

CHAPTER - 4

ALBERT EINSTEIN AT SCHOOL

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

A. Reading With Insight

Question 1. What do you understand of Einstein's nature from his conversations with his history teacher, his mathematics teacher and the head teacher?

Answer: Exchanges between Einstein and History teacher show that Einstein is honest and truthful. He admits his shortcomings frankly. He has firm and well-defined opinions. He explains precisely what he thinks. Thus his basic intelligence, logical reasoning and lucid expression are highlighted. He showed the sparks of genius even at a young age. His maths teacher had a high opinion of him. He went to the extent of saying: "I can't teach you more, and probably you'll soon be able to teach me." When Albert said that it was excessive praise, the teacher acknowledged that it was only the truth. He made the point by saying that Albert was ready immediately to enter a college or institute for the study of higher mathematics. Albert himself said, "I've learnt all the maths, they teach at school and a bit more."

The head teacher told Albert that he was expelling him from school because his presence in the classroom made it impossible for the teacher to teach and other pupils to learn. No serious work could be done while he was in the class. Albert refused to learn and he was "in constant rebellion.

For a moment Albert felt tempted to tell the head teacher what he thought of him and his school. Then he stopped himself. He didn't say even a single word. Holding his head high, he went out with a sense of pride. Thus, he had a lot of self-control. Albert was not at all impolite. He addressed his teachers respectfully and answered the questions honestly.

Question 2. The school system often curbs individual talents. Discuss.

Answer: Albert Einstein's miserable five years' stay at school is a telling comment on the system of education prevailing then and existing even now. This system of education has no room for individual aspirations, brilliance or aptitude. It discourages genius and originality and encourages mechanical dullards or the so called 'average' students. This system lays stress on facts and dates rather than ideas. It ignores originality and creativity, which lead to progress and development.

No wonder then that most of the students manage to pass the examination by cramming—

learning things by heart and repeating it in the exams. This parrot like learning or learning without understanding may help to get the diploma but fails to enrich the mind or inculcate ideas.

The teachers and authorities insist on discipline and conformity. The history teacher and the Head teacher are sticklers for rules, pedagogy and discipline. Brilliant students like Albert Einstein are considered dullard, stupid, incompetent, unfit rebels whose very presence makes it impossible for teacher to teach and other pupils to learn.

Question 3. How do you distinguish between information gathering and insight formation?

Answer: Learning the dates of battles or the details about victorious armies are facts. These details are part of knowledge which are content-based. There is no point in spending precious years of student life on information gathering because dates or facts could be ascertained from the books any time by just looking them up. Learning facts or parrot-like learning i.e., learning without understanding is what we call information gathering.

Analysing the facts, ascertaining the causes that led to a certain incident such as an uprising or a war and learning the ideas that spring from such actions are part of insight information. It gives us a clear perception into the true nature of a thing. Such knowledge increases our logical reasoning, power of analysis interpretation and understanding and makes us think.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

A. Short Answer Type Questions

Question 1. Why was Mr Braun speechless for a few moments?

Answer: Mr Braun asked Albert in which year the Prussians defeated the French at Waterloo. Albert told him that he didn't know. Mr Braun said that he had told them so many times. Albert told him that he saw no point in learning dates. These could be seen in books. This made him speechless.

Question 2. Who asks for the Einstein theory of education? How?

Answer: Mr Braun, the History teacher asks for Einstein theory of education. He does so highly sarcastically and in a mocking tone. '

Question 3. What is Einstein's view about education? How far do you agree with it?

Answer: For Einstein ideas are important and facts do not matter. He considers learning the dates of battles or the details about victorious armies meaningless. He is more interested in the causes that led the soldiers to kill each other.

Question 4. How did the history teacher react to Albert's replies? Will a modern student agree with the teacher? Why /Why not?

Answer: The history teacher felt amazed as well as annoyed at Albert's stubbornness. It was because Albert challenged all the established norms of attaining knowledge. Modern students do not agree with the history teacher's view. Education is not a mere acquisition of certain facts and their verbatim reproduction.

Question 5. Why did Albert see no point in learning dates and facts?

Answer: Dates and facts are parts of knowledge which are content based. Albert thought that there was no point in learning dates and facts because firstly, these could be, ascertained from the books any time by just looking them up. Secondly, for him, learning facts was not education.

Question 6. Do you think Albert is being impolite while answering the history teacher's questions ? Give your reasons.

Answer: No, Albert is not at all impolite. He addresses his teacher respectfully. Secondly, he answers the questions honestly. He does not think that his free and frank opinion will annoy the teacher and will be construed as impoliteness.

Question 7. What was the history teacher's opinion of Albert?

