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# 1 The last lesson

## About the author

**Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897)** was a French novelist and short-story writer. *The Last Lesson* is set in the days of the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) in which France was defeated by Prussia led by Bismarck. Prussia then consisted of what now are the nations of Germany, Poland and parts of Austria. In this story the French districts of Alsace and Lorraine have passed into Prussian hands. Read the story to find out what effect this had on life at school.

fearful in anticipation of something

to rely or trust on somebody/something

worn or damaged edges caused by frequent handling

Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context

in great dread of  
counted on  
thumbed at the edges

in unison  
a great bustle  
reproach ourselves with

something happening at the same time (एकसाथ/एक ही समय)

an excited (and often noisy) activity

to express disapproval

Paragraph I

I started for school very late that morning and was in great dread of a scolding, especially because M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles, and I did not know the first word about them. For a moment I thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. It was so warm, so bright! The birds were chirping at the edge of the woods; and in the open field back of the sawmill the Prussian soldiers were drilling. It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles, but I had the strength to resist, and hurried off to school.

When I passed the town hall there was a crowd in front of the bulletin-board. For the last two years all our bad news had come from there — the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer — and I thought to myself, without stopping, "What can be the matter now?"

Paragraph no. II

→ He noticed a crowd near bulletin-board (town hall)  
→ All the bad news had come in that board for last 2 years

→ he was late for school  
→ was afraid because M. Hamel would ask about participles.  
→ He knew nothing about it.  
→ thought of running away & spending (outside)

→ but he went to the school (unwillingly)

where there are some beautiful things

chirping birds

Prussian soldiers drilling behind the sawmill.

(these are tempting than participles)

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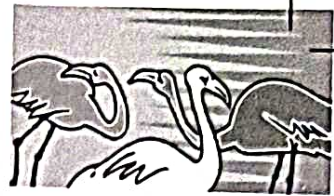
bad news

news of lost battles

drafts

orders of the commanding officers

→ So, he did not want to stop.



Para. IV

thinking that he was joking the boy didn't stop.

Then, as I hurried by as fast as I could go, the blacksmith, Wachter, who was there, with his apprentice, reading the bulletin, called after me, "Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!"

Para. III

When he was in a hurry the blacksmith stops him saying that he would reach school on time.

Para. V

- The school was so silent that day (unusual)
- As Sunday morning.
- he was so frightened as M. Hamel was walking up and down inside the classroom. (with his iron ruler)

I thought he was making fun of me, and reached M. Hamel's little garden all out of breath.

Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle which could be heard out in the street, the opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated in unison, very loud, with our hands over our ears to understand better, and the teacher's great ruler rapping on the table. But now it was all so still! I had counted on the commotion to get to my desk without being seen; but, of course, that day everything had to be as quiet as Sunday morning. Through the window I saw my classmates, already in their places, and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm. I had to open the door and go in before everybody. You can imagine how I blushed and how frightened I was.

Noise

due to

- Opening & closing of desks
- lessons repeated in unison
- loud sound
- Teacher's ruler rapping on table

But nothing happened. M. Hamel saw me and said very kindly, "Go to your place quickly, little Franz. We were beginning without you."

I jumped over the bench and sat down at my desk. Not till then, when I had got a little over my fright, did I see that our teacher had on his beautiful green coat, his frilled

(but it was silent that day)

Para. VI & VII

he was allowed to enter (not scolded)

Name of the boy is Franz.

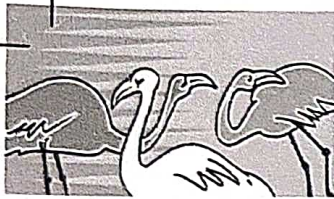


he entered and saw that M. Hamel was looking something different.

wearing

- Green coat
  - frilled shirt
  - black silk cap
- (all embroidered)

[which he wore on inspection days and prize days]



Para. VII

- continues.

most surprising for him was



also attended the class.

shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered, that he never wore except on inspection and prize days. Besides, the whole school seemed so strange and solemn. But the thing that surprised me most was to see, on the back benches that were always empty, the village people sitting quietly like ourselves; old Hauser, with his three-cornered hat, the former mayor, the former postmaster, and several others besides. Everybody looked sad; and Hauser had brought an old primer, thumbbed at the edges, and he held it open on his knees with his great spectacles lying across the pages.



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old Hauser brought an old primer. (damaged one)

sitting in an odd manner.

While I was wondering about it all, M. Hamel mounted his chair, and, in the same grave and gentle tone which he had used to me, said, "My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes tomorrow. This is your last French lesson. I want you to be very attentive."

... these words were to me!