

# 6

## Memories of Childhood

### Fastrack Revision

#### I. The Cutting of My Long Hair

##### Summary at a Glance

- It was the first day after the writer, *Zitkala-Sa*, had joined a residential school. A paleface woman, with white hair was their hostel warden. All the Indian girls were in stiff shoes and tightly fitting clothes. The writer disliked them. But later on she was compelled to live like all the other Indian girls.
- When they went for breakfast they had it by formula. Judewin was writer's friend. They both had long and thick hair. One day Judewin gave her a terrible warning. She

knew some words of English. She overheard the paleface woman who was talking about cutting their long hair. Judewin submitted and now she had shingled hair. But the writer rebelled. She went upstairs quietly and hid her in a room as long as she was searched out by all the women and girls. She was dragged out from where she was hiding. She resisted them by kicking and scratching wildly. She was brought downstairs. She was tied fast in a chair and her long hair was cut forcibly. She wept aloud. She felt it below dignity. But she was like a helpless little animal in a herd driven by a herder.



### Practice Exercise



#### Extract Based Questions

**Directions:** Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. The first day in the land of apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, its loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

- (a) The narrator of the above extract is .....
- (b) What season is being observed in the above extract?
  - (i) Summer
  - (ii) Rain
  - (iii) Winter
  - (iv) Spring
- (c) Where is the narrator going at the moment?
- (d) What does 'bedlam' mean?

2. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface women upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Everyone picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

- (a) A paleface woman refers to .....
- (b) The breakfast started at the:
  - (i) first bell
  - (ii) second bell
  - (iii) third bell
  - (iv) no bell
- (c) Give an antonym of 'ceased'.
- (d) Why was the narrator wondering?

### Answers

- (a) Zitkala-Sa
- (b) (iii) Winter
- (c) At the moment the narrator is marching into the dining room.
- (d) Bedlam means a scene of uproar and confusion.

- (a) the hostel warden
- (b) (iii) third bell
- (c) An antonym of 'ceased' is began or started.
- (d) The narrator was wondering because she was being keenly watched by the strange woman.

3. But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judewin gave me a terrible warning. Judewin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

- (a) What eating formula is being told by the narrator?  
 (i) Eating breakfast with table-manners  
 (ii) Eating breakfast within five minutes  
 (iii) Eating breakfast so early  
 (iv) Obeying the hostel warden
- (b) What terrible warning was given to the narrator by his friend?
- (c) Judewin is .....
- (d) What does 'coward' mean?

### Answers

- (a) (i) Eating breakfast with table-manners  
 (b) About cutting their long and heavy hair  
 (c) the narrator's friend.  
 (d) Coward means lacking in courage.

## II. We Too Are Human Beings Summary at a Glance

- ▶ When the writer, *Bama*, was studying in the third class, she had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by untouchability.
- ▶ She could walk her home in ten minutes, but it would take her from half an hour to an hour. She came home enjoying and watching things on her way.
- ▶ One day she saw a threshing floor at the opposite corner of her street. People of her street were working hard with the help of bullocks to separate grain from the straw. The landlord was sitting at ease nearby.
- ▶ An elder of her street fetched vadai for the landlord from the bazaar. The elder man was holding the strings of the paper bag. The writer wanted to shriek with laughter seeing such a big man carrying a small packet in that fashion.
- ▶ She came home and told the story to her elder brother. He explained if elder had touched the packet with his hand, they would be polluted. The upper caste believed themselves superior to the Dalits.
- ▶ One day her brother who was studying in a university and had come home for the holidays told her, "Because we are born into Dalit Community, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect."
- ▶ He advised her to study hard, then other people would come to her voluntarily. She worked hard and stood first in the class and many people became her friends.



### Extract Based Questions

**Directions:** Read the extracts given below and answer the questions that follow:

1. When I was studying in the third class, I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability. But I had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by what it is.  
 I was walking home from school one day, an old bag hanging from my shoulder. It was actually possible to walk the distance in ten minutes. But usually

it would take me from half an hour to an hour to dawdle along watching all the fun and games that were going on, all the entertaining novelties and oddities in the streets, the shops and the bazaar.

