Mother's Day Summary

Mother’s Day, a play by J. B. Priestley, portraying the status of a mother in a household. Priestly humorously explores the story when Mrs. Pearson, in her forties, stands up for her rights and how her family reacts at this. Mrs. Pearson is very fond of her family and works day and night to support her family member in the best possible manner. However, she is upset at the way she is being treated. Nobody cares for her or asks about her. All day long she stays at home doing all the work. In the evening when the kids and her husband return she gave threw herself in meeting their demands. She did not want any dislikeable thing to happen in her household yet she craved for their attention and a little respect. She went to her neighbour Mrs. Fitzgerald, a fortune teller and a magician. Older and heavy, Mrs. Fitzgerald comes with a plan. She proposed that they could exchange bodies and then with Pearson’s body, she would teach a lesson to Pearson’s family that Mrs. Pearson could not herself for she was too humble and nice to do that.

Though reluctant, Mrs. Pearson agreed to the idea and the two exchanged their bodies. Mrs. Pearson was still not sure and asked Mrs. Fitzgerald if she could get her body back. However, determined Fitzgerald tells Pearson to not worry and that she would handle the matter carefully. She left for Pearson’s home with Mrs. Pearson’s body. She entered the home and knew what she was to do to teach Pearsons' a lesson so they would not bother Mrs. Pearson in future unnecessarily. Mrs. Pearson (Mrs.Fitzgerald’s soul) smoked a cigarette and was confident than ever. A few moments later, her daughter, Doris Pearson, entered the house and started demanding tea and her dress. Mrs. Pearson was sure to make her realise that she was Doris’ mother and not a servant. She was stunned to see her mother smoking and that she had not prepared tea for her and that her dress was not ready as well. Doris told her mother that she was to go out with her beau Charles Spencer on which the mother remarked if she could not find someone better. This broke Doris and she left weeping.

Then came the son, Cyril Pearson, who is amused at his mother’s strange behaviour. They get into an argument. The children could not baffle the situation. When the mother left to fetch the stout, the children discussed their mother’s behaviour. Doris felt that it might have been that mother got her head hit. Then enters mother with a bottle of stout and a glass half filled with it. The children began to laugh and the mother chided them and asked them to behave like grown-ups. Doris then asked her mother for her such behaviour and if they had done something wrong. Then Mrs. Pearson tells them that it is actually the children’s and her husband’s behaviour that has disturbed her. They always come and go without bothering about her. They demand duties from her and she does her best to keep everyone happy and still no body is bothered about her. She remarks that while the three of them do a job of forty hours a week with two days as weekend, she goes on working seven days round the clock. She
proclaimed that she would do some work on Saturday and Sunday only if she is thanked for everything.

When the mother scolded Doris and Cyril duly, entered George Pearson and is annoyed at her wife sipping stout. He told her that he would have supper at the club and that he did not want tea. The wife told him that there was no tea. He got annoyed and the wife then said that when he did not want tea then why was he fighting for it. Mr. Pearson is flabbergasted at such conduct of his wife. The wife continues to rebuke the husband telling him that why he goes to club when he is a joke among all there. He is stunned and demanded the truth from his son. Cyril got upset at his mother yet told the father that it was the truth.

Then enters Mrs. Fitzgerald (actually Mrs. Pearson). Mrs. Pearson (actually Mrs. Fitzgerald) told her that she was just putting everyone at place and that the things were alright. Mrs. Pearson (Mrs. Fitzgerald in body) requested to have her body then and Mrs. Pearson (Mrs. Fitzgerald in body) on a condition that Pearson would not go soft on her family again. They got into their original bodies and Mrs. Fitzgerald left. The mother and the children and husband smiled at each other and it was decided that they all will have the dinner together and play a game of rummy.
1. This is a humorous play with many humorous situations. Which situation did you enjoy most?

Answer: The play indeed is very humorous. But the funniest moment was when Mrs. Pearson (or Mrs. Fitzgerald) insults and humiliates her husband George by telling him what they thought of him at the club. She even told him the nickname 'Pompy-Ompy Pearson', with which he was called at the club, behind his back.

2. How does the Pearson family finally spend the evening?

Answer: The evening was finally spent in the way Mrs. Pearson had always wanted. The children helped to prepare dinner. She could play rummy and chat with her husband. She was a happy and contented woman now.

3. What advice does Mrs. Fitzgerald give to Mrs. Pearson after they change back personalities?

Answer: She advises Mrs. Pearson not to give any explanations. She tells her to be assertive and give them a tough look or a rude tone occasionally.

4. What does Mrs. Pearson tell her husband about her visit to the bar?

Answer: George got a rude shock when his wife had not prepared tea for him although he had first said that he hadn’t wanted any. But he was annoyed when he found that tea wasn’t ready. She asked him if he had ever shouted at the bar for not giving something he had not wanted.

5. Doris says, ‘you’ll see’ to her father. What does she mean?

Answer: Doris was crying when her father returned from work. When he asked her the reason, she spoke these words to tell him about her mother’s peculiar behaviour. She also told him that mother had refused to do any work for anyone and was also talking rudely.

6. What is Doris’ reaction when Mrs. Pearson says she will work for only forty hours a week?

Answer: Doris was shocked at the answer. She also wondered where her mother would go away for the weekend. She thought her mother had gone crazy because of an accident or a hit on the head.
7. Mrs. Pearson says, ‘……..I’ve joined the movement’. What does she mean?

Answer: Mrs. Pearson says this to Cyril, her son. She told him that just as he wouldn’t like to do anything that he doesn’t want to do when he was at work, she too would not do anything if she didn’t like to. She would also join the movement of Union – to bar what she doesn’t want to do.

