristles were swallowed, then they get stuck in the appendix and turn it rotten. That is why he would get nervous if he found a loose toothbrush bristle on his tongue.
 - B. What can you understand about the speaker's attitude to his Nanny from this statement? Which other word support your answer?
 - a. From this statement it is clear that the speaker had great faith in his Nanny's wisdom. He believed whatever she told him. The other words that show his attitude towards his Nanny are 'Nanny, who in my eyes was filled with more wisdom than Solomon....'
 2. I entered the room clutching my stomach on the right –hand side and staggering pathetically.
 - A. Which room is being referred to?
 - a. The Matron's room in the speaker's school is being referred to here.

- B. Why was the speaker clutching his stomach on the right –hand side?
- a. The speaker was pretending to have an attack of appendicitis. He had observed his sister, who had really had such an attack, and she had complained of pain in the lower right side of her tummy. That is why he was clutching his stomach on the right- hand side.

C. Why was he ‘staggering pathetically’?

- a. The speaker was staggering pathetically because he was pretending to be in great pain. He was putting on an act of being very ill- so ill that he could not eat or walk properly.

3. Then I slipped in the clincher.

A. What was the clincher?

- a. The clincher was the speaker’s (false) report to the Matron that he had been sick all morning.

B. What do you think the word ‘clincher’ means here?

- a. Here the word ‘clincher’ means the final argument or statement that would decide the case. It is because the speaker said that he had been sick that the Matron finally began to believe him.

4. “Life is tough, and the sooner you learn how to cope with it the better for you.”

Why did Dr Dunbar say this to the speaker? Do you think after this incident he would face a similar situation differently? What would you do, if faced with a similar situation?

- a. Dr Dunbar said this because he had understood that the speaker had lied and pretended to be sick in order to come back home. He knew that the speaker maybe home sick again, or face other problems at school, but he had to be strong and face them bravely.

Yes, after this incident, the speaker would be able to bear his homesickness more bravely. He would not be so miserable and would not try so hard to come back home.