(CBSE 2023)

- (a) The narrator was humiliated because .....
- (b) The narrator 'dawdled along' as she .....  
 (i) enjoyed looking at the various sights  
 (ii) was getting late for school  
 (iii) she didn't like going home  
 (iv) she enjoyed haggling and shopping
- (c) On the basis of the extract, choose the correct option with reference to the two statements given below:  
 I. The distance from school to home was very short.  
 II. She was feeling upset and so dawdling her way home.  
 (i) I can be inferred from the extract but II cannot.  
 (ii) II can be inferred from the extract but I cannot.  
 (iii) Both I and II cannot be inferred from the extract.  
 (iv) Both I and II can be inferred from the extract.
- (d) The word 'novelties' in the passage most nearly means:  
 (i) colourful trinkets  
 (ii) wooden toys  
 (iii) unique and interesting items  
 (iv) expensive souvenirs

### Answers

- (a) they were teased, called names, and physically assaulted by a group of children from a higher caste.
- (b) (i) enjoyed looking at the various sights  
 (c) (iii) Both I and II cannot be inferred from the extract.  
 (d) (iii) unique and interesting items
2. Just then, an elder of our street came along from the direction of the bazaar. The manner in which he was walking along made me want to double up. I wanted to shriek with laughter at the sight of such a big man carrying a small packet in that fashion. I guessed there was something like vadai or green banana bhajji in the packet, because the wrapping paper was stained with oil. He came along, holding out the packet by its string, without touching it. I stood there thinking to myself, if he holds it like that, won't the package come undone, and vadais fall out?

- (a) Why was the man carrying a small packet holding out it by its string?  
 (i) So that the packet should not fall down  
 (ii) So that the packet may not be polluted  
 (iii) So that the packet may stay in his hand  
 (iv) So that the packet may stay before his eyes
- (b) Vadai is a food stuff which belongs to .....
- (c) Give a synonym of 'Shriek'.
- (d) Who is 'I'?

### Answers

- (a) (ii) So that the packet may not be polluted  
 (b) South India  
 (c) A synonym of shriek is scream or screech.  
 (d) Bama is 'I'.
3. When I heard this, I didn't want to laugh any more, and I felt terribly sad. How could they believe that it was disgusting if one of us held that package in his hands, even though the vadai had been wrapped first in a banana leaf, and then parcelled in paper? I felt so provoked and angry that I wanted to touch those wretched vadais myself straightaway. Why should we have to fetch and carry for these people, I wondered. Such an important elder of ours goes meekly to the shops to fetch snacks and hands them over reverently, bowing and shrinking, to this fellow who just sits there and stuffs them into his mouth. The thought of it infuriated me.
- (a) The above extract has been taken from the lesson .....
- (b) Why did the narrator not want to laugh now?  
 (i) She was afraid of the elderly man  
 (ii) She was shocked to see the social evils  
 (iii) She was afraid of the landlord  
 (iv) She was angry with the landlord
- (c) Give a synonym of 'meekly'.
- (d) Give an antonym of 'infuriated'.

### Answers

- (a) Memories of Childhood  
 (b) (ii) She was shocked to see the social evils  
 (c) A synonym of 'meekly' is mildly or compliantly.  
 (d) An antonym of 'infuriated' is pleased or comforted.



### Short Answer Type Questions

- Q 1. Why did Zitkala-Sa feel that early morning at the school was discordant?
- Ans. Zitkala-Sa felt that early morning at the school was discordant because it was a bitter-cold, and the snow still covered the ground.
- Q 2. What did Zitkala-Sa notice when they were walking in single line to the dinning hall?
- Ans. When the girls were walking in single line, Zitkala-Sa noticed the girls in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses.

- Q 3. Why was Zitkala-Sa embarrassed when she reacted to the sound of the first bell at the breakfast table? What was expected of them?

Ans. When Zitkala-Sa heard the sound of the first gong, she drew a chair from under the table and at once slipped into it while all the rest at the table remained standing. She was embarrassed. They were expected to sit on the chair on the sound of the second gong.

- Q 4. Why was the writer so averse to having her hair cut? What did she do to escape this ordeal?

Or

How did Zitkala-Sa try to save her long hair?

(CBSE 2023)

Ans. The writer was so averse to having her haircut because her mother had taught her that short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards. To escape this ordeal she went upstairs unnoticed and hid in a room which was dim.

- Q 5. What did Bama notice with regard to an elder from their street? What explanation did her brother give her for this strange behaviour?

