

# **THE FROG AND THE NIGHTINGALE**

**- Vikram Seth**

## **The Frog and the Nightingale Summary**

The poet, Vikram Seth, very cleverly gives us a message of the importance of self-confidence and moral courage in his poem - *The 'Frog and the Nightingale'*. Once in a bog, a frog sat under a Sumac tree and croaked all night in a loud and unpleasant voice. The other creatures loathed his voice but their complaints, insults and brickbats couldn't stop him from croaking stubbornly and pompously, insensitive to the disturbance he was causing.

Then, one night a nightingale appears at the bog. Her melodious voice captures the admiring attention of the creatures of the Bingle Bog. Ducks and herons swim towards the Sumac tree to hear the nightingale serenade. Some lonely creature even weeps hearing her song. When she stops, there is thunderous applause with the creatures demanding a repeat performance (encore). The jealous frog disturbed by the intrusion of a challenging rival listens to the nightingale dumbstruck.

Next night, when the modest bird prepares to sing, the plotting frog interrupts and posing as a music critic, says that the technique was fine, of course, but it lacks a certain force. Unassuming and not used to any kind of criticism, she defends herself by saying, "At least its mine".

The heartless frog convinces the nightingale that she was in need of training that only he could provide. The nightingale, lacking in confidence and extremely gullible agrees and flatters him, saying that he was Mozart in disguise. The frog capitalized on the nightingale's servile attitude and said that he would charge a modest fee, which would not harm her.

The nightingale soon became famous and the frog grew richer, earning money from her concerts. Eminent personalities like the Owl (Earl) of Sandwich and Duck (Duke) of Kent attend the concerts. The frog sat and watched with mixed feelings of happiness and bitterness. He was happy because he was earning money, and jealous because the bird was receiving so much attention.

Meanwhile, the frog makes the nightingale rehearse hard even when it rained and constantly criticized and abused her, ensuring that she became broken in spirit. Fired and spent, her voice lost its beauty and the creatures stopped coming to hear her sing. Morose and depressed, she refused to sing, but the frog goaded her to practice. Scared and unhappy, the nightingale tried, burst a vein, and died.

The frog, unsympathetic, dismissed her off - calling her 'stupid'. A shrewd judge of character, he summed her up saying that the nightingale was too nervous and prone to influence, hence bringing her own downfall. Now, the frog once more sings at night in his bog - unrivalled.

### **Important General Questions:**

1. Why does the frog persist in singing, though no one in the bog wishes to hear him?
2. Do you think the nightingale was responsible for her own downfall? Why? Why not?
3. What does the poet wish to convey in the poem “The Frog and the Nightingale”?
4. “Artists thrive and flourish due to the admiration of their fans”. Do you think this statement proves true in case of the Nightingale? Explain.
5. How did the Frog break the nightingale’s spirit and destroy her?

### **Text book Questions:**

1. How does the frog make use of the nightingale’s talent for his own gains?
2. What happened to the nightingale at the end and why? Do you think the end is justified?
3. In spite of having a melodious voice and being a crowd puller, the nightingale turns out to be a loser and dies. How far is she responsible for her own downfall?
4. Do you agree with the Frog's inference of the Nightingale's character? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Bring out the irony in the frog's statement - 'Your song must be your own'.

#### **Answer:**

*The creature which doesn't even know anything about music tries to comment on a bird like nightingale that possesses a melodious voice and always produces original tunes. Frog's comments are totally baseless as he tried to put down Nightingale's self-esteem and confidence.*

### **Exercise:3 Answer the following questions briefly.**

- a. How did the creatures of Bingle bog react to the nightingale's singing?

**Answer:** *The creatures of Bingle Bog were fed up and irritated with the loud and unpleasant voice of the frog. They wanted to beat and insult him but the frog was too sensitive and he continued singing.*

**b. Which are the different ways in which the frog asserts his importance?**

**Answer:** *The frog pretended to be a great singer and he also said that he was the reporter of Bog "Trumpet". He boasted that he was a music critic and musician like Mozart and ready to train her.*

**c. Why is the frog's joy both sweet and bitter?**

**Answer:** *Frog was happy to charge money for Nightingale's song was unhappy at the popularity of the nightingale in the Bog. Though financially he was happy, he couldn't actually relish the nightingale being praised by everyone.*

**d. Why was the frog angry?**

**Answer:** *The nightingale's songs became very dull, listless and monotonous due to exertion and stress. The crowds dwindled and stopped attending nightingale's performances. Frog was not able to make the expected money and he was angry.*

