

# The Man Who Knew Too Much

**Q1. With your partner, discuss and narrate an incident about a person who likes to show off. Check whether your classmates agree with you.**

**Ans.** You can be at peace with yourself when you are true to yourself. Showing off doesn't pay in the long run. It may impress some for some time but not all, all the time. My friend Ramesh falls in this category. Whenever you see him, you would always find him with half a dozen books. In the class, he interrupts the teacher for one or the other reason. If the teacher says that the World War II was fought in 1940s, Ramesh does not tolerate this kind of generalisation. He stands up and says, "Sir, to be exact from 1939 to 1945." This lean and thin spectacled pantaloone had faced many interviews including the N.D.A. It was not the Board that interviewed him but it was Ramesh who interviewed the Board. The result was obvious. Everytime he got a rejection letter.

**Q2. Now read about the "Professor" who knew too much and find out if he knew enough!**

**Ans.** Attempt yourself.

**Q3. The 'Professor' knew too much. How did he prove himself ? Fill up the space with suitable examples from the story, using the given clues:**

**(a) about muzzle velocity:**

**(b) after a thirty mile walk:**

**(c) his salute on payday:**

**(d) the loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane:**

**(e) about hand grenades:**

**(f) during cook house duties:**

**Ans:** The 'Professor' certainly knew too much.

He had everything on the tips of his fingers. He borrowed training manuals and read them all at night. He troubled instructors with questions. He always tried to show that all others, including his instructors, knew much less than him.

(a) about muzzle velocity: When a Sergeant defines muzzle velocity or the speed at which the bullet leaves the rifle, the Professor interrupts, "Two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second".

(b) after a thirty mile walk: After a thirty mile walk he was not only wonderfully tireless but would display his terrible heartiness. He would say, "What about a song, chaps?"

(c) his salute on payday: His salute on payday was a model to behold. When officers in sight he would swing his skinny arms marching like a Guardsman.

(d) the loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane: The 'Professor' could unmistakably

identify it by the harsh engine note, due to the high tip speed of the airscrew.

(e) about hand grenades: The 'Professor' gave a very specific answer about the fragments of the outside of a grenade. He told, "Forty- Four".

(f) during cook house duties: During cook house duties he protested against the unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes resulting in sheer waste of vitamin values.

**Q4. Based on your reading of the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct options.**

(a) Private Quelch was nicknamed 'Professor' because of \_\_\_\_\_

(i) his appearance. ,

(ii) his knowledge.

(iii) his habit of reading.

(iv) his habit of sermonising.

(b) One could hammer nails into Corporal Turnbull without his noticing it because \_\_\_\_\_

(i) he was a strong and sturdy man.

(ii) he was oblivious to his surroundings.

(iii) he was a brave corporal.

(iv) he was used to it.

(c) The author and his friend Trower fled from the scene as \_\_\_\_\_

(i) they had to catch a train.

(ii) they could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge.

(iii) they felt they would have to lend a helping hand.

(iv) they did not want to meet the cooks.

**Ans:** (a) (iv) his habit of sermonising.

(b) (i) he was a strong and sturdy man.

(c) (ii) they could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge.

**Q5. Answer the following questions briefly:**

(a) What is a 'nickname'? Can you suggest another one for Private Quelch?

(b) Private Quelch looked like a 'Professor' when the author first met him at the training depot. Why?

(c) What does the dark, sun-dried appearance of the Sergeant suggest about him?

(d) How was Private Quelch's knowledge exposed even further as the Sergeant's classes went on?

(e) What did the Professor mean by "intelligent reading"?

(f) What were the Professor's ambitions in the army?

(g) Did Private Quelch's day to day practices take him closer towards his goal? How can you make out?

(h) Describe Corporal Turnbull.

(i) How did Private Quelch manage to anger the Corporal?

(j) Do you think Private Quelch learnt a lesson when he was chosen for cookhouse duties?

Give reasons for your answer.

**Ans:** (a) A 'nickname' is an informal, often humorous name given to a person. The name is connected with his real name, his personality or appearance or with something he has done. The nickname of Private Quelch was the 'Professor'. Another nickname for him could be 'Mr. Show Off.

(b) Private Quelch looked like a 'Professor' when the author first met him at the training depot. He was lanky, stooping, frowning through his horn-rimmed spectacles. A five- minute-

conversation would bring out his debating skills and abilities. All these traits are generally found in university professors.

