Essays - 5.

What is a Good Book?

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Q. 1 What, according to Ruskin, are the limitations of the good book of the hour?

Answer:

According to Ruskin, the good book of the hour was just like a newspaper or a letter but in good print. It just conveys the voice of the author to numerous preserve and not preserve the voice like a true book does. The good book isn't true or useful like a true book either.

Q. 2 What are the criteria that Ruskin feels that readers should fulfill to make themselves fit for the company of the Dead?

Answer:

Readers who are hardworking and have merit are the ones who are fit for the company of the Dead. Unlike the society, wealth or name or ambition cannot gain one the companionship but rather love and rising up to their thoughts can give one entry.

Q. 3 Why does Ruskin feel that reading the work of a good author is a painstaking task?

Answer:

Ruskin feels that a good author hides his deepest thoughts and gives it as a reward to only the hard-working reader. The reader has to be like a miner of gold, digging deeply and thoroughly through the words of the author. It is only through this patience, perseverance, and use of the best tools that one can get the meaning of a good author.

Q. 4 What is the emphasis placed by Ruskin on accuracy?

Answer:

Ruskin believes that the educated person is different from the uneducated in his accuracy. Only a literate person can have the precise knowledge of a language, the pronunciation of words and knowledge about the origin and evolution of the words. A person without accuracy will be at an inferior standing compared to a person having the real accuracy.

TALKING ABOUT THE TEXT

Q. 1 Discuss in pairs Ruskin's insistence on looking intensely at words, and assuring oneself of meaning, syllable by syllable—nay, letter by letter.

Answer:

Ruskin speaks most strongly about learning and understanding the language down to its roots by its words and even letters. Merely memorizing the language is the act of an uneducated person. A scholar would be the person who has in-depth knowledge of the language and its words, pronunciation as well as history and origin of the words. Without these, anyone who knows a language is inferior to one who knows no matter how many languages they know or books they read.

Q. 2 Discuss in pairs Choice of diction is very crucial to the communication of meaning.

Answer:

Communication relies on the mutual understanding of two or more people. The medium of communication, language thereby becomes a very important part of the communication. Without proper diction or choice of words, the meaning of what a person wants to convey may change. Diction contributes a lot to the subtle meaning of the words and adds expression to it.

APPRECIATION

Q. 1 The text is an excerpt from Sesame and Lilies which consists of two essays, primarily, written for delivery as public lectures in 1864. Identify the features that fit the speech mode. Notice the sentence patterns.

Answer:

The text was given as a lecture hence it shares the features of a speech. His use of the first person or 'I' is the most direct feature. Repetition of certain expressions like "if you could, you would; you would write instead" is characteristic of an interaction and spontaneous explanation. He regularly asks questions like "Perhaps you think no book was ever so written?" which engages another person in a speech.

The sentence patterns are more conversational and fluid. The number of times he uses 'and', 'but' or 'so' shows a spontaneity of thought and explanation rather than the corrected lines of a written text.

Q. 2 The lecture was delivered in 1864. What are the shifts in style and diction that make the language different from the way it is used today?

Answer:

The shifts in style and diction are very evident in the text. Certain words like 'assuredly' is less used and words like 'most distant' are now incorrect because it has become 'most distant'. Certain phrases like 'peerage of words' or national noblesse of words' is no more used because aristocracy or nobility hardly exist anymore. Certain formations of sentences are also different like 'no one has yet said it' as opposed to how it is said today- 'no one has said it yet'.

LANGUAGE WORK

Q. 1 Many sentences and paragraphs in the excerpt begin with the word 'And'. To what extent does this contribute to the rhetorical style of the lecture?

Answer:

John Ruskin gave ‘What is a Good Book’ as a public lecture in the nineteenth century. His style of speaking is more fluid and conversational as compared to an essay. His repetitive use of ‘And’ or ‘but’ helps in explaining an idea even further. It is more spontaneous like an interaction rather than written and rewritten like an essay.

Q. 2 Study each of the following sentences and notice the balance between its parts. Pick out other sentences in the text that reflect this kind of balance

a. It is right that a false Latin quantity should excite a smile in the House of Commons; but it is wrong that a false English meaning should not excite a frown there.

b. Let the accent of words be watched, by all means, but let the meaning be watched more closely still, and fewer will do the work.

Answer:

1. A book is essentially not a talked thing but a written thing; and written, not with the view of more communication, but of permanence.

2. They do not give it to you by way of help, but of reward, and will make themselves sure that you deserve it before they allow you to reach it.

3. You may dig long and find none; you must dig painfully to find any.

4. You might read all the books in the British Museum (if you could live long enough), and remain an utterly ‘illiterate’, uneducated person; but that if you read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter—that is to say, with real accuracy—you are forever more in some measure with an educated person.