COUNCIL FOR THE INDIAN SCHOOL CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS

ICSE CLASS 10 ENGLISH LITERATURE TREASURE CHEST MASTER COMPANION

Official Prescribed ICSE Class 10 Syllabus Anthology: Comprehensive Stanza-by-Stanza & Scene Analyses, Thematic Breakdowns, Character Sketches, Poetic Devices & Solved RTC Questions

Board: CISCE (ICSE Class 10 Examination)	**Paper:** English Paper 2 (Literature in English)
Anthology: Treasure Chest (Stories 6–10 & Poems 6–10)	**Target Year:** ICSE 2026 Examination & Beyond

No.	Prescribed Chapter / Title	Author / Poet	Key Thematic Focus
1	With the Photographer	Stephen Leacock	Satire on mechanical vanity vs authentic individuality
2	The Elevator	William Sleator	Claustrophobia, irrational phobia vs genuine dread
3	The Girl Who Can	Ama Ata Aidoo	Female empowerment, African traditions, bodily capability
4	The Last Lesson	Alphonse Daudet	Linguistic identity, patriotism, Alsace-Lorraine tragedy
5	The Pedestrian	Ray Bradbury	Technological totalitarianism, loss of human connection
6	Haunted Houses	H.W. Longfellow	Gentle spiritual realm, immortality, ethereal memory
7	The Glove and the Lions	Leigh Hunt	Chivalric vanity, dangerous tests of love, moral rebuke
8	When Great Trees Fall	Maya Angelou	Grief, cosmic bereavement, healing and spiritual legacy
9	A Considerable Speck	Robert Frost	Microscopic living intellect, preservation of thought
10	The Power of Music	Sukumar Ray	Absurdist nonsense satire, cacophony, poetic justice

PART I: PRESCRIBED SHORT STORIES (ICSE CLASS 10)

1. With the Photographer — Stephen Leacock

Plot Overview: A 40-year-old narrator visits a humorless, mechanical photographer to have his portrait taken. The photographer scorns the narrator's face as 'quite wrong', manipulates his head, demands he expand his chest and drop his ears, and then spends days retouching away his genuine features (eyebrows, mouth, eyes) using delphide and bromide treatments. When presented with the unrecognizable proof, the narrator tearfully demands the photograph remain unaltered as his face—though imperfect—is his own God-given face, leaving the photo to the studio as a worthless mechanical artifact.
Core Themes: Satire of commercial superficiality; the triumph of authentic human imperfection over clinical artifice; vulnerability under dehumanizing scrutiny.
Key Character Sketch: *The Photographer* (cold, humorless, clinical, conceited in machine perfection); *The Narrator* (meek, sensitive, self-deprecating yet fiercely defensive of his natural dignity).

> ***Solved RTC:***
> *'I want a photograph that looks like me... It is mine. It is the only face I have. I know it's not beautiful, but it was given to me.'*
> ***(i) Why does the narrator reject the retouched photograph?***
> ***Ans:*** *Because the photographer's cosmetic alterations completely erased the narrator's personal identity. He values authentic selfhood over artificial beauty.*

2. The Elevator — William Sleator

Plot Overview: Twelve-year-old Martin, frail, quiet, and easily intimidated, moves into a worn seventeen-story apartment building. He suffers from acute elevator phobia due to the tiny, dimly lit cage with trembling cables. His terror escalates when a massive, heavy-set woman in a green coat enters at the fourteenth floor and stares silently at him with chilling green eyes. When Martin's father ridicules his cowardice, Martin is forced to enter the elevator again while nursing a fractured leg. On floor eighteen, the fat woman steps in, smiles menacingly, whispers 'Hello, Martin', and stops the elevator.
Core Themes: Psychological horror, childhood vulnerability, domestic lack of empathy, irrational phobia versus tangible menace.
Key Technique: Ambiguous open ending; rising claustrophobic suspense; sensory details (trembling cables, smell of cheap perfume).

3. The Girl Who Can — Ama Ata Aidoo

Plot Overview: Set in Hasodzi, rural Ghana, seven-year-old Adjoa narrates her struggles with her grandmother Nana, who constantly laments that Adjoa was born with thin, spindly legs incapable of supporting wide maternal hips. In traditional Ghanaian society, a woman's value is judged by reproductive endurance. However, Adjoa's school athletics coach discovers her extraordinary speed. When Adjoa sweeps every running cup at the district sports meet, Nana proudly washes and irons her school uniform and carries the golden cup on her back like a newborn baby, realizing that legs are made for running and achieving, not merely for bearing children.
Core Themes: Female empowerment, dismantling patriarchal bodily standards, generational reconciliation between tradition and modern potential.