(c) The Sergeant who was describing the mechanism of a service rifle to the soldiers was as dark and sun-dried as raisins. He was wearing North-West Frontier ribbons. The sun-dried appearance of the Sergeant suggested that he had served in British India. There, the scorching heat of the sun bake the skin and made it tanned like raisins.

(d) The Sergeant didn't relish when Private Quelch interrupted him. He went on lecturing. When he had finished, he turned with his questions again and again to the Professor. But it only enhanced the Professor's reputation and glory. He had all by heart, the parts of the rifle or its use and care. The Professor knew them all. His knowledge exposed even further as the Sergeant's classes went on.

(e) The smart answers given by the Professor made the Sergeant ask if he had taken any training before. The Professor replied confidently, "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading." The Professor meant that he had read everything thoroughly and with concentration.

(f) The Professor's greatest ambition in the army was to get a commission. In pursuit of his ambition he worked hard reading the training manuals. He tried to impress the instructors and the senior officers by his knowledge, promptness and smartness. But he would go step by step. As a first step, he meant to get a stripe.

(g) Private Quelch's day-to-day practices might have not won him a commission in the army but it was not the end for him. Whenever he spoke, the squad listened to him in a cowed, horrified kind of silence. Instead of being nominated for a commission, he was nominated for permanent cookhouse duties. But everybody believed that his nomination for the commission was just a matter of time.

(h) Corporal Turnbull was a smart youngman.

But he was not aman to be fooled around or talked frivolously with. He had come from Dunkirk with all his equipment correct and accounted for. He was the hero of soldiers. They thought him so tough that they could hammer nails into him without his noticing them.

(i) Corporal Turnbull was explaining that the outside of a grenade was divided up into a large number of fragments. The Professor at once told that the correct number was forty four. The Corporal said nothing, but his brow tightened. He was the kind of man not to be trifled with. He didn't like any interruption. He cut the Professor to size by sending him for permanent cookhouse duties.

(j) There is no indication that Private Quelch learnt any lesson when he was chosen for cookhouse duties. He didn't stop exhibiting his knowledge. When he entered the kitchen he started finding fault with the working staff. He protested against the 'unscientific' and 'unhygienic' method of peeling potatoes. He considered it a 'sheer waste of vitamin values'.

**Q6. At first, Private Quelch was a hero in the eyes of his fellow soldiers. Support this observation with suitable examples from the story in about 100 words.**

**Ans:** At first, Private Quelch impressed all his fellow soldiers with his profound knowledge about everything under the sun. He was nicknamed as the 'Professor'. The lanky, stooping and frowning 'Professor' was almost a hero in the eyes of his fellow soldiers. He had earned a certain respect from his colleagues. He wanted to get on in life. He had a brain that had a flair for details. He was always to the point and specific. In the very first lesson in musketry, he left his mark on the fellow soldiers. He had no liking for generalisation. When it came to telling the velocity at which the bullet leaves the rifle, the Professor was there to correct to the last digit. The Sergeant in the hope of revenge turned his questions again and again to tire Professor. But the Professor was prompt in answering all tire questions. Similarly, the Professor irritated Corporal Turnbull by interrupting and correcting him. He was sent for permanent cookhouse duties. Later on, his fellow soldiers couldn't stand him for exhibiting his knowledge. They fled away whenever they saw him.

**Q7. Private Quelch knew 'too much'. Give reasons to prove that he was unable to win the admiration of his superior officers or his colleagues in about 100 words.**

**Ans:**No doubt, Private Quelch or the Professor knew 'too much'. He was a lanky and stooping man frowning through his horn-rimmed spectacles. He was aptly nicknamed the Professor. But Private Quelch's habit of exhibiting his knowledge irritated his fellow- soldiers as well as his superior officers. Each time when one of his colleagues made a mistake, he would publicly correct him. He was always very condescending. He tried to show how superior he was to all of them. He badgered the instructors with questions. When a Sergeant instructor described the muzzle velocity well over 2000 feet per second, the Professor corrected him. He replied 2440 feet per second. The irritated Sergeant in the hope of revenge, turned his questions again and again to the Professor. Corporal Turnbull cut the Professor to size for interrupting him. He snubbed Private Quelch by nominating him for permanent cookhouse duties. Even his colleagues fled when the Professor was nearby to avoid his sermonising.

