

Note: The transactional processes suggested in CISCE curriculum are highlighted in grey.

Learning Outcomes

- To observe that the older generation is a guiding force for the new generation
- To comprehend the deeper meaning presented
- To know that experience and knowledge can be imparted as well as imbibed

Summary: *'The Bridge Builder'* is a simple poem about caring for others even when there is no obligation to do so. An old man, unafraid of crossing a dangerous chasm, decides to spend his time building a bridge over the deep chasm, after crossing it. He knows that he might never have the need to use the bridge again, but makes this selfless choice for any inexperienced person who might travel this way in future. On a metaphorical level, the poem tells us not to be selfish, and leave behind what is good for the wellbeing of the next generation.

Pre-reading

Ask students how bridges are useful to us.

(Allow free response. *Suggested answer:* Bridges help us cross from one part of the land to another. They provide passage for crossing over difficult terrains or natural barriers such as lakes, rivers, streams etc. This helps save time, effort and at times money as long-winding alternate routes can be hard on the pocket.)

Now read this short paragraph to the class.

I was very shy when I joined the new class. Everything in this school was very different from my earlier one. The students kept to themselves and did not extend a helping hand. I felt lost.

When I was in this state of confusion and worry, the English teacher entered the class. He looked straight at me and asked me to come forward. He put me at ease right away and I felt relieved. From then on everything seemed so easy. He taught me new phrases and expressions. He joked and laughed and made us laugh. I looked forward to his classes. He guided me whenever I needed help.

I crossed the bridge effortlessly and mastered the language in no time.

Now ask students:

What is the 'bridge' referred to here? Is it the same as the bridge that is built across rivers? What is the comparison here? (A hurdle that he crossed to become successful)

Explain metaphors to students with reference to the above paragraph.

Note: A metaphor refers to one thing by mentioning another. It provides similarities between two ideas.

Now talk to the class about the various difficulties man faces in life. It could be related to work, expenses, experiences and so on.

Ask students:

How do we handle such hurdles in life? Whom do we turn to for guidance in this world if and when we face difficulties in life? (Allow free response. — Students may say that we look to our parents, elders, teachers, gurus and so on for guidance)

Tell students that they will be reading a poem which holds a parallel meaning. Through the course of the reading, let them work in pairs and analyse and infer the metaphorical meaning of the words and phrases in the poem against their literal representations. Guide them if required.

READING

Students read to comprehend, analyse, compare and infer the deeper meaning in the poem

- Read the first stanza. / Play the audio track and pause after the first stanza.

Ask students:

How has the poet described the evening and the chasm/pit? (Evening: Cold and gray as it was dusk; Chasm: was deep and wide) Why was he not afraid of the stream deep below? Why did he build the bridge when he had already crossed it?

Now let students work in pairs and compare the scene portrayed in the first stanza with real life.

Draw the columns on the board. Brainstorm for details and fill in the columns. Prompt students if required.

Note: The filled in metaphorical details are for the teacher's reference. These are only suggestions. Accept any logical answer.

Literal meaning		Metaphorical meaning
<i>An old man going a lone highway</i>	First Stanza	An elderly man who was on his own
<i>Chasm wide and deep</i>		A challenging situation in life
<i>The sullen tide; The sullen tide had no fear for him</i>		A tough situation; He was accustomed to such situations and could deal with them easily
<i>Built a bridge</i>		Found a solution to deal with the situation and ready to impart the knowledge to another
<i>You will never again pass this way</i>	Second Stanza	You have managed to overcome the hurdles that you may never come across again
<i>This chasm that has been as naught to me</i>	Third Stanza	My experiences have helped me deal with such hurdles and I do not find this one cumbersome
<i>To that fair-haired youth may a pitfall be</i>		May be very difficult for the youngster who is not accustomed to such difficult situations
<i>He too must cross in the twilight dim</i>		He too would face the same situation
<i>I am building this bridge for him</i>		I am setting him guidelines to handle the situation

- Read the second stanza. / Continue with the audio track and pause after the second stanza.

Who did the old man encounter while building the bridge? Was he the same age as the old man? (No) How do you know? (He addressed him as 'old man' which meant he was younger.) How were the two men different? (The old man was concerned about others who may pass that way and wanted to help while the other man felt no such concern, as the thought did not even cross his mind. Perhaps he was indifferent.)

- Read the third stanza. / Play the audio track till the end.

Ask students:

What had the old man observed before reaching the pit? (That a young man was coming along the same way) Does the phrase 'old gray head' hold any significance? (Experienced / wise) What did he think of the fair-haired youth? (That the fair-haired youth was incapable of crossing such a deep and

wide chasm / that he was inexperienced and would need help)

Post-reading

a. Discuss:

- *How can we practise this approach/thought/ in a classroom situation? (By helping those who require our help or guidance)*
- *Why should we do this? (By doing this we help others to progress and thus spread goodwill)*

b. Who would you compare yourself to – The old man or the fellow pilgrim?

