

- Summary of A Visit to Cambridge
- Character Sketch of Stephen Hawking
- Themes in A Visit to Cambridge
- Literary Devices in A Visit to Cambridge

Summary of A Visit to Cambridge

"A Visit to Cambridge" by Firdaus Kanga is a poignant narrative that recounts the author's meeting with the renowned physicist Stephen Hawking. Both men are differently abled and use wheelchairs, which forms a central theme of the story. The author describes his journey to Cambridge, England, and his desire to meet Hawking, who despite his paralysis, has made groundbreaking contributions to science. The story explores themes of disability, courage, and human spirit, highlighting how both men navigate life with physical challenges and societal perceptions.

Key Elements

- **Theme:** Disability and resilience, perception of differently abled individuals, inspiration and human spirit.
- **Characters:** Firdaus Kanga (narrator and writer), Stephen Hawking (astrophysicist and scientist).
- **Setting:** Cambridge, England.

Textual Evidence

"I haven't been brave," said his disembodied computer-voice, the next afternoon. "I've had no choice." This quote reflects Hawking's perspective on living with disability.

Solved Example

Question: What does the author mean by "Cambridge was my metaphor for England"?

Answer: The author uses Cambridge as a symbol representing England. It signifies his perception of England through the lens of Cambridge University, a place of learning and history, which changed for him after meeting Stephen Hawking.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who is the author of "A Visit to Cambridge"?
- What disability does Stephen Hawking have?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Explain the significance of the meeting between Firdaus Kanga and Stephen Hawking.
- What does Hawking mean when he says, "I haven't been brave, I've had no choice"?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Discuss the theme of perception of disability as presented in the story.
- Analyze how the author portrays the inner strength of Stephen Hawking despite his physical limitations.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Firdaus Kanga; Stephen Hawking has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), causing paralysis.
- **Level 2:** The meeting symbolizes the connection between two differently abled individuals inspiring each other; Hawking implies that living with disability is not a matter of bravery but necessity.
- **Level 3:** The story challenges societal views on disability, showing that differently abled people have strength and dignity; Hawking's intellect and determination are highlighted as his true strengths beyond his physical condition.

Quick Reference

- **Author:** Firdaus Kanga
- **Main Character:** Stephen Hawking
- **Theme:** Disability, courage, human spirit
- **Setting:** Cambridge, England

Glossary

- **Astrophysicist:** A scientist who studies the physical properties of celestial bodies.
- **Buoyant:** Cheerful and lively.
- **Torso:** The main part of the body excluding limbs and head.
- **Incandescence:** Emission of light from a hot object; metaphorically, inner glow.
- **Accessory:** Something added but not essential.
- **Inflection:** The modulation of voice pitch.

Character Sketch of Stephen Hawking

Stephen Hawking is portrayed as a brilliant and determined scientist who, despite being completely paralysed due to ALS, continues to contribute significantly to science. He communicates through a computer-generated voice and uses a wheelchair for mobility. Hawking's character embodies resilience, intellect, and a unique perspective on life and disability. He is candid about his condition, stating, "I haven't been brave, I've had no choice," reflecting his acceptance of his circumstances. His humor and sharpness are evident when he says he finds it amusing when people patronise him.

Key Traits

- Intelligent and accomplished scientist
- Resilient and accepting of his disability
- Witty and straightforward
- Inspires others through his achievements

Textual Evidence

"I find it amusing when people patronise me." This shows his awareness and humor despite his condition.

Solved Example

Question: How does Stephen Hawking's attitude towards his disability inspire others?

Answer: Hawking's acceptance and focus on his work rather than his disability inspire others to look beyond physical limitations and value inner strength and intellect.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- What disease did Stephen Hawking suffer from?
- How did Hawking communicate?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Describe Hawking's personality as depicted in the story.
- What does Hawking mean by saying he has not been brave?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze how Hawking’s character challenges common stereotypes about disability.
- Discuss the significance of Hawking’s humor in the story.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS); through a computer voice synthesizer.
- **Level 2:** Intelligent, resilient, humorous; he means living with disability is not a choice but a necessity.
- **Level 3:** He shows that disability does not limit intellect or achievement; humor humanizes him and breaks pity stereotypes.

