ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alphonse Daudet was a French short-story writer and novelist, now remembered chiefly as the author of sentimental tales of provincial life in the south of France. He was born on May 13, 1840 at Nimes in France. He was the son of a silk manufacturer. In 1849 his father had to sell his factory and move to Lyon. Alphonse wrote his first poems and his first novel at age of 14. He died on Dec. 16, 1897 in Paris, France.
INTRODUCTION

The last lesson written by Alphonse Daudet narrates about the year 1870 when the Prussian forces under Bismarck attacked and captured France. The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine went into Prussian hands. The new Prussian rulers discontinued the teaching of French in the schools of these two districts. The French teachers were asked to leave. Now M. Hamel could no longer stay in his old school. Still he gave the last lesson to his students with utmost devotion and sincerity as ever... One such student of M. Hamel, Franz who dreaded French class and M. Hamel’s iron rod, came to the school that day thinking he would be punished as he had not learnt his lesson on participles. But on reaching school he found Hamel dressed in his fine Sunday clothes and the old people of the village sitting quietly on the back benches. It was due to an order from Berlin. That was the first day when he realized for the first time that how important French was for him, but it was his last lesson in French. The story depicts the pathos of the whole situation about how people feel when they don’t learn their own language. It tells us about the significance of one’s language in one’s life for the very existence of a race and how important it is to safeguard it.

THE SETTING OF THE STORY (BACKGROUND)

The present story is set during the days of Franco–Prussian War (1870–1871) in which France was defeated by Prussia led by Bismarck. At that time Prussia consisted of Germany, Poland and some parts of Austria.

The French district of Alsace and Lorraine were captured by Germans. The new master was to come the next day in a school in Alsace to teach German in place of French. The story tells the effect of this news on the life at a school in Alsace.
“Chauvinism” is a devotion for or against something, just based on what you feel (not necessarily what you may know). So, Linguistic chauvinism is the idea that one’s language is superior to that of others. ‘The Last Lesson’ very prominently raises the question of linguistic and cultural hegemony of the colonial and imperial powers and their lust for controlling the world and influencing their cultures and identities.

Linguistic chauvinism is the overt preference for one language over others. Language is considered to be the cultural identity of a particular group of people who use it. Hence, imposing some other language on the people hammers their emotions and is a step to annex their relationship with their culture. The language of any country is the pride of that country. It not only defines the culture but also tells us about the people, literature and history of other country. Language for some people is just the medium of communication but for others it is the question of life and death.

People of Lorraine and Alsace are the victims of linguistic chauvinism. They are forced to learn German.

2. SUB THEME

“The Last Lesson”, beautifully brings out the human tendency to postpone the learning of things, feeling there is plenty of time to do so.

It highlights the point that people realise the importance of their mother tongue/national language only when they are refrained from using it. We tend to take our language for granted. It is only once we are refrained from using it, we realise how important it is for our identity as a citizen of a particular country.
The Last Lesson has two major characters:

1. **Franz**: Franz is the young French student at a school in Alsace-Lorraine.

2. **Monsieur Hamel**: school-master, who has been teaching French in a school for 40 years.

The story has a few other very minor characters:

- Wachter: the blacksmith
- M. Hamel’s Sister: who lives with Hamel
- Hauser: is an older gentleman

**SUMMARY OF THE LESSON AT A GLANCE**

The Last Lesson is a first-person narrative whose speaker is a little boy named Franz. The boy is a resident of Alsace-Lorraine district of France that has lately been occupied by the Prussians.

The setting is an unnamed town in Alsace, and the story takes place near the beginning of the Prussian occupation of Alsace and Lorraine, about 1873. Little Franz is the narrator of the story. Having gotten a late start on this beautiful warm morning, Franz rushes to school. He is fearful that **Monsieur** Hamel will scold him because he is late and has not prepared his French lesson on participles.

