Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5: The Tale of Melon City - Notes, Summary, NCERT Answers and MCQs (2026-27)

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These Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5 The Tale of Melon City notes explain Vikram Seth's funny poem simply. You get a summary, characters, themes and NCERT answers. You also get 10 MCQs, a chain-of-blame table, a mistakes table and a revision box.

What is The Tale of Melon City about?

> The Tale of Melon City is a humorous narrative poem by Vikram Seth. It is Chapter 5 of Snapshots, the Class 11 English supplementary reader. A "just and placid" King orders an arch that turns out too low. His hunt for someone to hang ends with the King himself on the gallows. A melon then becomes the new King.

The poem is light, rhyming and full of irony. It laughs at foolish rulers and the people who put up with them. Use this table for quick facts.

Fact	Detail (from the NCERT text)
Chapter	Chapter 5, Snapshots (NCERT Supplementary Reader, Class 11 English Core, Reprint 2026-27)
Poet	Vikram Seth
Source	From Mappings (1981); included in his Collected Poems
Based on	A tale retold "after Idries Shah"
Type	Narrative poem in rhyming couplets; a satire
Main characters	The King, the chief of builders, workmen, masons, the architect, the wisest man, a Councillor, the Ministers, an idiot
Setting	An unnamed city, later called Melon City
Central conflict	A King's idea of justice versus common sense
Ending	A melon rules; the people are content as long as they have peace and liberty

You can read the full poem free on the official NCERT textbook site.

What happens in The Tale of Melon City? (Summary)

> In this Class 11 Snapshots poem, the King orders an arch across the main road. Riding under it, he loses his crown because it is too low. He wants someone hanged, but everyone blames someone else. In the end, only the King fits the noose, so he is hanged. A passing idiot then picks a melon as the next King.

1. A just and placid King

In an unnamed city lives a King who is called just and calm. He orders a grand arch to be built over the main road. He wants it to impress and improve the people who see it.

2. The crown falls

The workmen build the arch because the King has ordered it. When the King rides under it, the arch knocks off his crown. It has been built too low. The King frowns and calls it a disgrace.

3. The chief of builders

The King orders the chief of builders to be hanged. The gallows are set up. On his way, the chief shouts that it was the workmen's fault.

4. The workmen and the masons

The King, being "just," orders the workmen hanged instead. The workmen say the bricks were the wrong size. The masons are summoned. Trembling, they blame the architect.

5. The architect

The King sentences the architect. The architect reminds him that the King himself changed the plans. The King is furious, but decides this is tricky and needs advice.

6. The wisest man

The wisest man in the land is carried to court. He is so old he can neither walk nor see. He declares that the arch itself is the culprit and must be hanged.

7. A nation wants a hanging

A Councillor objects that the arch touched the King's own head, so hanging it would be shameful. The crowd grows restless. Fearing them, the King says someone must be hanged at once.

8. The King is hanged

The noose is set rather high. Everyone is measured, but only one man is tall enough to fit it. That man is the King. So the King is hanged by his own royal order.

9. A melon on the throne

The Ministers are relieved that someone was hanged. By custom, the next person to pass the City Gate will choose the ruler. An idiot passes and, as always, answers "A melon." A melon is crowned. Years later, the people still accept it, as long as they are left in peace and liberty.

Who are the characters in The Tale of Melon City?

> The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, has a cast of types, not named people. The King is foolish but proud of being just. The builders, workmen, masons and architect pass the blame. The wisest man and a Councillor give silly advice. The Ministers and an idiot finally choose a melon as King.

Character	Who they are	Key traits (with proof)
The King	Ruler of the city	Called just and placid, but foolish. Wants a hanging at any cost. Ends up hanged himself.
Chief of builders	Head of construction	Saves himself by blaming the workmen.
Workmen and masons	Builders of the arch	Blame the brick size, then the architect.
The architect	Designer of the arch	Points out that the King changed the plans.

Character	Who they are	Key traits (with proof)
The wisest man	Very old adviser	Cannot walk or see. Says the arch must be hanged.
A Councillor	Royal adviser	Says the arch cannot be hanged, as it touched the King's head.
The Ministers	Practical officials	Relieved after the hanging. Follow custom and crown a melon.
The idiot	First man through the City Gate	Always answers "A melon," because he likes melons.

Character sketch of the King

The King wants to look just and calm. But his idea of justice is empty. He only wants someone punished for a small hurt to his pride.

