

# WELLAND GOULDSMITH SCHOOL- PATULI

## CLASS – IX

### SUBJECT- ENGLISH LITERATURE

#### CHAPTER- SHORT STORY: OLD MAN AT THE BRIDGE

##### THE STORY AT A GLANCE:

- An old man, aged **seventy-six years**, with **steel rimmed spectacles**, **black dusty clothes** and a **grey dusty face** sat by the side of the road at a crowded pontoon bridge during the Spanish Civil War on an Easter Sunday. (A pontoon bridge, also known as a floating bridge, is temporary, used in wartime and civil emergencies.)



(Pictorial representation of a pontoon bridge)

- The narrator (a young soldier), whose duty was to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced, struck up a conversation with the old man when he found him still sitting after all

the others had left.

- The old man was from **San Carlos** and had to leave his home town due to the heavy artillery firing by the enemy.
- The old man then explained that he was the last to leave as he stayed to take care of his animals, his only family. There were **two goats, a cat** and **four pairs of pigeons**.
- He expressed his worry for his animals. He consoled himself with the thought that the cat could look after itself and as the dove cage was unlocked, the pigeons would fly away but the old man wondered about the fate of the goats and shared his concern with the soldier who told him that they would be safe and come through it.
- The narrator, concerned about the safety of the old man, asked him to walk up the road and catch a ride to Barcelona since it was not safe to continue staying there as the enemy was advancing. The old man tried to get up but was too weak to do so.
- The irony of the situation was not lost upon the soldier as he realized that the animals, for which the old man was so concerned, had a greater chance of survival than the old man himself.
- The old man's luck had run out and he seemed resigned to his fate at the bridge.
- The author, Ernest Hemingway, has thus captured the true picture of war and its effects without a single shot being fired or a drop of blood being spilled.

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## **LITERARY DEVICES/ FIGURES OF SPEECH**

- **IRONY:** i) Easter Sunday- Rebirth or revival of Jesus Christ contradicts with the uncertainty of the old man's life as he faces inevitable death.
  - ii) The old man is worried about his animals but not about himself. In fact, the animals have a better chance of survival than the old man.
- **METAPHOR:** Ebro River- The Ebro River is symbolic of the old man's journey of life. The river can also be a metaphor for the passage of time or the stages of a human life.
- **SYMBOLISM:** i) Old man- innocent victims of war
  - ii) Pontoon Bridge-uncertainty and danger
  - iii) Goats- sacrificial animals
  - iv) Cat- independent
  - v) Pigeons- refugees
  - vi) Doves- peace and harmony

**OVERALL MESSAGE**: Futility of war  
Common people are the  
innocent victims of war.

## **ASSIGNMENT**

**Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow:**

It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead beyond and find out to what extent the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.

- (i) Describe the old man seated near the bridge.
- (ii) Describe the scene at the bridge at the beginning of the story.
- (iii) What was the narrator's duty?
- (iv) Why did the old man have to leave his home?  
Why was he the last one to leave town?
- (v) How does Hemingway show us the effect of war on the lives of common people through the story 'Old Man at the Bridge'?

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