On his way to school, Franz passes through the town square, and in front of the town hall he sees a small group of people reading notices posted on a Bulletin Board. These are notices posted by the Prussians concerning orders issued from headquarters. While Franz is running across the square, Wachter, the blacksmith, calls to him that there is no need to hurry. Franz thinks that Wachter is teasing him.
Out of breath, he arrives at school. To his dismay, there is no noise or confusion to cover his entrance. Instead, this day, there is the silence and stillness of the Sunday. Frightened and red-faced, he enters the classroom; instead of giving Franz a harsh scolding, however, Monsieur Hamel gently directs Franz to his seat.

Once settled in his seat, Franz begins to notice the differences that this day has brought. Monsieur Hamel is all dressed up in his Sunday best, the clothes that he wears when prizes are given or on inspection days. Franz’s classmates are especially solemn this day. Then his attention is drawn to the back of the room, where villagers are seated, and to Hauser, there with his old primer spread across his knees. He couldn’t understand until M Hamel announced the notice which was served from Berlin that now onwards no French would be taught in schools of Alsace and Lorraine, only German would be taught in the schools of these two French cities and he emotionally requested students to be more attentive for their last French lesson. Franz now realized that what was there on notice board in Town Hall.

These words of notice fell on Franz like a thunder clap. He couldn’t believe it would be his last lesson that day. He was badly repenting that why he didn’t learn, never paid attention to his lessons. He hardly knew how to read and write French. He was repenting that instead of studying he would go for other pleasant activities. His book that seemed always burden to him now to same appeared to him like old friends. Even his thoughts for his teacher M. Hamel changed as he realized that he would never see him again as it was his last day in the school. He forgot about his cranky nature and his cruel ruler. Now he could realize that the teacher had worn this dress in honour of his last lesson. He also understood why older people were present in class as they were repenting why they never bothered to go to school and they were there to show their respect to their teacher, who served them for forty years.

When Franz’s name was called to recite the lesson, he made mistake and could even speak few words but M. Hamel did not scold him rather he preached him that one should not waste his precious time just by living under the impression that there is plenty of time and postponing the important things for next day. How would they feel when the Germans will make fun of them that they were not able to speak or write the French despite of being Frenchmen? Teacher did not put all blame on Franz, but he also blamed the parents who never bothered to send their children to school to study, instead they put their children to work on farms and in mill to earn extra money. Even he blamed himself that he often would send his pupils to water his plants instead of study at school and he would declare a holiday whenever he wanted to go for fishing.

Teacher further said about the French language that it was the most beautiful, clearest and most logical language of the world. People should stick with their language it will prove to be a key to their prison in case they are enslaved. A magic had happened that day in class the students understood everything very well, because they were more attentive and teacher was more patient and polite on that day.
Finally, with a very heavy heart, M Hamel stood up, he was very sad as he walked to the black board, took a chalk and wrote on it “Vive La France” which means “Long Live France” and declared the class was dismissed.

**Glossary:**

- **Chauvinism:** exaggerated or aggressive patriotism.
- **Linguistic:** relating to language
- **Hegemony:** dominance, especially by one state or social group over others.
- **Imperial:** relating to an empire.
- **Annex:** seize
- **Monsieur:** a title or form of address used of or to a French-speaking man, corresponding to Mr or sir.
- **solemn:** serious, grave

**NOTE:** Dear Students as you have got an overview of the lesson, click on the link to listen to the audio of the story and after that click on to the link to watch the movie based on the lesson to have a better understanding of the chapter.

A link to the narration of the story: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MOqZrg2Blg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MOqZrg2Blg)

A link to the movie based on the story: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEd-Mcn-UJg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lEd-Mcn-UJg)

After Reading the introduction, setting, characters and summary of the chapter it’s time to test your understanding

click on the Link to take a quiz on THE LAST LESSON - An Overview

[https://forms.gle/289yZoVpy1xEWpTF6](https://forms.gle/289yZoVpy1xEWpTF6)