4. The Last Lesson — Alphonse Daudet

Plot Overview: Alsace, 1870. Young Franz walks to school fearing M. Hamel's interrogation on participles. Upon arrival, he finds the classroom strangely somber, village elders sitting on back benches, and M. Hamel attired in his ceremonial green coat. Hamel delivers shocking news: an order from Berlin decrees that henceforth only German will be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine; this is their last French lesson. Overwhelmed by shame for neglected studies, Franz listens with intense clarity as Hamel praises French as the clearest, most logical language on Earth. As church bells chime and Prussian trumpets sound, Hamel choked with emotion writes on the blackboard in giant letters: *'VIVE LA FRANCE!'*
Core Themes: Linguistic chauvinism, patriotic identity, human regret over postponed learning ('I have plenty of time').

5. The Pedestrian — Ray Bradbury

Plot Overview: On a misty November night in 2053, Leonard Mead takes a solitary evening walk through quiet streets past three million citizens entombed in dark living rooms, their faces illuminated only by flickering television screens. In this dystopian city, walking for pleasure and reading books are viewed as mental sickness. Mead is stopped by the city's lone robotic, driverless police cruiser. When Mead discloses he is a writer and walks merely to 'see and breathe the air', the computerized car classifies his behavior as dangerous deviance and transports him to the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies.
Core Themes: Dehumanizing technology, passive mass consumerism, loss of human curiosity, totalitarian surveillance.

PART II: PRESCRIBED POETRY (ICSE CLASS 10)

1. Haunted Houses — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Poetic Meaning & Form: Written in graceful four-line rhymed stanzas, Longfellow reflects on how every dwelling where people have lived and died is haunted by benign spirits. These phantoms are neither dreadful nor malevolent; they glide silently with quiet footsteps across thresholds and along moonlit stairs. The poem bridges the tangible physical world with the invisible celestial realm, asserting that the spiritual atmosphere of our homes is enriched by the living memory of departed loved ones.

> ***Key Poetic Devices:*** *Metaphor (spirits as harmless guests), Personification, Ethereal Imagery, Assonance.*
> ***Solved RTC:*** *'All houses wherein men have lived and died / Are haunted houses. Through the open door / The harmless phantoms on their errands glide...' — (i) Longfellow removes superstition, redefining ghosts as peaceful carriers of ancestral memory.*

2. The Glove and the Lions — Leigh Hunt

Narrative Ballad Core: King Francis I of France presides over a royal arena where fierce lions battle. The beautiful but supremely vain Countess De Lorge decides to test her brave lover Count De Lorge's devotion by throwing her glove into the deadly pit. Without hesitation, De Lorge leaps among the roaring beasts, retrieves the glove unharmed, and returns to the stands. However, instead of offering it in adoration, he flings the glove directly in her face. King Francis loudly applauds De Lorge's action, declaring: *'No love, but vanity, sets love a task like that!'*

3. When Great Trees Fall — Maya Angelou

Elegy on Loss and Resilience: Angelou begins with the organic metaphor of giant trees toppling in a great forest—shaking the earth, silencing small creatures, and altering the horizon. She parallels this with the passing of monumental human souls. When great souls die, our breath turns dry, our minds grow numb with grief, and the bedrock of our reality seems dismantled. Yet, with time, their immortal spiritual legacy restores our spirits, reminding us that because they lived, we too can live, heal, and achieve greater human empathy.

4. A Considerable Speck (Microscopic) — Robert Frost

Philosophical Humour & Free Will: Frost sits at his writing desk watching a microscopic living mite frantically race across a freshly inked manuscript sheet. Recognizing that the creature possesses independent fear, intelligence, and a desperate instinct for self-preservation, Frost refrains from crushing it with his pen. The poem serves as a wry philosophical salute to genuine individual thought and creative intellect in an era of mindless, collective mediocrity.

5. The Power of Music — Sukumar Ray

Nonsense Verse & Comic Satire: Translated from Bengali (*Ganer Guto*), Ray satirizes the relentless, ear-splitting singing of Bhisma Lochan Sharma. His monstrous, booming vocals cause the skies to tremble, birds to fall senseless from branches, horses to bolt, and trees to shudder in agony. The populace desperately begs him to cease, offering gold and praise. Bhisma sings on undeterred until a resolute billy goat, unaccustomed to such insolence, delivers a thunderous headbutt from behind, violently hurling Bhisma into the sky and restoring heavenly silence.