

The winter oak – yuri nagibin



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. How does Anna Vasilevna change by the end of the story from what she is like at the beginning? Explain the part Savushkin plays in these changes and how the language of the story helps us to understand them.

In 'The Winter Oak', Anna Vasilevna changes in many ways and Savushkin is the key to these changes. In the opening few paragraphs of 'The Winter Oak' the reader learns a great deal about Anna Vasilevna's initial personality. For example, when Nagibin writes, "The piercing bell that announced the beginning of the school had hardly died down when Anna Vasilevna came into the class-room," we learn that Anna Vasilevna is obviously a very punctual person. She is presented in a fairly stereotypical way by Nagibin.

This stereotype is continued when Nagibin writes of Anna Vasilevna "pushing a hair pin back into her heavy knot of hair," because a bun is viewed as a conventional hairstyle for strict teachers. A key theme in the story is learning and this is the focus of Anna's change. The beginning of the story is set in a classroom, where Anna Vasilevna is teaching. As Anna Vasilevna announces to the class that, "Today we are going to continue learning about parts of speech" we see Anna's intention to teach the class, however it is ironic as the English lesson is not the only lesson that Anna will be a part of that day.

When Savushkin enters the classroom, we are able to see how important he is to Anna's change. Savushkin is rebelling against the conformities of school by being late to his lesson and this goes against Anna Vasilevna's legalist ideology of conformity. Anna Vasilevna is annoyed by Savushkin's refusal to

conform. She is part of the restrictive school system and she abides by the rules, so why shouldn't he? Later on in the lesson, when the class are asked to call out examples of nouns, Savushkin contributes, "winter oak," he says which the reader knows must be significant as it is the title of the story. When Nagibin describes the manner with which Savushkin announces his noun, we begin to see how important Savushkin is to the story. Savushkin speaks "Just as if he had woken up out of a dream," which suggests to the reader that even though Savushkin has arrived at school physically, his mind is still in his 'dream world.'

We also learn about how sure of himself and confident Savushkin is. He contributes his noun by shouting it, and we are told that "The children began to laugh," they are ridiculing him for his effort but Savushkin notices neither the laughter of the children nor the admonishment of Anna Vasilevna. However Anna Vasilevna is willing to give Savushkin a chance, this is perhaps the start of Anna Vasilevna's change as she is able to see that this rule breaking late little boy may have something to contribute that would not come to the other children for a number of years. We learn more of Savushkin as Nagibin goes on to write "The words were torn out of his soul" suggesting that Savushkin's "joyful secret" is very much a part of him.

Savushkin says "winter oak" as a "confession" this tells us of his sinful guilt about being consistently delayed by the tree which shows that however individual and independent Savushkin may be, he still has some regard, however little for rules. As the part of the story set in the classroom comes to an end we see that although Anna Vasilevna does not yet understand Savushkin's "strange excitement" she is on her way to sharing it with him as

they enter the forest together later in the story. Also, at this early point in the story, when Anna Vasilevna says, “ Oak is a noun” we know that at present it means nothing more to her than grammar however it soon will mean much more to her as the story progresses.

The part of the story set in the staff room of the school shows the beginning of both characters changes. As Savushkin talks, he spreads his hands in a “ grown-up way,” this tells the reader that the role reversal between pupil and teacher has begun. Anna Vasilevna clearly still has her mind on the grammar lesson of that morning as she corrects Savushkin in his explanation of his route to school; “ Not straighting, straight,” this shows the reader that even though she has begun to change, she still maintains some of her adult qualities.

As the pair enter the forest we can see Anna Vasilevna’s changes much more clearly. Where Nagibin writes; “ The path along which Savushkin led Anna Vasilevna began just behind the school building,” there is symbolism in many ways. The word education comes from the Latin “ to lead out” as Savushkin is leading Anna Vasilevna the reader observes the role reversal where Savushkin has now become Anna’s teacher and leader. Additionally, the path on which Savushkin walks to school is symbolic of the path of life. It is said to start just behind the school building, which is the symbol of conformity and legalism, the path leads to Savushkin’s world of individuality so the path is helping Savushkin to lead Anna out into a different world. This point is reinforced as the pair are “ transported into another world.” The pathetic fallacy contained in “ joyful glades” helps Nagibin’s description of Anna Vasilevna’s change.

In the forest, Savushkin becomes more of a teacher than anywhere else as the role reversal in the story gets into full flow. Savushkin reassures Anna Vasilevna when she is worried by saying “ But don’t be afraid.” Also, Anna Vasilevna becomes more of a child by getting excited about fairly simple things, such as deer. Her childishness is also emphasised by her innocent pleasure of the act of “ kicking snow into the water with the toe of her boot.” Savushkin’s importance in Anna Vasilevna’s changes is emphasised when Nagibin writes that “ Savushkin had gone on, and was waiting for her.” Savushkin has clearly had more experience of life in the forest than Anna Vasilevna however even though he is able to complete his journey of individuality faster than her, he is willing to wait and to teach. When Savushkin and Anna Vasilevna actually see the oak, it is described with much religious vocabulary. Words such as “ majestic,” “ magnanimous,” and describing the winter oak as a “ cathedral” lead the reader to believe that it provides holy sanctuary to the life in the forest. When Savushkin treats the oak as an “ old acquaintance,” we think of Savushkin as a friend of the forest.