**Q8. (a) Write down the positive and negative traits of Private Quelch's character instances from the story.**

| Positive traits | Instances from the story |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| (i)             |                          |
| (ii)            |                          |
| (iii)           |                          |
| (iv)            |                          |
| Negative traits | Instances from the story |
| (i)             |                          |
| (ii)            |                          |
| (iii)           |                          |
| (iv)            |                          |

**(b) Now, share your notes with the class. Add details if you need to.**

**(c) Attempt a character sketch of Private Quelch using your notes in about 100 words.**

| Positive traits     | Instances from the story   |
|---------------------|--|
| (i) Knew 'too much' | All doubts on the subject lost after five minutes' conversation with him   |
| (ii) Very specific  | When a Sergeant told the trainees that a bullet leaves the rifle at the speed of over two thousand feet per second, the Professor immediately interrupted him. He corrected him by saying, "Two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second." |

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| (iii) Meant to get on         | 'He was sure to get a commission, before long.'   |
| (iv) Diligent                 | Borrowed training manuals and stayed up late at night reading them.                         |
| <b>Negative traits</b>        | <b>Instances from the story</b>   |
| (i) Disturbing                | 'A voice interrupted.' The Professor interrupted when a Sergeant was delivering his lesson. |
| (ii) Badgered the instructors | He irritated and badgered the instructors with questions.                                   |
| (iii) Air of superiority      | '..... how condescending he was'.   |
| (iv) Exhibitionism            | His fellow soldiers fled to avoid his exhibitionism.  |

(b) Attempt yourself.

(c) Character Sketch of Private Quelch

Private Quelch was a soldier without a rank. He was a tall and stooping man. He appeared frowning through horn-rimmed spectacles. His appearance, his reading habit and his deep knowledge earned him a nickname of the Professor.

Private Quelch meant to get on in life. He had brains. He was sure to get a commission before long. But as on first step, he meant to get a 'V'-shaped stripe. Private Quelch was not only ambitious but also very diligent. Even his fellow soldiers gave him credit for that. He borrowed training manuals and read late at nights. He had a flair for details and hated vague generalisations. He was always correct to the last digit.

The great defeat in Private Quelch was his sense of exhibitionism. He utilised his "intelligent reading" only to badger the instructors with questions. He irritated a Sergeant by his interruption during the lesson. In the hope of revenge, he turned with his questions again and again to the Professor. Similarly, he annoyed Corporal Turnbull trying to correct him publicly. He was punished and nominated for permanent cookhouse duties. Private Quelch was too showy. He always tried to show that he was much superior to all his fellow soldiers. He was always condescending. In the end his colleagues tried to avoid him. They feared his sermonising and fled when he was nearby.

### Writing Task

**Q9. You are the 'Professor'. Write a diary entry after your first day at the cookhouse, describing the events that led to this assignment, also express your thoughts and feelings about the events of the day in about 175 words.**

**Ans:** Army Training Depot, Liverpool.

20th July, 1948 Dear Diary,

Corporal Turnbull was certainly not fair to me today. Perhaps he had taken his revenge. What was my fault? I don't like vague generalisations-. When it came to counting the fragments of the outside of a grenade, he should have been very specific. 'Large number' was a vague explanation. I gave the answer that was correct to the last digit—44 segments. I was expecting

a nomination for the commission. He shocked me when he nominated me for permanent cookhouse duties.

My first day at cookhouse was quite a disgusting one. There is no system there. I protested against the unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes. Quite ridiculous and disgusting! Who should tell these fools that they are only wasting vitamin values by doing so. I will have to educate that gang of louts. They think that I am showy. But what can I do? I love knowledge and love to show it. And this is my fault. I can't help it.

### **Additional Questions Solved**

#### **I. Short Answer Type Questions (30-40 words)**

**Q1. Describe the physical appearance of Private Quelch. What was he nicknamed and why?**

**Ans:** Private Quelch was a tall and stooping young man. He always seemed to be frowning through his horn-rimmed spectacles. He got a nickname within the first week of his army life. He was called the 'Professor' by his colleagues. He had knowledge and information about everything under the sun. Those who had doubts on the subject lost them after five minutes' conversation with him.

**Q2. What was the reaction of the Sergeant when Private Quelch interrupted him during his first lesson in musketry?**

**Ans:** The 'Professor' knew too much and used to badger the instructors with questions. During the first lesson in musketry, he publicly corrected a Sergeant. The Sergeant expressed that a bullet leaves the rifle at the speed of over 2000 feet per second. Immediately the Professor interrupted, "Two thousand four hundred and forty feet per second." The Sergeant didn't take it kindly. Perhaps in the hope of revenge, he turned with his questions to the Professor. But the Professor answered each of them. It only enhanced his glory.