Quick Reference

- **Disease:** ALS
- **Communication:** Computer voice synthesizer
- **Personality:** Resilient, witty, brilliant

Glossary

- **Patronise:** To treat someone with an apparent kindness that betrays a feeling of superiority.
- **Disembodied:** Separate from the body.

Themes in A Visit to Cambridge

The story explores several important themes that are relevant to students and society:

Key Themes

- **Disability and Acceptance:** The story challenges the perception of disability as a limitation and shows acceptance and adaptation.
- **Resilience and Determination:** Both Hawking and Kanga demonstrate strength in facing physical challenges.
- **Perception of Differently Abled People:** The story critiques how society often patronises or misunderstands disabled individuals.
- **Inspiration and Human Spirit:** The narrative inspires readers to look beyond physical conditions and appreciate inner qualities.

Textual Evidence

"A lot of people seem to think that disabled people are chronically unhappy," I said. "I know that's not true myself." This challenges common misconceptions.

Solved Example

Question: What message does the story convey about the lives of disabled people?

Answer: The story conveys that disabled people can lead meaningful, inspiring lives and should not be pitied or underestimated.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- What is the main theme of the story?
- How does the author describe society's reaction to disabled people?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Explain how the story changes the perception of disability.
- Discuss the theme of resilience as shown by the characters.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze the societal attitudes towards disability as critiqued in the story.
- How does the story inspire readers to rethink their views on differently abled individuals?

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Disability and acceptance; society often patronises disabled people.
- **Level 2:** Shows disability does not limit potential; characters show strength and determination.
- **Level 3:** Highlights patronising attitudes; encourages respect and understanding.

Quick Reference

- **Main Themes:** Disability, resilience, perception, inspiration

Glossary

- **Chronically:** Persistently or constantly.
- **Patronise:** To treat condescendingly.

Literary Devices in A Visit to Cambridge

The author uses several literary devices to enhance the narrative and convey deeper meanings.

Key Devices

- **Metaphor:** "Cambridge was my metaphor for England" compares Cambridge to the whole country symbolically.
- **Imagery:** Vivid descriptions of Hawking's physical condition and the setting create strong mental pictures.
- **Dialogue:** The conversation between Kanga and Hawking reveals character and themes.
- **Symbolism:** The wheelchair symbolizes both limitation and strength.
- **Contrast:** Between physical disability and intellectual brilliance.

Textual Evidence

"Before you, like a lantern whose walls are worn so thin you glimpse only the light inside, is the incandescence of a man." This metaphor highlights the inner strength beyond physical appearance.

Solved Example

Question: Identify and explain a metaphor used in the story.

Answer: The author uses the metaphor of Cambridge as a symbol for England, representing his perception of the country through the university.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- What is a metaphor? Give an example from the story.
- How does the author use imagery?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Explain the symbolism of the wheelchair in the story.
- Discuss how dialogue helps develop the characters.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Analyze the use of contrast between physical disability and intellectual ability in the story.
- How does the metaphor of the lantern contribute to the theme?

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** A metaphor is a figure of speech comparing two things; example: Cambridge as a metaphor for England; imagery is used to describe Hawking's appearance vividly.
- **Level 2:** The wheelchair symbolizes both limitation and strength; dialogue reveals personality and themes.
- **Level 3:** Contrast shows that physical limitations do not affect intellect; the lantern metaphor highlights inner light and spirit.

Quick Reference

- **Metaphor:** Comparison without using like or as
- **Imagery:** Descriptive language
- **Symbolism:** Use of symbols to represent ideas

Glossary

- **Incandescence:** Emission of light; metaphor for inner glow.
- **Contrast:** Difference between two things.