

The Man who knew too much

1. The 'Professor' knew too much. How did he prove himself? Fill up the space with suitable examples from the story, using the given clues:

A) About muzzle velocity:

Answer: Once a Sergeant was describing the mechanism of a service rifle, "The muzzle velocity or speed at which the bullet leaves the rifle is well over two thousand feet per second." On this, The Professor interrupted and corrected the Sergeant, "Two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second.

B) After a thirty mile walk:

Answer: The Professor used to drill with enthusiasm and was miraculously never tired after route marches and used to infuriate all with his horrible heartiness. Afterwards, he would say, "What about a song, chaps?" This was not greeted by anybody after a walk of thirty miles.

C) His salute on payday:

Answer: The professor flashed a model to behold at the pay table. Always tireless, like a Guardsman, he would march and raise his skinny arms and flash a perfect salute whenever an officer was around.

D) The loud sound of a high flying invisible aeroplane:

Answer: The soldiers used to pride themselves on aircraft recognition. Once, while all were out for a walk, they heard the drone of a plane flying overhead. The sun was glaring and none of them could see the plane. But The Professor didn't need even a sight of the plane and announced, "That of course, is a North American Harvard Trainer. It can be unmistakably identified by the harsh engine note, due to the high tip speed of the airscrew." The rest felt like louts and felt out of place with Private Quelch.

E) About hand grenades:

Answer: One afternoon Corporal Turnbull was taking a session on hand grenades. The Corporal began by telling about how the outside of a grenade is divided up into a large number of fragments to assist segmentation. However, The Professor interrupted by pointing out with the exact number of fragments, which was 44, and went on suggesting that Corporal should have started his lecture by first explaining the five characteristics of the grenade. In reaction the Corporal let Quelch take the lecture. After The Professor was through and all had fallen in, Corporal Turnbull assigned Private Quelch, the permanent cookhouse duties. Of course, it was a joke for days afterwards; a joke and joy to talents.

F) During cook house duties:

Answer: One day while the narrator and his friend Thrower were returning from the canteen to the hall. They saw three cooks through the open door and they heard The Professor criticising the method of peeling potatoes. He was telling the other two cooks that their “abominably unscientific and unhygienic method of peeling potatoes” wasted the vitamin values of the vegetable. The narrator and his friend heard and fled.

2.

A) The author and his friend Thrower fled from the scene as _____.

(ii) They could not stand Private Quelch exhibiting his knowledge

B) One could hammer nails into Corporal Turnbull without his noticing it because _____.

i) He was a strong and sturdy man

C) Private Quelch was nick-named 'Professor' because of _____.

(iv) His habit of sermonizing

3. ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS.

A) What is a 'nickname'? Can you suggest another one for Private Quelch?

Army personnel, in their first week of training, together with the uniform, rifle and equipment, are described a nick name. It is a name that defines their personality, representing their behaviour, nature and intellect. Private Quelch was a man too interested to bask in the glory. He would talk in swaggering manner and display his knowledge without being asked. Proud in vain, he would go on pretentiously displaying how much he knew about all around. Once, on being asked if he had any training before, he replied, "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading." This defined his personality. Hence, many nicknames can be suggested for "The Professor" defining his character such as braggart, trumpet, vaunter, etc.

B) Private Quelch looked like a 'Professor' when the author first met him at the training depot. Why?

When the narrator first saw Private Quelch at the training depot, Quelch appeared lanky, stooping, frowning through horn-rimmed spectacles and the narrator understood why the person was known as The Professor. The narrator also said that if anybody had any doubts on the subject, a five minutes conversation with The Professor would clear them all. Private Quelch laid his first impression in the first musketry class in which he went on correcting the Sergeant on the muzzle velocity or speed at which a bullet leaves a rifle, and how on being questioned by the Sergeant, The Professor boasted about his "intelligent reading". It was a phrase that became familiar to the platoon. That was introduction of Quelch to all.

C) What does the dark, sun-dried appearance of the Sergeant suggest about him?

The Sergeant was as dark and sun-dried as raisins. He wore North-West Frontier Ribbons. He was to deliver a lecture on the mechanism of a service rifle. His appearance spoke much about him. He appeared to be a man who had dedicated his whole youth serving army. His ribbons reflected valour and gallantry. He was not a man to be fooled around or impressed easily, a man not to be incited with anger.

D) How was Private Quelch's knowledge exposed even further as the Sergeant's classes went on?