**Q3. What was Private Quelch's main ambition and how did he work in pursuit of his ambition?**

**Ans:** Private Quelch's main ambition was to get a commission. He meant to get on in his life and make a career. He had a very smart and fertile brain. As the first step, he meant to get a stripe. In pursuit of his ambition, he worked really hard. He borrowed training manuals and woke up late at nights reading them. He always tried to impress his senior officers with his ability, smartness and, of course, knowledge. He was sure to get a commission sooner or later.

**Q4. How did the Professor try to impress and influence his senior officers? Did he get the desired success?**

**Ans:** Private Quelch was showy by nature. Exhibitionism was one of the dominant parts of his personality. He always tried to impress his senior officers by his profound knowledge. He badgered the instructors with questions. He drilled with enthusiasm. When he saluted his senior officers, he was a model to behold.

But Private Quelch didn't get the desired success. His exhibitionism irritated his senior officers. Corporal Turnbull snubbed him by nominating him for permanent cookhouse duties.

**Q5. How did the Professor infuriate his colleagues with his 'horrible heartiness' ?**

**Ans:** Private Quelch always took pains to show that he was different from others. He badgered the instructors with questions. He drilled with enthusiasm. He remained 'miraculously tireless' even after a route march of thirty miles. This 'horrible heartiness' of the Professor infuriated his colleagues. They found themselves tired after the route march.

**Q6. Give examples from the text to show how superior and condescending the Professor was.**

**Ans:** The Professor always walked with an air of superiority. He considered his colleagues

nothing more than a gang of louts. He was always condescending and would remark "Let me show you fellow", or "No, you'll ruin your rifle". Each time when one of them made a mistake, the professor would publicly correct him. Whenever one of them shone, the Professor outshone him.

**Q7. How would the Professor recognise a plane flying high overhead ?**

**Ans:** The Professor was far ahead of his colleagues. He had a lot of knowledge and information of things related to the army. The narrator and others were once out for a walk and heard the drone of a plane flying high overhead. But none of them could see it in the glare of the sun. Without even a glance upward, the Professor gave his verdict, "That, of course, is a North American Harvard Trainer". The Professor could identify it by the harsh engine note, due to the high tip speed of the airscrew.

**Q8. What happened on 'the drowsy summer afternoon that was 'such a turning-point' in the Professor's life?**

**Or**

**How did Corporal Turnbull snub the Professor?**

**Ans:** One afternoon, Corporal Turnbull was taking a lesson on the hand grenade. He was telling that the outside of a grenade was divided up into a large number of fragments. The Professor quipped, "Forty- four segments". Corporal Turnbull was not a man to be trifled with. He threw the grenade to the Professor and asked him to give that lecture. Unashamed, Quelch gave them a wonderful lecture. But Turnbull snubbed him. He was nominated for permanent cookhouse duties. It was a turning-point in the Professor's life and he became a stock of laughter for all.

**Q9. What did the narrator and his friend Trower see when they were returning from the canteen?**

**Ans:** When the narrator and his friend Trower were returning from the canteen, they saw the Professor sermonising there. Three cooks were standing against the wall. In his monotonous tone, Quelch was expressing his resentment and protest at the way they peeled potatoes. In his opinion, it was quite unscientific and unhygienic to peel potatoes in such a way. He wanted to draw their attention to the sheer waste of vitamin values. The narrator and his friend fled as they couldn't stand the sermons of the Professor anymore.

**Q 10. How did the Professor behave when on cookhouse duties? Did he change himself?**

**Ans:** Old habits die hard. The Professor was snubbed by Corporal Turnbull. He was nominated for permanent cook-house duties. But the Professor remained unaffected. When he entered the cookhouse, he started sermonising colleagues. He showed his resentment at the most unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes. He drew their attention to the sheer waste of vitamin values.

**Q11. Justify the title 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'.**

**Ans:** 'The Man Who Knew Too Much' is the most appropriate and logical title for the lesson. In the Professor, the author Alexander Baron presents a unique man. He surprises everyone with his knowledge and up-to-date information. However, his showy nature, an air of superiority and exhibitionism irritate and infuriate his colleagues and superior officers. By and by, he loses sympathy and love of his colleagues. They can't stand his exhibitionism and run away when he is near them.

