Breakfast by John Steinbeck

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**Summary**

The story “Breakfast” throws light on the fact that the most important thing is contentment. If man has contentment, he can be happy even if he has no house, no permanent job, and no good food to eat.

Once, the writer is going somewhere. On his way, he sees a young woman working outside her tent. The writer is feeling cold and hunger. He goes to the tent. He finds the woman preparing breakfast.

An old man and a young man came out of the tent. They offer the writer to join them for breakfast. The writer agrees. All of them sit on the ground and enjoy a good breakfast. The old man and the young man thank God for that good breakfast. They have been eating good food only for twelve days, but they are happy.

After the breakfast, the young man offers the writer a job, but the writer denies and departs saying thanks for the breakfast. At the end, the writer expresses his feelings.

1. **What is the theme of the story “Breakfast”?**

The theme of the story “Breakfast” is that if man has contentment, he can be happy even if he has no house, no permanent job, and no good food for long.

The writer relates his personal experience to prove that things do not bring happiness. It is our attitude towards life and God that ensures it. Once, the writer met a family. This family was living in a tent just like gypsies who do not have any permanent job or house. These gypsies are always on the move. They pitch up their tent where they find work.

This family was just like them. This family did not have a grand house. They were poor. When they sat to eat, they used a packing box as a table. They sat on the ground to eat because they do not have any chairs, but they were happy. They did not have any complaint or anger against any person or agency because of their poverty. They were happy with the little living they had.

They had been eating good food just for twelve days, but they were grateful to God. The older man said while eating, “God Almighty, it’s good.” Contentment and gratefulness to God was their wealth. After working for twelve days, they were able to get good clothes. They were happy. It was very easy for them to become happy on little favours from God. They did not need much to be happy.

Therefore, the story presents the theme that we are at wrong when we think that things bring happiness. The writer has proved that money is not wealth, but contentment is. (272)

1. **Elaborate the last remark in the story “Breakfast”.**

**What were the reasons that it was pleasant and there was some element of beauty in it?**

In his last remarks, the writer has talked about the theme of the story very beautifully. He has not tried to draw the theme for the reader. He has just given the hint that there is some element of beauty in the story.

The writer has narrated a very short and common event. This event does not have any thrill, surprise of suspense in it. However, something has made this event pleasant. There is some element of great beauty. A long time has passed but this element of beauty still fills his heart with pleasure whenever he thinks of it.

When we go through the story, we find that the element of great beauty was contentment of those people. Besides, they were simple, and were thankful to God on what they had. We see that the family presented by the writer lived in a tent just like gypsies. This family did not have any permanent house or job. The two men pitched up their work where they found work.

They were so much poor that when they sat to eat, they used a packing box as a table. They sat on the ground to eat because they did not have any chairs, but they were happy. They had been eating food just for twelve days, but they were grateful to God. The older man said while eating, “God Almighty, it’s good.” The family did not need much to be happy. This was the element of beauty in the story, which the writer has mentioned in the last lines of the story. (261)

1. **Read the story “Breakfast” carefully and describe the experience and feelings of the writer about the family of cotton pickers.**

**Describe in your own words the writer’s chance meeting with the family of cotton pickers.**

The writer had an experience of meeting with the family of cotton pickers. That experience had an everlasting impact on the writer.

One day, the writer was walking down a country road. He was feeling cold. He saw a grey tent at a distance. A woman was preparing breakfast nearby. The writer approached the tent. After some time two men came out of the tent. One was young while the other was old. They said good morning to the writer. The young man said “Keerist” when he smelt the hot bread.

They offered the writer to join in the breakfast. The writer accepted the offer. They all sat down on the ground and ate to their fill. The young and the old man both were happy at their new dungarees. The old man thanked God. When the writer thanked the cotton picker for the breakfast, he waved his hand in a negative. The young man offered the writer to join in their work, but the writer told them that he had to go along.

The writer expressed his feelings at the start and at the end of the story. According to the writer, this short event still brings curious warm pleasure. He indirectly refers to his pleasant feeling on the simplicity and contentment of cotton pickers. He was impressed by their thankfulness to God. (225)

1. **“Breakfast” is a criticism on the materialistic modern age particularly on city people. Discuss.**

No doubt, the story “Breakfast” is a criticism on the materialistic modern age, particularly on city people.

In this story, the writer has indirectly criticized the people who think that only things can bring happiness. The writer relates his own personal experience to prove that things do not bring happiness. It is our attitude towards god and life that ensures it.

Once, the writer met a family. The family was living in a tent just like gypsies who do not have any permanent house or job. These gypsies are always on the move. They pitch up their tent where they find work. This family was just like them. They did not have a grand house. They were poor. When they sat to eat, they used a packing box as a table. They sat on the ground to eat because they did not have any chairs, but they were happy.

They did not have any complaint or anger against any person or agency because of their poverty. They were happy with the little living they had. They had been eating good food just for twelve days, but they were grateful to God. The older man said while eating, “God Almighty, it’s good.” Contentment and gratefulness to God was their wealth. They were able to buy new clothes, after working for twelve days. It was very easy to them to become happy on little favours from God. They did not need much to be happy.