However much Savushkin has developed from his time spent in the forest, he has not lost his innocence of being unable to recognise his wrongdoings. As he exclaims that they will be too late to see his mother he appears unaware of his dawdling. Anna Vasilevna has broken the habit of a lifetime, normally very punctual, she is late, this is a signal of her change. Anna Vasilevna felt as if “ She had walked into a trap,” and because of this she feels that it would be acceptable to be cunning herself. Before this act of slyness, she asks the winter oak if it is all right. This is treating the oak as

some kind of god, which adds to the previous religious references. As Anna Vasilevna tries one last time to impose her rules and authority on Savushkin by telling him to go by the road, we know that she had changed because she has become less obsessed by rules. We know this because later, she relents and grants Savushkin permission to go to the forest.

Anna Vasilevna realises at the very end of the story that she is not the only teacher in the story, she also realises that she must take the journey of life along the road leading to individuality. Another main lesson learnt by Anna Vasilevna in the story is that sometimes to advance in adult life, you must recede to the ideas and viewpoint of a child. In the final paragraph, Nagibin writes that Savushkin was “guarding his teacher from afar,” this is the final element of the role reversal, Anna Vasilevna was portrayed as the authoritative figure in school at the beginning of the story, and Savushkin has now taken over that position. Anna Vasilevna has broken free of Savushkin leading her to independence and individuality and goes on to complete her own journey.

2. “Education does not take place only in the classroom.” To what extent do you think this statement is true?

I agree entirely with the statement “Education does not take place only in the classroom.” Although a small proportion of our academic learning occurs in the classroom, every human being has many life lessons to be learnt that simply cannot be taught in a classroom at school. These are things such as people skills, how to act in an emergency situation, household chores such as ironing and even things such as flirting!

However, some of these lessons need to be learnt by the individual's own experience and there is not a specific way to teach them these lessons. For the life lessons that can be learnt but out side of the classroom there are a number of possibilities. I have spent 10 years in the various branches of the Guide Association and now work as a Young Leader in a local Rainbow unit and I believe that the Guide Association and the Scout Movement play a big part in the learning of children as they grow up. Things such as basic survival skills learnt during Scouts have proved to be important lessons for many people I know and at Brownies, the number of lessons my friends and I have taken through secondary school have been incredible.

A recent survey carried out on a number of young people suggests that up to 1/6 of learning occurs through watching the television. I found this fact incredible as my years of watching far too much television have always been viewed as a terrible thing by my parents. However, the combination of audio and visual has proved to be one of the most effective learning techniques over a number of centuries so this finding seems a little more reasonable than first thought.

I also believe that organisations and institutions are not always necessary for learning, you can learn a great deal from individuals for example an idol or person you admire, an author, a teacher or parent. Teachers do not always have to be more academically developed than the pupil to learn, often peers can be great sources of learning, I for one have been inspired by my friends to take ideas to new levels and see the world in a different way. Sometimes even lesser educationally developed people can help us to advance in our own personal learning journey, as the saying goes; " To go forward you must

go back.” We can apply this to the situation by saying that the view of the world through the eyes of a child is always much less complicated than that through the eyes of an adult and the answer to a question that troubles an adult is glaringly obvious to a child.

The word “ education itself comes from the Latin, “ to lead” and this is accurate in point out that education is like a journey. We are led along the road of life and learning by our teachers, whoever they may be. In conclusion, I agree with the statement “ Education does not take place only in the classroom.”

3. Like Savushkin, everyone has a secret world, write about yours.

My secret world is the beach near to where I live. Although its location is not very secret my thoughts and opinions when I am there, are. I can go to the beach alone by day, and sit and watch the world go by. I can think about anything that is on my mind and sort things out in my head. At night I can walk along the beach, listening to the waves. I can sit and watch the waves break gently on the shore. I love to go to the beach on my own because it gives me an opportunity to come to terms with life and I can relax without any pressure from others.

I can go to the beach with my family, to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries. I can socialise with friends and relatives that I rarely see. We can make memories together. The smell of the barbecued food, the sounds of laughter as we remember the memories of last time we met together, the sight of so many faces that I have grown up with are all part of the reason that I love the beach as my special place.

I can go to the beach with my friends during the day. We can put the world to rights as we lie and sunbathe for hours on end; we can joke and laugh as we tan our skin. The sun beating down on our backs, the chatter and laughter of my friends and the sight of so many smiling faces surrounding me are part of the reason I love the beach.

I can go to the beach in the evenings with my friends to watch the fireworks. We can sit and watch the glowing explosions flare across the sky as we think to ourselves or share a joke with a friend. The ability to be an individual at the beach or as part of a group is what draws me here most, I enjoy being able to think, and my thoughts make the beach my secret place.