**e. How did the frog become the unrivalled king of the bog again?**

**Answer:** *The frog humiliated and insulted the nightingale. He made her practice continuously in the rain and thunder. He instructed her to sing at very high notes. So out of sheer fatigue and stress, Nightingale's voice burst out and she died. So the bog had to tolerate the frog's singing once again.*

**Reference to Context:**

1. *And the whole admiring bog  
Stared towards the sumac, rapt,  
And, when she had ended, clapped,  
Ducks had swum and herons waded  
To her as she serenaded*

**a. What was the reaction of the nightingale's song?**

**b. Explain 'serenaded' and 'rapt'**

**c. How did the nightingale sing and make a difference to the frog's songs?**

2. *“Not too bad – but far too long.  
The technique was fine of course,  
But it lacked a certain force”.*
  - a. **Why is the frog making above comments?**
  - b. **What defects does he point out in the nightingale’s songs?**
  - c. **What was the reaction of the nightingale to the above comments?**
  
3. *For six hours, till she was shivering  
and her voice was hoarse and quivering.  
Though subdued and sleep deprived,  
In the night her throat revived*
  - a. **Why had the nightingale come to this state?**
  - b. **How did she revive?**
  - c. **What would be the future of this kind of exertion?**
  
4. *Well, poor bird – she should have known  
That your song must be your own.  
That's why I sing with panache*
  - a. **How does the frog express his sympathy?**
  - b. **What character traits are reflected by the frog’s comments?**
  - c. **Explain – ‘panache’**

**Give explanation for the following expressions:**

1. *Croaked in the Bingle Bog.*
2. *He croaked awn and awn and awn.*
3. *And the crass cacophony.*
4. *To display his heart’s elation.*
5. *Stared toward the Sumac, rapt*
6. *For my splendid baritone*
7. *The technique was fine of course.*
8. *Journeyed up and down the scale*
9. *‘We must aim for better billings  
You still owe me sixty shillings’*
10. *‘Use your wits and follow fashion  
Puff your lungs out with passion’*

## **Literary Devices used in the poem:**

### **METAPHORS:**

- A solitary loon
- Mozart in disguise
- Foghorn

### **SYMBOLS:**

- The Frog: symbolizes opportunistic and cunning people who exploit others for their own benefits.
- The Nightingale: represents naturally talented artists who fail to achieve fame due to their innocence.

### **ALLITERATION:**

- Bingle Bog
- Brainless bird
- Better billings
- Something sharper snappier
- Crass cacophony

## **Glossary**

1. blared - to make a loud unpleasant noise
2. sumac - a tree of the cashew family grown in the temperate zone
3. minstrel - a musician or a singer in the Middle Ages
4. elation - feeling a great happiness and excitement
5. rapt - so interested in something that you are not aware of anything else
6. serenade - gentle music to his lover by a man standing under her window
7. loon – an American bird that eats fish and has a cry like a laugh
8. enraptured - in a state of deep pleasure
9. encore - (here) once more! repeat
10. applause - the noise made by a group of people clapping their hands and sometimes shouting to show their approval
11. twitched - pulled up with a sudden movement
12. fluffed - to do something badly/to fail at something
13. splendid - excellent
14. baritone - a man's singing voice with a certain type of range

15. wield - to have and use power/authority
16. confessed – admitted / agreed
17. flattered - felt happy at false praise
18. impressed - deeply influenced
19. to boast about - to speak high of
20. Mozart - a classical Austrian musician & composer of 18th century
21. in disguise - in a concealed form
22. adoration - a feeling of great love or worship
23. precision - carefully and accurately
  
24. charged admission - allowed to come in at a fee
25. subdued - (here) tired
26. sleep deprived - kept away from sleep (feeling lethargic)
27. titled crowd - throngs of people with titles
28. tiaras - pieces of jewellery, studded with precious stones.
29. glitter - shine
30. twittering - a series of short high sounds that birds make
31. trills - repeated short high sounds (like a bird)
32. zipped - moved quickly
33. uninspired - rude and unpleasant behaviour as at a ticket-window
34. morose - sad
35. addicted - habitual of
36. follow fashion - to go after current trend
37. with panache - with a confident and elegant way to impress others
38. foghorn - (originally) an instrument that makes a loud noise to warn ships of a danger. (here) croaking or unmusical.
39. unrivalled - having none to match