

The Tale of Melon City – Important Questions

Q. What sort of King ruled over the state?

Ans. The King was fair and gentle. He seemed to be interested in the welfare of the masses. So, he proclaimed that an arch should be constructed which should extend across the major thoroughfare. He hoped that it would improve people's mind on looking at it.

Q. Where did the King want an arch to be constructed and why?

Ans. The King wanted an arch to be constructed extending over the main thoroughfare from one side to the other. He thought that it would improve the lookers-on morally and mentally.

Q. Why did the King order the chief of builders to be hanged?

Ans. One day the King was riding down the thoroughfare. The arch was so low that it struck against the Crown. The Crown fell off. The King was angry at this disgrace. He held the chief of builders responsible for this and ordered him to be hanged.

Q. How did the workmen escape being hanged?

Ans. When the chief of builders blamed the workmen for the incident, the King stopped the proceedings of hanging for a while. Then he decided to have all the workmen hanged. The workmen argued that the size of the bricks was wrong. The King decided to hang the masons instead. Thus, the workmen escaped being hanged.

Q. How did the architect lay the blame on the King?

Ans. The King ordered that the architect should be hanged. The architect reminded the King that he had made certain amendments to the plans when they were shown to him. Thus, the architect indirectly lays the blame on the King.

Q. What was the King's reaction when the architect blamed him for the incident?

Ans. When the architect blamed the King for the incident he was confused and nearly lost control over himself. However, being a just and placid King, he said that it was an intricate matter and he needed someone's advice. He ordered to bring him the wisest man in the country.

Q. Comment upon the criteria of selection of the wisest man and the quality of councillor he offered.

Ans. The criteria was that wisdom comes with grey hair. The old man they selected could not walk or see. He spoke in a trembling voice. The advice he offered was absurd. A lifeless object cannot be deprived of life by hanging it.

Q. What was the advice given by the wisest man?

Ans. At the King's command the wisest man was found and brought, rather carried, to the Royal Court in fact, he was so old that he could neither walk nor see. He said that the culprit must be punished. He held the arch responsible for hitting the Crown violently and causing it fall. So, according to him, the arch was the real culprit.

Q. How did the arch escape punishment?

Ans. As advised by the wisest man, the arch was held responsible for hitting the Crown and led to the scaffold. Suddenly, a councillor said that it would be a shameful act to hang the arch that touched his Majesty's head. The King thought it was true and spared the arch.

Q. Describe the circumstance which led to the hanging of his Majesty.

Ans. The crowd was getting restless as the hanging was being delayed. Sensing their mood, the King said that someone must be hanged immediately, as the nation wanted it. A noose was set up. It was somewhat high. Each man was measured turn by turn. There was only one man who was tall enough to fit in the noose, and it was the King. So, His Majesty was hanged.

Q. What was the problem confronted by the Ministers? How did they solve it?

Ans. After hanging of His Majesty, the ministers were confronted with the problem of finding a ruler for their state. To solve this problem they followed their old custom. The heralds were sent out to proclaim that the next person who passes the City Gate would choose the ruler of their state.

Q. How was the melon crowned the king of the state? Or How did the melon become the ruler?

Ans. The ministers sent out messengers to declare that the next man to pass the City Gate would choose the ruler of their state. An idiot happened to pass the gate. When asked to decide who was to be the King, he replied, "A melon". This was his standard answer to all questions. The minister declared that a melon would be their new ruler. They crowned the melon and it became the city king.

Q. The Tale of Melon city is full of irony. Give any two examples from the poem?

Ans. 'The Tale of Melon City' by Vikram Seth is full of ironical instances. The poem begins with a 'just and placid' king ordering the construction of an arch. After the construction, the king went there and his crown struck the arch. He felt disgraced and ordered death sentence for the person responsible for it. The circumstances took such a turn that he himself got hanged. The second instance is that a chance was given to any person who passed that gate to decide the ruler of the state. The first person who passed that gate was a foolish man and he decided that a melon should be the ruler of the state. Without giving any second thought, a melon was placed on the throne.