He changes his mind with every excuse. He fears the crowd more than he cares about fairness. In the end, his own foolish rule hangs him. The poem uses him to mock rulers who confuse punishment with justice.

Character sketch of the Ministers

The Ministers are practical and selfish. They are glad someone was hanged, because it calms the crowd and protects their power. They follow an old custom blindly, even when it crowns a melon.

Character sketch of the people

The people want a hanging when they are restless. Later, they happily accept a melon as King. They do not care who rules, as long as they are left in peace and freedom.

How does the blame pass in The Tale of Melon City?

> In The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, blame moves down a chain. Each person saves himself by pointing at someone else. In the end, the chain loops back to the King. Learn this chain in order. It answers most questions on irony and justice in the poem.

Step	Who is accused	Whom they blame
1	Chief of builders	The workmen
2	The workmen	The wrong size of bricks (so, the masons)
3	The masons	The architect
4	The architect	The King, who changed the plans
5	The arch (per the wisest man)	Rejected: it touched the King's head
6	Whoever fits the high noose	Only the King fits, so he is hanged

What are the main themes of The Tale of Melon City?

> The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, has four main themes. They are foolish justice, irresponsible rulers, blind customs and public indifference. The poem uses humour and irony to show how power without sense becomes absurd. It also mocks people who accept any ruler for a quiet life.

Theme	Where you see it in the poem
Absurd justice	The King wants a hanging for a fallen crown, and anyone will do.
Passing the blame	Builders, workmen, masons and architect blame each other.
Foolish rulers	The King changes his mind often and is finally hanged by his own decree.
Blind custom	The first man at the City Gate chooses the ruler, even an idiot.
Public indifference	People accept a melon King as long as they have peace and liberty.
Laissez faire	The poem ends by saying minimal rule seems well established there.

Is the title The Tale of Melon City suitable?

Yes. The whole tale explains how the city came to be ruled by a melon. The title sounds like a folk tale, which suits the poem's simple, storytelling style. It also hints at the satire: a city whose ruler is a fruit.

What do the difficult words in The Tale of Melon City mean?

> Hard words in Snapshots Chapter 5, The Tale of Melon City, describe kings, courts and punishment. Placid means calm. A thoroughfare is a main road. A scaffold is a platform for hanging criminals. Learning about twenty such words makes the poem's jokes much easier to enjoy.

Word	Simple meaning
Placid	Calm and not easily upset
Proclaimed	Announced officially
Arch	A curved structure over a road or gateway
Triumphally	In a grand, celebratory way
Thoroughfare	A main road
Edify	To improve someone's mind or morals
Spectators	People who watch
Gallows	A wooden frame for hanging criminals
Proceedings	The events of a formal action
Masons	Workers who build with stone or brick
Quivering	Shaking with fear
Ordain	To order officially
Amendments	Changes
Saw red	Became very angry
Counsel	Advice
Quavering	Trembling (NCERT footnote)
Culprit	The person to blame
Scaffold	A platform for executing criminals (NCERT footnote)
Noose	A loop of rope used for hanging
Royal Decree	An official order from the King
Heralds	Messengers who make public announcements

Word	Simple meaning
Laissez faire	A policy of letting things take their own course, with little control

What are the NCERT answers for The Tale of Melon City?

> The NCERT exercise for The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, has five questions. They ask you to retell the tale and judge the "just and placid" King. Others ask how peace and liberty can be kept, and where humour and irony appear. The last is a class activity.

Questions are from the NCERT text. Answers are written by Nextoper.

Q1. Narrate 'The Tale of Melon City' in your own words.

A calm, "just" King ordered a fine arch over the main road. When he rode under it, it knocked off his crown, because it was too low. Angry, he ordered the chief builder to be hanged.

The builder blamed the workmen, the workmen blamed the bricks, the masons blamed the architect, and the architect blamed the King's own changes. The wisest man said to hang the arch, but a Councillor objected.

The restless crowd wanted a hanging. Only the King was tall enough for the high noose, so he was hanged. By custom, the next man at the City Gate chose the new ruler. He was an idiot who said "A melon," so a melon was crowned. The people did not mind, as long as they had peace and liberty.

Q2. What impression would you form of a state where the King was 'just and placid'?

At first, it sounds like a fair and peaceful state. But the poem uses these words with irony. The King's justice means finding someone, anyone, to hang.