Ans. Bama noticed an elder from their street holding the strings of a small vadai packet, without touching it. He went straight up to the landlord, bowed low and extended the packet toward him. Her brother explained that the landlord was an upper caste. If the elder had touched the packet, the landlord would be polluted.

- Q 6. What advice did Bama's brother give her so that she may overcome the humiliation of being born an untouchable?

Ans. Bama's brother advised her to study with care, learn all she could and always be ahead in her lessons to overcome the humiliation of being born an untouchable.

- Q 7. What is the thread of commonality that runs through the childhood experience of Bama and Zitkala-Sa?

Ans. Both Bama and Zitkala-Sa are from marginalised communities who took back on their childhood, and reflect on their relationship with the mainstream culture.

- Q 8. What communities did Bama and Zitkala-Sa belong to? Why did the two feel a deep sense of alienation?

Ans. Bama belonged to a Tamil Dalit Roman Catholic family and Zitkala-Sa belonged to a native American community. Bama felt a deep sense of alienation because she was marked as untouchable. Zitkala-Sa felt a deep sense of alienation because of severe prejudice prevailed towards native American culture and women.

- Q 9. Why did Zitkala-Sa resist the cutting of her hair?

Or

Why did Zitkala-Sa oppose tooth and nail the shingling of her long hair?

(CBSE 2019)

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa resisted the cutting of her hair because her mother had taught her that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Short hair was worn by mourners and shingled hair by cowards.

**Q 10. What light does Zitkala-Sa's resistance to the shingling of her hair throw on her character?**

(CBSE 2019)

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa had long and thick hair. Her friend Judewin overheard the hostel warden talking about cutting their long hair. Judewin submitted but Zitkala-Sa refused to submit. She decided to struggle. It shows that he protested the misbehave and forced activity of the school. She rebelled and tries upto last to save herself from the problem. Thus, we see that Zitkala-Sa shows courage to face the problem.

**Q 11. What distracted Bama most on her way back from school?**

(CBSE 2020)

**Ans.** One day Bama saw an elderly man coming from the bazaar who was holding out a packet of vadais by its string without touching it. She laughed to see it but when she asked about it to her brother and came to know that the man was a Dalit and he was carrying vadais for the landlord and if he touched it with his hand, it would be polluted. It was the incident that had transpired to make her feel that the upper caste had lost all human feelings.

**Q 12. How can we say that vadai packet incident reveals that the writer lacked the cognitive and emotional maturity required to understand the implications of untouchability.**

(CBSE SQP 2023-24)

**Ans.** At the time of the incident, the writer was only in the third grade, which means that she was likely around eight years old. Children at that age are still developing their cognitive and emotional abilities—it is not uncommon for them to lack a full understanding of complex social issues like untouchability.

Or

The writer shared that she had not, till then, heard people speak openly of untouchability which suggests that she may not have had a complete grasp of the issue's societal implications. It is possible that she understood that certain individuals were treated differently from others, but she may not have fully comprehended the scope of the problem.



## Long Answer Type Questions

**Q 1. The two accounts that you read above are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of theme found in both of them?**

(NCERT)

Or

Both Bama and Zitkala-Sa were from marginalised communities. They challenged the system to bring dignity into their lives. Justify.

(CBSE 2023)

Or

**Bama and Zitkala-Sa, though victims of a system that crushes their aspirations, are determined to break out. Comment.**

(CBSE 2023)

**Ans.** The two accounts—'The Cutting of My Long Hair' by Zitkala-Sa and 'We Too are Human Beings' by Bama—are based in two distant cultures.

Both the women come from marginalised communities. They look back on their childhood, and reflect on their relationship with the mainstream.

Zitkala-Sa fell a prey to severe prejudice prevailed towards Native American culture and women. She was deprived of her blanket that covered her shoulders. She had to replace her moccasins by squeaking shoes. Her long and thick hair was replaced by shingled hair.

When Bama was studying in the third class, she had already seen, felt, experienced and been humiliated by the curse of untouchability. In those days, the upper caste did not allow the Dalits to touch them, their food and other things. Dalits were made to live apart in a particular street. Because Dalits were born into this community, they were stripped of honour or dignity or respect.

Both the woman had to rebel against the indignities they suffered from.