The first lecture of musketry was delivered by the Sergeant. He was teaching the mechanism of a service rifle. He was explaining the muzzle velocity or speed of a bullet when it leaves the rifle, he said, it "is well over two thousand feet per second." However, The Professor had to exhibit his knowledge, so went on correcting the Sergeant with the exact figure, which is "two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second." When the Sergeant finished, he put questions to Quelch; however, it only enhanced his glory as he answered them with perfect "technical definitions, the parts of the rifle, its use and care, he had them all by heart". Later, the Sergeant asked Private Quelch, if he had any training before. The Professor replied with a phrase that was to become familiar to the whole platoon; he said, "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading." Then it was it, all were introduced to Private Quelch's knowledge, "he had brains". And the author narrates that "he was sure to get a commission before long and as a first step, he meant to get a stripe."

E) What did the Professor mean by "intelligent reading"?

The professor was a voracious reader no doubt. However, he used to flaunt his bookish knowledge a lot. Being a vaunter, he always tried to exhibit that how much he knew about things. So, when the Sergeant asked him if he had had any training before, he replied, "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading." This shows his attitude, how he believed in advertising his knowledge.

F) Do you think Private Quelch learnt a lesson when he was chosen for cookhouse duties? Give reasons for your answer.

The assignment of permanent cookhouse duties to The Professor was a big blow to him. However, Quelch learnt little from the episode and remained critical in his attitude towards his mates and showed off his knowledge to his mates. The day when the narrator was returning with his friend to his hut he heard The Professor was going on telling other cooks in his monotonous voice on how unscientific and unhygienic is the method of peeling potatoes. He tried to explain to them how the essential vitamins of potatoes were wasted like this. He declared that he will protest against the method. The scene makes it

clear that Private Quelch was a rigid, never to change human who only knew how to criticise others and never improved himself.

G) How did Private Quelch manage to anger the Corporal?

Private Quelch was a much learned student. He loved to exhibit his knowledge and he cared little of how people around him responded. Once, when Corporal Turnbull was taking a lesson on hand grenade, The Professor went on correcting him on the number of segments that a hand grenade is divided into and also The Professor suggested him, as an expert on the subject, on how Corporal should have started his lecture. Turnbull, though a calm person on the exterior, was a man not to be trifled with. Although he did not react at first and patiently let Quelch take the lecture. However, he took his revenge in the end of the class by assigning Private Quelch permanent cookhouse duties. The episode, of course, was to become a popular joke among the whole platoon.

H) Describe Corporal Turnbull.

Corporal Turnbull had come to deliver a lecture on the hand grandee. Though young, "he was not a man to be trifled with". He had come back from Dunkirk (France). He had "his equipment correct and accounted for and his kitten in his pocket". He was a hero figure for the whole platoon. Highly admired, he was personified by saying that he was so tough that one could hammer nails into him without his noticing it. Such remarks make it clear that Corporal Turnbull was a tough and rugged man. Also, it can be observed that Turnbull was a no-nonsense and a fastidious person. He was not a person who would patronise people who showed off their knowledge. He was a man who believed in discipline and who patiently observed and then approached a person decidedly. Turnbull was a composed man, not to be easily provoked. However, though calm on surface, he played his turn well. When the time came, he taught Quelch a lesson for lifetime.

I) Did Private Quelch's day to day practices take him closer towards his goal? How can you make out?

Private Quelch worked hard to achieve his ambitions. He would stay up late in the night and read manuals. During battalion marches, he drilled with enthusiasm and stayed tireless. He lectured all in his repetitive callous voice on

every aspect of human knowledge. Initially The Professor gained respect; however, gradually all were terrorized of his approach. He started receiving clumsy sarcasms and practical jokes. He was no doubt unaffected by all this as “he was too busy working for his stripe”. Though The Professor’s behaviour initially brought him popularity; however, his condescending nature brought his popularity down after what happened in Corporal Turnbull’s session. The Professor was assigned the cookhouse duties and that is when he became the object of mockery.

J) What were the Professor's ambitions in the army?

The Professor meant to get on, he told everybody. He was sure to become an army officer before long; he was determined to get the commission. He meant to get his rank as a soldier as his first step. He chased his ambition and worked hard. He would stay late at night and read borrowed training manuals. During the training marches of battalion he drilled with enthusiasm and endless energy.

K) At first, Private Quelch was a hero in the eyes of his fellow soldiers. Support this observation with suitable examples from the story in about 100 words.

In the beginning of the training, when all interacted with Private Quelch, they thought him to be far intelligent than any ordinary fellow. However, it was only with the passage of time they came to know the other side of the truth. No doubt, The Professor was a rapacious reader and his intelligence was admirable and the knowledge he acquired was not ordinary; however, the fashion in which he exhibited his learning not just annoyed his mates but also let him down in front of his seniors. Not just this, Quelch became an object of mockery and was laughed at by fellow soldiers. In the first lecture that the platoon had in musketry, The Professor pointed out the exact figure of the muzzle velocity at which a bullet leaves a rifle, two thousand, four hundred and forty feet per second. Even during the training marches of the battalion, Private Quelch never ran out of enthusiasm and was tireless. He used to work hard; he had brains and was sure to get a commission before long. He would stay up late at nights reading borrowed training manuals. He was a hero in the eyes of every soldier. All admired him for his knowledge and the spirit he had. However, this all lived not long and soon all lived in terror of The Professor. He

would publicly correct anyone who made a mistake. Quelch was so condescending that he was disliked by all.