Answer: The history teacher had a very low opinion of Albert. He called Albert an ungrateful boy who ought to be ashamed of himself. He suggested that Albert should ask his father to take him away from school.

Question 8. What punishment did the history teacher give to Albert for not answering his questions?

Answer: This history teacher's eyes got cold and cruel. He said he didn't want a lecture from him. He punished Albert by making him stay in for an extra period that day. He told him that he was a disgrace. Moreover, he didn't know why he continued to come.

Question 9. Why did Albert feel miserable when he left school that day?

Answer: Albert was punished for his 'insolence' that day. He had to stay in for an extra period after the school that day. Albert felt miserable because he hated the school and would have to return there the next day as well.

Question 10. 'Going back to his lodgings did not cheer him up.' Why?

Answer: He lived in an atmosphere of slum violence. His landlady beat her children regularly. Every Saturday her husband came drunk and beat her. The wailing and howling of kids got on his nerves. He couldn't stand the incessant loud noise.

Question 11. What did Albert conclude after six months alone in Munich? What reasons did he advance?

Answer: After six months alone in Munich, Albert concluded that he must get away from there. He thought it absurd to go on like that. He realised that he had been wasting his father's money and everyone's time. So he considered it better for all to stop just then. "

Question 12. Why does the biographer refer to Albert's interest in music as a 'comfort'?

Answer: Albert's lodgings as well as school made him feel miserable. He hated the school. Going to the lodging didn't cheer him up as he hated the atmosphere of slum violence. He soothed his tired nerves by playing on his violin. So music was a source of comfort for him.

Question 13. Who is Elsa? What does she think is enough to pass the examination?

Answer: Elsa is Albert's cousin. She normally lives in Berlin where her father has a business. She thinks that one can pass the examination simply by learning things by heart and repeating them in the exams. A student doesn't have to understand what he is taught.

Question 14. What sudden idea does Albert hit upon to get away from school?

Answer: Albert thought that if he had a nervous breakdown and a doctor certified that it was bad for him to go to school, he would be able to get away from the school. This would be better than leaving the school and then forced back to it by his father.

Question 15. Who is Yuri? What part does he play in Albert's plan?

Answer: Yuri is a senior student, perhaps of medical school. He knows a lot of medical students. It is he who introduces Albert to Dr Ernest Weil and helps further Albert's plan by getting him medical certificate he desires so earnestly.

Question 16. "Ugh!" Exclaimed Albert, "these are the students". Comment.

Answer: Yuri lived among poor students. Albert thought them 'civilised human beings'. Yuri told him that one of the students killed another in a duel and felt proud of it. At this Albert was filled with disgust because he hated violence.

Question 17. Yuri calls Albert 'the world's worst liar'—do you think this is an insult or a compliment to Albert? Why?

Answer: It is a compliment, Albert is honest and truthful. He can't tell a deliberate lie. He can't deceive anyone. He is so simple hearted that if he tries to tell a lie, his face betrays him at once.

Question 18. Why was Albert quite nervous when he met the doctor? What does this nervousness indicate about his nature?

Answer: Albert had been wondering all day what to tell the doctor. In fact, he had worried so much that when the time came to see the doctor he was quite nervous. His nervousness shows that he had a very sensitive nature. Even a minor worry would ruffle him up.-

Question 19. How did Albert hope to convince the doctor?

Answer: Albert declared humorously that he was going to have a real nervous breakdown. It would make it easier for the doctor to certify his illness. The next time Yuri saw Albert he found that the latter had lost his high spirits. Albert confirmed that he would really have a nervous breakdown which would satisfy any doctor.

Question 20. Who was Ernest Weil? How did he help Albert?

Answer: Ernest Weil was a doctor. He had qualified as a doctor only the previous week. He was a good friend of Yuri. Albert told Yuri of his plan to leave school. Yuri told him to go to Dr Ernest Weil to get a medical certificate for the purpose.

Question 21. What advice did Yuri give to Albert before meeting Dr Ernest Weil?

Answer. Yuri told Albert not to deceive Dr Ernest Weil. He should tell everything clearly. He should be frank with him. He shouldn't pretend that he had got what he hadn't.

Question 22. What opinion do you form of Dr Ernest Weil?

Answer: Young Ernest Weil had just qualified to be a doctor, but he was intelligent. He could not be deceived easily. He was frank, honest and sympathetic. He wins the confidence of his patient with his warm smile. His sharp analytical mind helps him in quick diagnosis and suggesting cure.

Question 23. What did Albert tell Dr Ernest Weil if he certified that he had a nervous breakdown?

Answer: Albert told him that he would go to Milan in Italy. His parents lived there. Dr. Weil asked him what he would do there. Albert told him that he would try to get admission into an Italian College or Institute.