**Q 2. It may take a long time for oppression to be resisted, but the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life. Do you agree that injustice in any form cannot escape being noticed even by children?**

**Ans.** It may take a long time for oppression to be resisted, but the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life.

Children are more sensitive and observant than the adults. I agree that injustice in any form cannot escape being noticed even by children.

Zitkala-Sa had long and thick hair. Her friend Judewin overheard the paleface woman talking about cutting their long hair. Judewin submitted but Zitkala-Sa refused to submit. She decided to struggle first. She rebelled. She hid in a room where light was dim. At long last, she was detected. She was tied fast in a chair and her long hair were to give them shape of shingled hair. It was her first day at school when she had suffered extreme indignity.

Bama was studying in the third class when she saw an elder of her street how he acted lest the landlord should not be polluted. He was Dalit and he was not supposed to touch the packet of vadai. Bama felt so provoked and angry that she wanted to touch those vadais herself straight away. Her brother explained that they being Dalits cannot touch the upper caste people.

Children see, hear, feel and experience what happens around them. Hence, any boom of injustice cannot escape being noticed by them.

**Q 3. Bama's experience is that of a victim of the caste system. What kind of discrimination does Zitkala-Sa's experience depict? What are their responses to their respective situations?**

(NCERT)

Or

**Untouchability is not only a crime, it is inhuman too.  
Why and how did Bama decide to fight against it?**

(CBSE 2019)

**Ans.** Bama was a Dalit girl. Dalits were supposed untouchable by upper caste. Her experience is that of a victim of caste system.

Seeing the act of the elder who was from their street, Bama felt so provoked and angry that she wanted to touch those vadais herself straight away. She wondered that such an elder of her street went meekly to the shop to fetch snacks and handed them over reverently, bowing and shrinking to the landlord. The thought of it infuriated her.

Zitkala-Sa's experience depicts severe prejudice towards Native American culture and woman. She was admitted to the Carlisle Indian school. She was oppressed at school the very first day. It was a very chilly day. She was covering her shoulders with a blanket. First of all that blanket was removed. Her soft moccasins were replaced by squeaking shoes. Her long hair was cut to shingled hair in spite of her revolt.

Zitkala-Sa cried aloud, shook her head when her long hair was cut. Then she lost her spirit. She had suffered extreme indignities. In her anguish, she moaned for her mother.

Zitkala-Sa felt herself like many little animals driven by a herder.

**Q 4. "Then I lost my spirit". What are the incidents that led the writer to feel this way?**

**Ans.** The writer underwent the following incidents that led her to feel that she had lost her spirit.

(i) It was the first day of the writer at Carlisle Indian School. It was very chilly, she had covered her shoulders with a blanket. Her blanket had been stripped from her shoulders because all the girls were in closely clinging dresses.

(ii) Her soft moccasins were replaced by squeaking shoes.

(iii) She was to learn eating by formula.

(iv) Her friend Judewin overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting their long and heavy hair because all the other girls had shingled hair. Judewin submitted because the authorities were strong. But the writer did not submit. She decided to struggle first. She rebelled.

She watched her chance, and when no one noticed, she disappeared. She crept upstairs quietly. She hid in a room. The room was very dim. She heard in the hall loud voices were calling her name. Then a search began and she was at last detected.

She was carried downstairs and tied fast on a chair. She cried aloud, shook her head. Then her long hair was cut to shingled hair. Then she lost her spirit.

**Q 5. "Our people should never run errands for these fellows." This was a remark made by Bama. What was it that had made her feel thus?**

**Ans.** One day Bama saw an elder of their street coming from the bazaar. He came along, holding out the packet of vadais by its string, without touching it. She wanted to laugh at the sight of such a big man carrying a small packet in that fashion. The elder went straight up to the landlord, bowed low and extended the packet towards him.

Reaching home she told her elder brother the story in all its comic detail. Her brother said everybody believed that they were upper caste and therefore must not touch us. If they did, they would be polluted. That's why the elder had to carry the package by its string.

It was the incident that had transpired to make her feel that the upper caste had lost all human feelings. But the Dalits too were human beings. Dalits should never run these petty errands for those fellows. They should work in their fields, take home their wages, and leave it at that. Bama had feeling of a rebellion in her heart even when she was in third class.