L) Private Quelch knew 'too much'. Give reasons to prove that he was unable to win the admiration of his superior officers or his colleagues in about 100 words.

Although Private Quelch was far knowledgeable than his fellow soldiers, he was little admired and more disliked. He always exhibited his learning without being asked for and had uncanny habit of correcting any and everybody. He did not spare his seniors as well, who came to deliver lectures to the platoon. He did it first with the Sergeant who came to deliver a lecture on the mechanism of a service rifle and later in the class of Corporal Turnbull who was taking lesson on hand grenade. Although he always had been correct with the facts he gave, he was not appreciated for his condescending nature. He tried best to impress his seniors with his knowledge and know how, he forgot that they were his seniors after all and had much experience of life and far better knowledge of technicalities of any subject. The Sergeant though did not say much to The Professor; Corporal Turnbull did not miss his chance and assigned Private Quelch permanent cook house duties to teach him lesson. Thus, the great knowledge that The Professor possessed doomed him and became the reason for him being disliked by all.

4) Write down the positive and negative traits of Private Quelch's character instances from the story

	Positive traits	Instances from the story
1	Knowledgeable	When the Sergeant was delivering the lecture on the mechanism of a service rifle, he pointed out the exact figure of the muzzle velocity at which a bullet leaves a rifle. Even in the class of Corporal Turnbull he pointed out that there are 44 Segments in a hand grenade.
2	Hard working	Quelch used to borrow training manuals and used to stay up late at nights reading them. He drilled with enthusiasm during the training marches. He had it all planned out. He was sure to become an army officer before long.
3	Confident	On being asked by the Sergeant if he had had any formal training before, The Professor confidently replied, "No, Sergeant. It's all a matter of intelligent reading."
4	Determined	The narrator talks about Private Quelch explaining his determination as how in pursuit of his ambition he worked so hard. He was sure to get a commission (to become an army officer) long before and as a first step he meant to get a stripe (a V-shaped band indicating rank of a soldier).

	Negative traits	Instances from the story
1	Interrupting	The Professor always had to break in an ongoing lecture or a class. He interrupted the Sergeant to point out the exact figure of the muzzle velocity of a bullet when it leaves a rifle. Later also, when Corporal Turnbull was taking lesson on the hand grenade, Quelch pointed out the number of segments a grenade has. It is true that what he pointed out is correct. However, Private Quelch should have used a phrase like “excuse me” and then with the due permission of the senior he could go on making his point.
2	Impolite	Besides that Private Quelch never used the phrase “excuse me” before interrupting an ongoing lecture. He paid little respect to his seniors and left no chance of pointing out their mistakes as to what he thought would make him appear even more admirable. After pointing out the number of segments a grenade has, The Professor went on telling Corporal that he should have started the lecture with the five characteristics of a grenade.
3	Condescending	The Professor would publically correct any fellow soldier if he made a mistake. For example, on handling a rifle he would command them, “Let me show you fellow,” or “No, you’ll ruin your rifle, that way, old man.” He always looked down upon his mates and behaved like he alone had all the knowledge among the whole platoon.

4	Critical	Private Quelch was always critical of not just his mates but his seniors, which earned him little respect. However, even after all what happened with Corporal Turnbull; Private Quelch did not take his lesson. Once, after Quelch was assigned permanent cookhouse duties, the narrator along his friend was returning to his hut, he heard The Professor exclaiming at two cooks on how unhygienic is the way they peel the potatoes and is abominably unscientific and how this method wastes the essential vitamins of the potatoes.
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5. You are the 'Professor'. Write a diary entry after your first day at the cookhouse, describing the events that led to this assignment, also expresses your thoughts and feelings about the events of the day in about 175 words.

1. Start the entry with a greeting like “Dear diary”, mention the date (or in the end, as you wish), time (if you wish).
2. The write up should be informal as it is a personal write up.
3. Follow the events of the day in sequence.
4. Emotions that The Professor goes through should be expressed in the write up.
5. Must express the level of frustration of Quelch, post the duties were assigned to him and his current state of mind and how he feels personally.
6. Also, write if Private Quelch is aware of the reasons that led him to his present situation. If he has any regret on his actions and how will he improve his behaviour.