Poetic devices:

Rhyme scheme: *aa bb cc bb dd aa bb ee aa ff cc*

Personification: *sullen stream*

Contrasts: *Old gray head* (experienced) — *fair-haired* (novice)

Alliteration: *sullen stream, built a bridge, crossed the chasm, this chasm that has*

STUDENTS' BOOK ANSWER KEY

The Bridge Builder

Comprehension

- A.**
1. The old man was travelling along a lone highway on a cold evening.
 2. The chasm has been described as vast, deep and wide.
 3. After crossing the chasm, the old man turned back and built a bridge.
 4. The fellow pilgrim asked the old man the reason for building the bridge because he didn't understand why the old man was building a bridge since he had already crossed the chasm and would never again travel that way.
 5. The old man built the bridge because he felt that things would be easier for those who came after him if there was a bridge to take them across. He also thought that while crossing the chasm was not a difficult task for him, it could be for those who were younger and with less experience than him.
 6. The old man built a bridge after he had already crossed the chasm. He cared enough about strangers to build a bridge for the convenience of people he would never meet. He could have just continued on with his journey but he also took the trouble to build the bridge when it was already getting dark.
- B.**
1. a. The speaker is the fellow pilgrim. He is speaking to the old man, the bridge builder.

- b. The speaker says these words because he feels that the old man is wasting his strength by building a bridge across a chasm that he has already crossed. The old man is a traveller and he would perhaps never again cross the same chasm again. Therefore, the speaker feels that it is pointless for him to stop and build a bridge that he does not need.
 - c. The old man is building a bridge at evening tide because he feels that others who may pass the same way may find it difficult to cross the chasm in the dark.
2. a. The speaker here is the old man, the bridge builder. He is speaking to a fellow pilgrim.
 - b. The 'youth' being referred to in these lines are the men and women of the younger generation or those with lesser experience in life than the old man.
 - c. The old man crosses the chasm easily and without any fear. Since he can do it easily, he regards it as doing almost nothing.

C. Suggested answers. Accept any logical answer.

1. The old man's actions are an example of service to society. He is compassionate enough to think about his fellow human beings. His unselfish nature makes him build a bridge that he does not need. His actions teach us to help others without expecting anything in return.
2. Life, in the poem, is considered as a journey which lasts an entire day and which ends at the close of the day. So, the traveller indicates to the old man that he has lived for a long time and is probably nearing the end of his time on earth. Therefore, he is unlikely to meet the younger people for whom he has built the bridge, in the years that he has left.
3. *The Bridge Builder* is a suitable title for the poem. The word 'bridge' in the poem denotes a link or a connection between a person and a goal that is difficult to achieve. A bridge makes this connection easier. Bridge builders like the old man work for society and make changes so that a large number of people can achieve a common goal.

Appreciating the Poem

Second stanza: ddaabb

Third stanza: eeaaffcc

Vocabulary

2. vast, deep and wide chasm

3. lone highway/sullen tide

4. old and gray head

5. fair-haired youth

Going Further

Free response

QUESTION BANK

The Bridge Builder

A. Answer in brief.

Why was the old man not afraid of the chasm?

Ans: The old man did not seem afraid of crossing the chasm with water running through it probably because he was experienced and knew that he could cross the

water unharmed. Another reason could be that he was not afraid as he had completed his duties on earth.

B. Answer in detail.

What did the fellow pilgrim tell the old man? How did the old man respond?

Ans: The fellow pilgrim was surprised to see the old man build a bridge after crossing the chasm. He advised the old man to stop building as he had already crossed the chasm and was safe. The old man completed building the bridge and said that he was not building the bridge for himself, but he wanted to help a young, inexperienced youth who was following him and might have a harder time crossing the chasm. The old man was concerned about the safety of the young traveller because he felt that what was a safe cross-over for him, might prove a pitfall for the young man.

C. Choose the correct answer.

What is the message in the poem, 'The Builder's Bridge'?

- a. To care for others even when there is no obligation to do so
- b. To build bridges for others to cross dangerous chasms
- c. To assist inexperienced travellers when they cross bridges

Ans: a

D. Read the lines and answer the questions.

Through which was flowing a sullen tide

The old man crossed in the twilight dim,

- a. Where was the tide flowing?
- b. How has the poet described the tide? Why?
- c. What time of the day was he crossing?

Ans: a. The tide was flowing through the deep canyon.

b. The poet refers to the tide as 'sullen' because the water was calm and sluggish.

c. The old man was crossing the chasm in the evening just after sunset.

E. Answer in detail. (Think and answer)

- a. Who does the Bridge Builder represent? Narrate your experience as a bridge builder, however small your help may have been. / Do you know of a bridge builder? How has he/she influenced you?

Ans: The theme of the poem is about helping other people with the experience one has acquired. The old man represents the experienced wise human being who has faced challenges in life and has overcome difficulties. He crosses the chasm without fear only because of his experience. He wants to be unselfish and kind by extending help in the form of building a bridge over a deep chasm for an inexperienced youth despite the knowledge that he may not get to use the bridge himself. The old man is like those who have seen difficulties in life and would like to do things to make life easier for other human beings who take the same path. Metaphorically, the bridge builder refers to an unselfish, helpful person.

Free response for the second part