8. Why does Doris say ‘Mum – what’s the matter with you?’?

Answer: Doris returns home to find that the mother has not got the tea ready. Her clothes are not ironed. The shock comes when the mother tells her to iron her dress herself as she was planning to go to Clarendon for a meal. This behaviour shocked Doris.

9. What advice does Mrs. Fitzgerald give Mrs. Pearson regarding being the boss in her family?

Answer: Mrs. Fitzgerald tells Pearson to become the mistress of her own house. She should not allow herself to be dominated by others. Her family should learn to treat her with respect.

10. How does the end of the play justify the title?

Answer: Mrs. Pearson being a weak person was taken for granted by her family. They dominated her a lot and did not care for her feelings. But in the end she winds when Mrs. Fitzgerald takes over for sometime and is able to get the respect that Mrs Pearson deserves. She has her day.

11. What do Doris and Cyril think about their mother’s sudden change in the behaviour?

Answer: Both Doris and Cyril are utterly confused and bewildered at their mother’s strange behaviour. They have never seen her smoking, drinking, playing cards and speaking in such a strange and sarcastic manner. They think that she has hurt her head and is suffering from a concussion.

12. What plans does Mrs. Pearson have about her work in the future?

Answer: Mrs. Pearson declares that she had joined a Mother’s Movement. She had decided to work for only forty hours a week like workers in their places of work. She would even go out on weekends to amuse herself and take a break from the family.

13. Who is Charlie Spence? How does Mrs. Pearson talk about him to Doris?
Answer: Charlie Spence is Doris’s boyfriend. They had planned an evening out together. After undergoing change in personality tells Doris that Charlie is dull headed, foolish and has bucked teeth. She advises her to find a better man to go out with.

14. How does Mrs. Fitzgerald plan to show the Pearsons their places?

Answer: Mrs. Fitzgerald had learnt some magic during her few years stay in the east. She offers to exchange her personality with Mrs. Pearson for some time. While she will look like Mrs. Pearson, she would still be able to use her domineering nature to show the Pearson family their place. This plan was a temporary arrangement.

15. Mrs. Pearson is sick of being ordered about by her family. Why is she so hesitant to put her foot down?

Answer: Mrs. Pearson loves her family a lot. At the same time she gets dominated by each of her family members. Her meek and timid nature prevents her from retaliating. Even though she drops a hint here and there, but no one really cares about her. When her neighbour Mrs. Fitzgerald asks her to be assertive, she doesn’t have the courage to do so.

16. How are Mrs. Pearson and Fitzgerald contrasted?

Answer: Both the ladies are in sharp contrast with each other. While Mrs. Pearson in passive docile, submissive and confused. She is also timid and soft spoken. Mrs. Fitzgerald is aggressive, dominating, sinister and bold. She has a deep voice.

17. Mrs. Annie Pearson and Mrs. Fitzgerald are totally opposite to each other in their attitudes. Show the difference between their personalities.

Answer: The play ‘Mother’s Day’ by J.B Priestley brings out a sharp contrast in the characters of the two main protagonists, Mrs. Pearson and Mrs. Fitzgerald. Mrs. Pearson is shown as a quiet, submissive woman who thinks it to be her prime duty to serve her family. On the other hand, her family consists of rude, arrogant and dominating members each of whom treat her like a servant, ordering her about and talking rudely in the process hurting her sentiments and feelings. Mrs. Pearson suffers quietly, never speaks her mind, never retaliates all because she wants to avoid any kind of unpleasantness.Mrs. Fitzgerald, on the other hand is strong, domineering, frank and outspoken. She demands respect and takes pride in the fact that no one can take her for a ride. She has an identity of her own, speaks her mind and asserts herself. She is instrumental in bringing about a transformation in the family members of the Pearson family. She exchanges her personality with Pearson with the help of magic and then tackles her family members one by one. She openly insults, humiliates and offends them. She refuses to do any work. She rebels by smoking and drinking. All this was done to make them realise their mistakes and make them love and respect their mother. She succeeds in the end.
18. Bring out the humour of the play.

Answer: The dramatist has combined a serious theme with some comical concept of the magic trick which ensures that the theme of the play is effective in a very humorous manner. Despite being a sinister and aggressive character, Mrs. Fitzgerald is the one that evokes maximum laughter. The way in which she scolds, rebukes and mocks at each family member is an effective source of laughter. When she assumes Mrs. Pearson’s form and challenges the children with sarcasm and bitter jest, the two rude and demanding children are forced to mend their ways. Her clever remarks and indignant outburst provide an element of humour throughout the play. During her conversation with George Pearson, she is harsh and offensive towards him. It is amusing in the way she reprimands a grown man. It is even more amusing as she points out flaws in each of the family members. All in all the deeper meaning of the play has been displayed through humour making it not only moralistic but entertaining as well.

19. The chapter deals with a very serious issue in a humorous way. Do you think humour and satire can be used as a tool for social reformation? Give reasons for your answer keeping in mind the chapter ‘Mother’s Day.’

Answer:

The chapter presents a humorous and satirical depiction of the status of women, in particular, a housewife, in a household. Mrs. Pearson devotes all her time and energies to fulfill all the needs of her family yet is treated like a doormat by her children and husband. Her services are taken for granted and she rarely receives any gratitude and care in return. Her caring nature only accelerates the expectation of her family from her. Through the interchange of bodies, Mrs. Pearson is empowered and starts asserting herself boldly and makes her family realize her importance. Her situation is the lot of most of the housewife who are neglected and who suffer in silence. The chapter raises important issues about female empowerment and the need for love and respect towards family members through the medium of satire and humor.