Question 24. How, according to Yuri, could the medical certificate help Albert?

Answer: Yuri thought that the medical certificate would help Albert to enjoy six month's leave from the school. He would not actually be leaving the school and if the worst befell, he could return and continue studies for the diploma.

Question 25. How did Albert hope to get admission to an Italian college without a diploma from the German school?

Answer: Albert hoped to get a testimonial from his mathematics teacher about his work. He had learnt all the maths that is taught at school and a bit more. He hoped that this certificate

would help him to get admission to an Italian college without a diploma from the German school.

Question 26. What did Mr Koch think of Albert?

Answer: Mr Koch had a high opinion of Albert. He thought that he couldn't teach Albert any more and probably soft he would be able to teach his teacher. Mr Koch certified that Albert was ready immediately to enter a college or institute for the study of higher mathematics.

Question 27. What did Yuri suggest to Albert before seeking an interview with the Principal? How far did Yuri's efforts and suggestion prove useful during Albert's meeting with the Principal?

Answer: Yuri suggested that Albert should get a written reference from the mathematics teacher before seeing the head teacher. His mathematics teacher gave him a glowing reference. However, it failed to serve the purpose for which Albert wanted to use it.

Question 28. What reference did Mr Koch give to Albert regarding his wish to join a college in Italy?

Answer: Mr Koch wrote that Albert was ready to enter a college for the study of higher mathematics. He also said that he couldn't teach him any more and probably he (Albert) would soon be able to teach him.

Question 29. What did the head teacher tell Albert when he met him?

Answer: The head teacher told him that his work was terrible. He was not prepared to have him in the school any longer. He wanted him to leave the school then.

Question 30. What did the head teacher tell Albert when the latter asked him what 'crime' he had committed?

Answer: The head teacher told Albert that his presence in the class made it impossible for the teacher to teach. It was also impossible for the other pupils to learn. He refused to learn and rebelled constantly. No serious work could be done while he was there.

Question 31. "Albert felt the medical certificate almost burning a hole in his pocket." What does the author mean?

Answer: Einstein was eager to show the medical certificate to the head teacher and notice how he reacted. However, the certificate had now become unnecessary, because the head teacher had decided to expel Albert.

Question 32. How did Albert leave his school where he had spent five years?

Answer: Albert left his school without any regrets. He, in fact, left it arrogantly. It was because of the bad treatment meted out to him by the head teacher. He didn't turn his head to have even a last look at this school.

B. Long Answer Type Questions

Question 1. Relate in your own words what transpired between the history teacher, Mr Braun and young Einstein.

Answer: Mr Braun, the history teacher laid stress on learning dates and facts. He repeated them often enough for his students to learn them. Young Albert Einstein was found wanting. He didn't know in what year the Prussians defeated the French at Waterloo. Albert frankly admitted that he didn't know. He said that he didn't ever try to learn dates. He claimed that he couldn't see any point in learning dates. One can always look them up in a book. The teacher felt angry as well as amazed at Albert's stubbornness. The boy insisted that learning facts is not education.

Mr. Braun then sarcastically asked Albert to tell the class the Einstein theory of education. Albert said that ideas are more important than facts. Instead of learning the dates of battles or which of the armies killed more men, he would be more interested in learning why those soldiers were trying to kill each other.

Mr Braun felt exasperated. His eyes were cold and cruel. He punished Albert by making him stay in for an extra period that day. He had a low opinion of Einstein and called him 'a disgrace'. He wondered why he continued to come to school. Albert politely replied that it was not his wish. Mr Braun angrily called him 'an ungrateful boy who ought to be ashamed of himself'. He suggested that the boy, should ask his father to take him away.

Question 2. Where the teacher interested in understanding Albert and bringing out his potential ?

Answer: This extract mentions only two of the teachers of young Einstein. They are: Mr. Braun—the history teacher and Mr Koch—the mathematics teacher. The former was not at all interested in understanding Albert and bringing out his potential. He followed the traditional methods and philosophy of education which laid more stress on acquisition of knowledge. Dates and facts were more important to him than the causes which led to the events. Secondly, he had a sarcastic attitude and mocking tone towards Einstein. Instead of helping the development of a talented boy, he complained to the head teacher and got him expelled. Mr Koch appreciated Einstein's genius, and had a good opinion of him. But he too was confined to his subject and didn't take interest in the real person. All this was because of the curriculum centred approach.

Question 3. What factors made Einstein's life in Munich miserable? What did he realise after six months?