Q. Are the people happy with their Melon King? Why or why not?

Ans. Yes, the people are happy with their Melon King because he follows the policy of non-interference. They don't bother what he is as long as he leaves them in peace and liberty.

Q. How does the so called 'just and placid' King of Melon City land himself into a difficult situation?

Ans. The King of Melon City proclaimed to construct an arch, spanning the main thoroughfare. Soon, the arch was constructed. One day the King was riding down the thoroughfare. His, Crown struck against the arch and fell off. The King felt dishonoured and decided to hang the chief of builders. The chief of builders put the blame on the labourers. The King decided to hang all the labourers. The labourers found fault with the size of the bricks. The King summoned the masons but they lay the blame on the architect. The King ordered to hang the architect. The architect reminded the King that he had made certain amendments to the plans when they were shown to him. The King found himself in a difficult situation as the architect held him responsible for the mishap. He was utterly confused. Being a just and placid King, he could not deny the charge.

Q. How did the King try to get out of the difficult situation? Did he succeed?

Ans. The King found himself in a difficult situation after hearing the architect's arguments. He said that it was an intricate matter and he needed someone's advice. He ordered to bring him the wisest man in the country. The wisest man was found and brought to the Royal Court. He said that the arch was the real culprit. It impudently hit the crown which fell off. So, the arch must be hanged. Suddenly, a councillor said that it would be a very shameful act to hang the arch that touched His Majesty's head. It seemed true to the King. He was at a loss what to do. Meanwhile, he saw the crowd was getting restless and they wanted a hanging. So, he declared that someone must be hanged. The noose was set up. It was somewhat high. Each man was measured turn by turn. But there was only one man who was tall enough to fit in the noose and it was the King. His Majesty was, therefore, hanged by Royal Decree.

Q. 4. What do think makes 'The Tale of Melon City' interesting and edifying?

Ans. According to the title, the poem tells a story about Melon City—a city named after its ruler. It is quite interesting and edifying to learn how the country got a melon as its ruler. In short it was on account of customary choice. The people relate the story of a just and placid King who was hanged by his own Royal Decree.

What the King did for the people and how he held the trials of the accused both are quite amusing. The clever arguments of the accused to save their lives are equally interesting. The King feels the pulse of the people who want to see a hanging. He knows how mischievous an angry mob can be and hence orders that someone must be hanged immediately. The irony of the situation is that the King is tall enough to fit the noose.

The practical minded ministers resort to the age old custom of choosing the next ruler. The idiot's idiotic choice is approved of in the name of custom. The people are indifferent to the fact that their ruler is a Melon not a man. The behaviour of pragmatic ministers and equally selfish, foolish and mean people seems quite funny and interesting. It is instructive too. A wise man should avoid the company of fools.

**Q. “Mockery is found in the process of fair trial and proper judgement”.
Comment.**

Ans. In the poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’ mockery is seen in the age-old custom of delivering justice by word of mouth of the Kings. There was a time when the King’s word was considered divine and whatever he uttered was law. A just and placid King was expected to protect the innocent and punish the guilty. However, the process of trial and the over-changing judgements mocks at the whole process of fair trials and considered awards. This is proved from the statements of the accused who try to save their lives by holding others responsible for the guilt. The King’s capriciousness and inability to see through the thin veil of their arguments make him an object of ridicule rather than a dispenser of divine justice.

Q. Justify the title of the poem, “The Tale of Melon City”.

Ans. The poem ‘The Tale of Melon City’ has a quite significant ending. It has a direct bearing on the title. The end reveals that the incidents took place, long ago. It throws light on the old custom of the state to choose their ruler. Confronted with the dilemma, the ministers took the easy way out. The person who passed the City Gate was to name the next King. It was a chance for an idiot who gave the standard answer ‘a melon’ to every question. Therefore, the melon was crowned the King, carried to the throne and respectfully set down there. The people are not at all ashamed to have a melon as their King. They say that if he rejoices in being a melon, that’s all right with them. They find no fault with him as long as he leaves them to enjoy their peace, freedom and free trade. The capital city is called Melon City after the King.