Such a state is ruled by whims, not reason. Officials pass the blame to save themselves. The people are easily swayed and do not question their rulers. It is a foolish state that only looks orderly.

Q3. How, according to you, can peace and liberty be maintained in a state?

Peace and liberty need fair laws, equal justice and wise leaders. Punishment should follow proof, not anger or pressure from a crowd.

Citizens must also stay alert. They should question unfair rules and take part in choosing leaders. A free press, independent courts and education help protect both peace and freedom.

Q4. Suggest a few instances in the poem which highlight humour and irony.

- The "just" King wants to hang someone for a small hurt to his pride.
- Each person escapes by blaming the next, until the blame reaches the King.
- The wisest man, who can neither walk nor see, says the arch should be hanged.
- The King is the only person tall enough for the noose, so he is hanged by his own order.
- The Ministers cry "Long live the King" and "The King is dead" together.
- An idiot chooses a melon as King, and the people accept it happily.

Q5. 'The Tale of Melon City' has been narrated in a verse form. Find similar examples in your language and share them in the class.

This is a class activity. Think of folk tales or stories told in verse in your own language. For example, many Hindi and regional tales of foolish kings are told in rhymes.

Tip: Name the tale, say who wrote or told it, and explain what lesson it teaches. Compare its humour with

What MCQs come from The Tale of Melon City?

> Here are 10 practice MCQs on The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5. Nextoper wrote them. Each answer has a one-line reason from the NCERT text. They test facts, characters and meaning. Cover the answers, try each question yourself, and then check how you did.

1. Who wrote The Tale of Melon City?
(a) Amitav Ghosh (b) Vikram Seth (c) A.J. Cronin (d) J.B. Priestley
Answer: (b) Vikram Seth, after Idries Shah.

2. How is the King described?
(a) Cruel and greedy (b) Just and placid (c) Brave and wise (d) Lazy and rich
Answer: (b) Just and placid, used with irony.

3. Why was the arch built?
(a) To mark a war victory (b) To edify spectators (c) To protect the city (d) To honour the Queen
Answer: (b) To edify, or improve, the people who saw it.

4. What happened when the King rode under the arch?
(a) It collapsed (b) He lost his crown (c) His horse fell (d) He was cheered
Answer: (b) The low arch knocked off his crown.

5. What did the workmen blame?
(a) The architect (b) The weather (c) The wrong size of bricks (d) The King
Answer: (c) The bricks, which they said were the wrong size.

6. What did the architect remind the King?
(a) He had not paid them (b) He changed the plans himself (c) The arch was beautiful (d) He was too tall
Answer: (b) The King had made changes to the plans.

7. What did the wisest man say should be hanged?
(a) The architect (b) The masons (c) The arch (d) The King
Answer: (c) The arch, as it knocked off the crown.

8. Why was the King hanged?
(a) The people voted for it (b) Only he was tall enough for the noose (c) He confessed (d) The Ministers plotted it
Answer: (b) He alone fitted the high noose.

9. Who chose the next ruler?
(a) The Ministers (b) The wisest man (c) The first person to pass the City Gate (d) The Queen
Answer: (c) The first person to pass the City Gate, as per custom.

10. Why did the people accept a melon as King?
(a) They loved melons (b) They feared the Ministers (c) It left them in peace and liberty (d) It was very wise
Answer: (c) They did not mind, as long as they had peace and liberty.

What should you revise the night before the exam?

To revise The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, fast, learn one blame chain and three ironies. Then remember one big idea. The big idea is simple. A ruler who wants punishment more than justice ends up punishing himself.

Blame chain: "Chiefs Want Masons' Architect Arrested, King!"

- Chief of builders - blames the workmen
- Workmen - blame the bricks
- Masons - blame the architect
- Architect - blames the King's changes
- Arch - the wisest man's choice, rejected
- King - the only one who fits the noose

Three big ironies

- The "just" King is hanged by his own decree.
- The wisest man cannot see or walk, yet judges the arch.
- An idiot's word makes a melon King.

One big idea: Foolish power ends in foolish results, and quiet people accept almost anything.

Self-check: can you answer these in one line?

Question	Tick when you can answer
Why did the King order the arch?	[ ]
Why was the arch too low?	[ ]
Whom did the masons blame?	[ ]
Why could the arch not be hanged?	[ ]
Why did the King fear the crowd?	[ ]
How was the new King chosen?	[ ]
What does laissez faire mean here?	[ ]

What practice questions can you try on The Tale of Melon City?