Answer: Two factors made Einstein's life in Munich miserable. These were his school and residential environment. The school was a hateful place. He had many bad days when he got punishment. He hated going back to school, but he had no option. He wishes that his father would take him away. However, he was forced to stay there and obtain diploma. Einstein found the system of education uninspiring and the teachers, unsympathetic. He had his lodging in the poorest quarters of Munich, the food was bad. Lack of comfort, dirt and squalor made his life miserable. The atmosphere of slum violence was oppressive. The landlady would beat her children. Her husband would come home on Saturdays. He would get drunk and beat his wife. Albert found young students fighting duels and killing others. The scars on the face were badges of honour for the victors.

Question 4. Comment on the role of Yuri as described in the extract.

Answer: Yuri performs an important function in young Albert's life. He is the friend, philosopher and guide for Albert. He is in fact Albert's confidant. He has won the love and trust of Albert to such an extent that he confides his miseries, problems and plans with him. Yuri is the only person in Munich that Albert likes. Yuri lives among poor students who frequently indulge in fighting duels.

Yuri helps Albert in his plans to obtain a medical certificate of nervous breakdown advising rest for six months. He introduces Albert to Dr Ernest Weil and asks Albert to be frank with him. Dr Weil turns out to be a sympathetic soul and issues him the much needed certificate.

Yuri again guides the course of Albert's ship of life. He advises Albert to obtain a written reference from the mathematics teacher before seeing the head teacher. Albert follows his advice faithfully. The certificate, however, proves useless because the head teacher has already decided to expel Albert for his undesirable activities. This, however, does not diminish Yuri's role in Albert's life. He is like a pillar of strength to the miserable young Albert in a foreign land.

Question 5. What stratagem (plan) did Einstein devise to stay away from school for six months? How far did he succeed?

Answer: Albert had told his father to take him away from the school. However, his father insisted that he should obtain a diploma first. Hence, he was unwilling to take Albert away from school. For Albert, staying at that school meant wastage of time and money. One day, he had a bright idea. He asked Yuri if he knew some friendly doctor. He could say that Albert suffered from nervous breakdown. The doctor would certify that the disease was 'bad for him to go to school'. They had to find a specialist in nerves. Albert began to look nervous and lost his high spirits.

Yuri fixed appointment with Dr Ernest Weil and asked Albert to tell him the truth. Albert was frank and truthful. He could enter some Italian college or institution at Milan without diploma. The doctor issued a certificate advising him rest for six months. The certificate proved useless as the head teacher was bent on expelling Albert.

Question 6. I knew you were going to leave before you knew yourself. Who said it and how did he know it? Substantiate with example from the text.

Answer: Mr Koch was Albert's Maths teacher. He was genuinely interested in Albert. Yuri told Albert to get a written reference from him. He willingly gave Albert the reference he wanted. He made it clear that Albert was ready to enter a college or institute for the study of higher mathematics. Mr Koch regretted that Albert was leaving the school. His logic was correct. A reference is usually asked when one leaves. Albert is puzzled. There are more surprises in store for Albert. He is summoned by the head teacher before Albert's request for interview. The head teacher does not want Albert to stay there any longer. Perhaps the issue might have figured in the staff council. The Maths teacher was discreet. He did not reveal the confidential discussion. He gave plausible reasons for his observation.

Question 7. Describe how the head teacher made it easy for Albert to leave school.

Answer: Albert wanted to remain away from the school. He got a medical certificate from Dr Ernest Weil. It was certified that he had a nervous breakdown. So he must stay away from school. He wanted to see the head teacher. Next day the head teacher called Albert to his office. He told Albert that his work was terrible. So he was not prepared to have him in the school. Albert asked if he should think he was to be expelled. The head teacher told him that if he left the school of his own accord, the question wouldn't arise. Albert asked what crime he had committed. The head teacher told him that the teacher couldn't teach the class when he was in it. In his presence, the pupils couldn't learn. Albert wanted to tell the head teacher what he thought of him and the school, but he didn't say anything. The head teacher asked him to close the door behind him. But Albert didn't do so. Nor did he have the last look at his school. He met only Yuri.

Question 8. Suppose you were the Principal of young Albert's School. What changes in education system would you like to introduce to make it more effective, meaningful and purposeful?

Answer: If I were the Principal of Albert's school, I would bring in drastic changes. I have a clear concept of education. For me, education means drawing out the best in the student. I'll help to develop an individual's personality by encouraging the budding talent. I know that all are not cast in the same mould. Our old system talks of uniformity and average student level. These are abstract principles. Education will focus on individual's aptitude and talent. There will be no cramming of facts, dates or multiplication tables. The audio visual devices will be used as aids to learning. Computer will supplement knowledge. I will provide more facilities for self-expression. The atmosphere of the school will be relaxed. I'll act as a father figure— a friend, philosopher and guide rather than a tormentor. I hope to inculcate values through examples of personal conduct.