Therefore, the story is a criticism on the materialistic modern age, particularly on city people who think that things bring happiness. (264)

1. **Write a note on the atmosphere and setting of the story.**

The setting of a story means time, place, and social circumstances in which its action occurs. When we read the story, we find that the time of the story is present. The writer wants to promote the idea that things do not bring happiness. Nevertheless, it is our attitude towards God and life that ensures it.

The place of the action of the story is a hilly area or a village. The family of cotton pickers is living in a tent just like gypsies. They pitch up their tent where they find work. When they sit to eat, they use a packing box as a table. They sit on the ground because they do not have any chair. They have been eating good food just for twelve days. However, they were happy and have contentment and gratefulness to God.

In this story, the writer presents the social circumstances of a poor family. He presents their poverty by describing the things like the tent, the rusty stove, packing box, the humble food and the cotton skirt of the woman. The action of the story takes place outside the tent where the family meets the writer. They have their breakfast there. (199)

1. **What did the younger man offer the writer in the story? What effect did this offer has on his mind?**

**Discuss the attitude of cotton pickers with the writer.**

**Why does the writer decline the offer of a job but could never forget these people?**

After having breakfast, the younger man offered the writer to join in their work of cotton picking, but the writer rejected the offer. However, he thanked for the breakfast.

The writer expressed his feelings at the start and at the end of the story. At the start of the story, the writer says that the remembrance of the offer of work and the attitude of the cotton pickers fill him with pleasure. He can remember these in the smallest detail. This memory is so good that he finds himself recalling it repeatedly. Each time he remembers something new. He gets curious warm pleasure.

At the end, he thinks that there was a great element of beauty. That element of great beauty makes him happy whenever he thinks about it.

Therefore, we see that the offer of work and the attitude of the family of cotton pickers had a very good effect on the writer. He still remembers it and it appears that he will always remember it. Whenever he remembers it, he gets happiness.

He is impressed by the simplicity, contentment, and the sincerity of the cotton pickers. They had only twelve days of work; still they offer the writer to join in. They were very kind with the writer. Although the writer was a complete stranger to them, yet they received him very kindly. They exchanged greeting with the writer and received him with a smile. They were very poor but they offered the writer to join in the breakfast. (251)

1. **Write a note on the characters of the story “Breakfast”.**

Characters are the persons presented in a story. A character may remain unchanged in his outlook from beginning to end or he may change. If a character remains unchanged, it is called a flat or type character and if it changes it is called a round character.

When we read the story “Breakfast” carefully, we find that the characters presented in the story are flat. They remain unchanged from the beginning to the end. There are five characters in the story. The members of the family of cotton pickers represent village people. The fifth one is the writer himself. He takes the role of a narrator. He receives the favours of the family of cotton pickers.

The first quality of the cotton pickers is that they are kind and good-hearted people. Their circumstances do not allow them to offer a stranger to join in the breakfast. They are very poor and they have been eating good food just for twelve days. They have seen and tasted good food after a long time. It is very difficult to offer somebody else. However, they are not just ordinary people. They are symbols of good qualities. The writer has presented them to prove that a person can be kind even to a stranger if he wants to. It is not difficult at all.

Their second quality is their contentment. They are contented people. They are so poor that they live in a tent just like gypsies. When they sit to eat, they use a packing box because they do not have any table. They sit on the ground to eat because they do not have any chair. However, they are happy and smile when they look at each other.

Their third quality is their gratefulness to God. In spite of all their poverty, they are happy and grateful to God on his favours.  Their gratefulness to God is very touching and impresses the writer very much.

In the present circumstances, it is very difficult to find such people. However according to the writer there are such people in the world. One may come across them on one’s way. (355)

1. **The story “Breakfast” is a symbolic story. Discuss.**

**The story “Breakfast” has an allegorical interpretation. Discuss.**

**The qualities are personified in the story “Breakfast”**

No doubt, the story “Breakfast” is a symbolic story and it has an allegorical interpretation. In this story, the good qualities of contentment and gratefulness to God have been personified as persons. The writer has presented a family of cotton pickers. The writer has not told the names of the characters because they are type characters. They are symbol of contented and grateful village people.

Firstly, they are symbol of kindness and good-heartedness. Their circumstances do not allow them to offer a stranger to join in breakfast. They are very poor and eating good food only for twelve days. They have seen and tasted good food after a long time. It is very difficult to offer someone else. However, they are not just ordinary people. They are the symbol of good qualities. The writer has presented them to prove that a person can be kind even to a stranger if he wants to.

Secondly, they are the symbol of contentment. They are contented people. They are so poor that they live in a tent just like gypsies. They pitch up their tent where they find work. When they sit to eat, they use a packing box because they do not have any chair. However, they are happy and smile when they look at each other.

Thirdly, they are symbol of gratefulness to God. In spite of all their poverty, they are happy and grateful to God on His favours. Their gratefulness to God is very touching and impresses the writer very much.

In the present circumstances, it is very difficult to find such people. However, according to the writer, there are such people in the world. One may find them on one’s way. Such people are really symbol of good qualities. (291)