These are Nextoper practice questions for The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5. They are not previous-year board questions. They follow the usual short-answer, long-answer and extract formats. Write full answers first. Then compare them with the summary, characters and themes on this page.

Practice question These questions are written by Nextoper for practice.

Short answer (about 40-50 words)

1. How did the chief of builders save himself?
2. What does the phrase "nearly lost his head" suggest about the King?

3. Why did the Ministers feel relieved after the hanging?
4. Why did the idiot say "A melon"?
5. What does the ending say about the people of the city?

Long answer (about 120-150 words)

1. The Tale of Melon City is a satire on rulers and the ruled. Discuss.
2. How does the poem show that justice without reason becomes absurd?
3. Write a news report on the crowning of the Melon King.

Extract-based practice

Read: "The nation wants a hanging." (paraphrase of the King's words)

a) Who says this, and why?
b) What does it show about the King's idea of justice?
c) What is the result of this decision?

What mistakes do students make in The Tale of Melon City?

> Many notes on The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, contain errors. Students copy them and lose marks. Common slips include saying a melon passed the gate and calling the King cruel. Others mix up who blamed whom. Check each fact below against the NCERT text before you write.

We found several of these errors in notes that currently rank online. Every correction is checked against the NCERT chapter.

Common mistake	What the NCERT text actually says
"A melon passed the City Gate and became King"	An idiot passed the gate. He chose a melon as King.
Calling the King "silly and unpredictable" in place of the poem's words	The poem calls him "just and placid." His foolishness is shown through irony.
"The workmen blamed the architect"	The workmen blamed the bricks. The masons blamed the architect.
"The wisest man said the King should be hanged"	He said the arch should be hanged.
"The arch was hanged"	A Councillor objected, so the arch was not hanged.
"The Ministers chose the melon"	The idiot chose it. The Ministers crowned it as custom required.
Calling it a short story	It is a narrative poem in rhyming couplets.
Calling it Chapter 8	It is Chapter 5 in the 2026-27 Snapshots reprint. Chapter 8 was its number in older books.

What is the short answer on The Tale of Melon City?

> Short answer: The Tale of Melon City is Chapter 5 of Snapshots, a Class 11 English book. Vikram Seth wrote this humorous poem. A "just and placid" King loses his crown under a low arch and wants someone hanged. Everyone passes the blame, and finally only the King fits the noose. An idiot then chooses a melon as King, and the people accept it.

What do students ask about The Tale of Melon City?

> Students most often ask who wrote The Tale of Melon City and what it means. They also ask why the King was hanged. Two more common questions are about how the melon became King and the meaning of laissez faire. Short, exam-ready answers to all five follow, each based on the NCERT text.

Who wrote The Tale of Melon City?

Vikram Seth wrote it. The poem is from his collection Mappings (1981). It is Chapter 5 of Snapshots, the NCERT supplementary reader for Class 11 English.

What is the message of The Tale of Melon City?

The poem mocks foolish rulers who confuse punishment with justice. It also mocks people who accept any ruler as long as they are left alone.

Why was the King hanged in The Tale of Melon City?

The crowd wanted a hanging, and the noose was set high. Only the King was tall enough to fit it, so he was hanged by his own decree.

How did a melon become King?

By custom, the next person to pass the City Gate chose the ruler. An idiot passed and said "A melon," his answer to every question. So a melon was crowned.

What does laissez faire mean in the poem?

Laissez faire means leaving things alone with little control. The people of Melon City do not mind a melon King, as long as they have peace and liberty.

What is the key takeaway from The Tale of Melon City?

> The Tale of Melon City, Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 5, teaches through laughter. Justice must be based on reason, not pride or pressure. A King who wanted someone punished ended up punished himself. And a people who ask only to be left alone may end up ruled by a melon.

Revise the blame chain, the three ironies and the ending. With those, you can answer almost any question on this chapter. Next, try the practice questions without looking back.

Related notes

- Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 4: Birth notes
- Class 11 English Snapshots Chapter 1: The Summer of the Beautiful White Horse notes
- All Class 11 English Hornbill and Snapshots notes

Sources

1. NCERT, Snapshots, Chapter 5, "The Tale of Melon City" by Vikram Seth (Reprint 2026-27). ncert.nic.in
2. CBSE Academic, Class 11 English Core (Code 301) curriculum. cbseacademic.nic.in

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