**Q12. What message does Alexander Baron want to give to the readers in 'The Man Who Knew Too Much'?**

**Ans:** Exhibitionism of knowledge is never liked and admired. It only irritates others.

In the story the Professor thinks himself an extraordinary genius. He thinks his colleagues just a gang of louts. He even doesn't spare his instructors and badger them with questions. His tendency to outshine others makes him a stock of laughter for others. Corporal Turnbull finally teaches him a lesson by giving him permanent cookhouse duties.

### **I. Value-Based Long Answer Type Questions (80-100 Words)**

**Q1. Love and sympathy win people and colleagues but exhibitionism of knowledge and the tendency to outshine others only irritate them. Give a character sketch of Private Quelch or the Professor in your own words including all his traits and shortcomings.**

**Ans.** Private Quelch was a soldier without rank.

He appeared lanky, stooping and frowning through his horn-rimmed spectacles. Due to his display of knowledge and reading habit he was nicknamed the Professor. Those who had any doubts on the subject, lost them after five minutes' conversation with him.

The greatest aim of the Professor was to get a commission. In pursuit of his ambition he really worked very hard. He borrowed training manuals and read them late at nights. He drilled with enthusiasm and remained miraculously tireless even after route marches. Technical definitions, the parts of the rifle, its use and care, he had them all by heart. But his exhibitionism and sense of superiority made him an unpleasant character. Each time any of his colleague made a mistake, the Professor would publicly correct him. His colleagues could not stand this exhibition of knowledge and fled when he was near.

Private Quelch knew too much about things and knew too little about people. He could never win the hearts and sympathy of his instructor and colleagues. The Professor badgered the instructors with questions. Similarly, he tried to cope with Corporal Turnbull when he was describing the outside of a grenade. Corporal Turnbull was not a man to be trifled with. He showed the Professor his right place. Quelch was sent for the permanent cookhouse duties. He became a stock of laughter for others. Turnbull proved to be more than a match for the Professor.

**Q2. How did Corporal Turnbull prove to be more than a match for the Professor? How was Quelch snubbed and shown his place by the Corporal? What made Quelch a stock of laughter and a joke for his colleagues?**

**Ans:** Corporal Turnbull was a smart young man. He could not be trifled with. He had come from Dunkirk.

It was a drowsy summer afternoon. Corporal Turnbull was taking a lesson on the hand grenade. He told that the outside of a grenade was divided into a large number of fragments. A voice interrupted, "Forty- four-segments". The Corporal looked over his shoulders. All were thunderstruck. Suddenly he tossed the grenade to the Professor and asked him to give that lecture. Quite unashamed, Quelch climbed to his feet and gave a wonderful lecture on the grenade.

Corporal Turnbull didn't take the Professor's gesture very kindly and supportingly. He snubbed him by asking him to fall in with the others. He deliberately announced that the Professor was nominated for permanent cookhouse duties. The Professor became a stock of laughter and a joke for his colleagues. He was really shown his place by Corporal Turnbull.

**Q3. Private Quelch or the Professor impressed with his brain, knowledge and diligence but irritated and infuriated his colleagues and senior officers with his behaviour, exhibitionism and the tendency to outshine and outsmart others. Justify the statement giving examples from the text. What lessons can we learn from Quelch's experience?**

**Ans:** Private Quelch was rightly nicknamed the Professor. He was gifted with a very sharp brain and had hunger for knowledge and information. Day in and day out, he lectured his fellow soldiers on every aspect of human life. At first they had a certain respect for him. Soon they



started living in terror of his approach. His superior air and condescending nature made others feel small.

Private Quelch did earn 'a certain respect' for his diligence and wide range of reading. His only ambition was to get a commission and in pursuit of this ambition, he really worked hard. He had all things by heart. He could identify a flying plane by its harsh engine note due to the high tip speed of the airscrew. The Professor had developed a bad habit of publicly correcting the mistakes of his colleagues and his superiors. His friends and colleagues began to hit back at him with clumsy sarcasms and jokes. The Professor didn't spare even his instructors. He would badger the instructors with questions. Corporal Turnbull didn't spare him. He snubbed him by sending him to the cookhouse. In short, the Professor could have earned respect and honour which was due to him. We can learn a lesson from Quelch's experience. Exhibitionism and tendency of belittling others made him an unpleasant character. 'Knowing too much' is not as important as earning the love and sympathy of our friends and colleagues.