**Q 6. In India, the so-called lower castes have been treated cruelly for a long time. Who advised Bama to fight against this prejudice, when and how?**

(CBSE 2017)

**Ans.** In India, the so-called lower castes, viz., SCs, STs and OBCs have been treated cruelly for a long time by upper castes. They were deprived of political, economical and educational rights. Most of them were being used to serve powerful high caste people. A partial improvement is seen at present in their condition.

Bama's elder brother a university student told her that people of our caste (Dalits) were not allowed to take water from the village wells located in the areas of high caste people. When he goes towards an irrigation tank, he asked one of the landlord's man—"Who are you, appa, what's your name? Annan told him his name. Immediately the other man asked, "Thambi, on which street do you live?" The point of this was if he knew on which street we lived, he would know our caste too.

Annan told her all these things and said, "Because we are born into this community, we are never given any honour or dignity or respect; we are stripped of all that. But if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities. So, study with care, learn all you can. If you are always ahead in your lessons, people will come to you of their own accord and attach themselves to you. Work hard and learn.

**Q 7. It may take a long time for oppression to be resisted, but the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life. How did Zitkala-Sa face oppression as a child and how did she overcome it?** (CBSE 2018)

**Ans.** Zitkala-Sa was a victim of social and racial prejudice. She belonged to a marginalised community. She was sent to a missionary school where she was looked down upon. The worst indignity she suffered was the cutting of her long hair.

In the dining room Zitkala-Sa observed that she was being keenly watched by a strange palefaced woman; Later her friend Judevin gave her a terrible warning that this palefaced woman was talking about cutting their long heavy hair. Women and girls entered the room and dragged her out. She resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of her resistance she was carried downstairs, tied fast in a chair and her long hair was shingled. No one came to help her and no one consoled her. Zitkala-Sa continued her protest against the injustice she faced, by criticising the evils of racial prejudice through her works.

**Q 8. A grown up Zitkala-Sa, reflects on the incident about cutting of her long hair and is conflicted that she did not do enough to resist and surrendered easily. She also wonders if she could have tried something else to prevent the incident.**

**As the grown-up Zitkala-Sa, create a diary entry, expressing these thoughts and conclude by absolving yourself of any blame.**

**You may begin like this:**

**I find myself reflecting on an event that happened many years ago ...** (CBSE SQP 2023-24)

**Ans.** Monday, 7 August 20XX

9 pm

Dear Diary,

I find myself reflecting on an event that happened many years ago, one that has continued to haunt me ever since. It is the incident where my long hair

was forcefully cut off at the Carlisle Indian School. As I sit here today, I cannot help but feel conflicted about my actions that day.

On one hand, I am proud that I stood up for myself and refused to submit to their demands at first. I remember the fire in my belly as I declared that I would struggle before giving in. However, as time passed, my spirit wavered, and eventually, I allowed them to cut my hair. Looking back now, I cannot help but feel that I gave in too easily, that I did not do enough to resist.

As I ponder over what I could have done differently, I realise that there might have been other options. Perhaps I could have sought help from my fellow students. Maybe I could have tried to escape or find another way out of the situation. But in that moment, I was so overwhelmed and confused that I could not think straight.

I know that I have blamed myself for this incident for far too long. But today, I choose to absolve myself of any blame. As a young girl, I was forced into a strange place. I was not given the chance to make my own choices, to decide what was best for me. I was a victim of a system that sought to strip away my identity and forced me to assimilate.

Today, I choose to forgive myself and honour the brave little girl who stood up for herself that day. I am grateful for her courage and strength, and I will continue to honour her memory by fighting for justice and equality for all.

Zitkala-Sa



## Chapter Test

### Extract Based Question

**Q 1. I watched my chance, and when no one noticed, I disappeared. I crept up the stairs as quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and huddled myself in the dark corner.**

**(a) Why did the narrator disappear?**

- (i) Because her hair were to cut as the hostel warden said

- (ii) Because her hair were to cut as she wished  
(iii) Because she was to be tortured by students of her class  
(iv) None of the above

**(b) Moccasins are .....**

**(c) Name the lesson.**

**(d) Give a synonym of 'Crawl'.**

### Short Answer Type Questions

**Q 2. Describe the deep sense of alienation felt by Zitkala-Sa and Bama.**

**Q 3. What made Bama feel that the upper caste had lost all human feelings?**

### Long Answer Type Question

**Q 4. Why did Zitkala-Sa feel that she had lost her spirit?**