The Lepchas live on the Kanchenjunga slopes. Kanchenjunga, according to them, is the sacred abode of gods, and high above the hills, behind Kanchenjunga, is Mayel—a beautiful secret valley.

The ancestors of the Lepcha tribe are believed to inhabit Mayel. However, no one can reach Mayel as the path towards it is protected by fierce demons. The passage is also blocked by a large heavy rock. The rock cannot be removed by any human.

Earlier, ancestors would come down to the valley of the Lepchas, but then they felt that the new generation of Lepchas was not virtuous enough. So, they stopped coming. The Lepchas were unhappy and tried looking for the elders, but could not find them.

abode: home
ancestors: forefathers
fierce: violent and frightening
virtuous: having high moral standards
One day, a young Lepcha named Sanga went hunting to a faraway forest and came across a river. He noticed a unique branch of a tree floating on the river. It had beautiful green needle-like leaves and a golden bark. He thought, 'This branch must be from Mayel, so Mayel has to be somewhere upstream.'

Sanga left his hunting equipment and climbed up the rocks, following the river. He kept climbing for several days, crossed a forest and a snow-covered mountain range till he reached a beautiful valley. He knew it was Mayel.

Sanga went to the first hut and knocked on the door. An old woman welcomed him and offered him a simple meal. They were joined by an old man. Sanga was tired after days of walking so he soon fell asleep on a rug.

Next morning, he woke up on hearing children's voices. He saw a little boy and a girl playing. He thought they were the neighbour's children and the old couple had perhaps gone out for some work. He asked the children about the old couple.

"We are the old couple you met last evening," replied the little boy.

Sanga was shocked, "How can it be true?"

"This is the way of our world," said the little girl. "In the morning, we are children; by midday, we become adults; at sunset, we are old. Next morning, we are children again. Thus, we live forever,"

Sanga spent seven happy days in Mayel, enjoying the beautiful valley with its green trees and flocks of white birds. Then the old woman said, "Son, now you should return to your village, for no ordinary person lives in Mayel."

She gave him seeds of different grains, and said, "Take these seeds to your village and your people will never lack food. We shall send a flock of white birds as messengers to your village. When you see them, sow the seeds at once."

Following the legend, the Lepchas still believe that the arrival of flocks of white birds indicates that they should go to work in the fields. Every year, after sowing new seeds, they pray to their revered ancestors to bless them with a fine harvest.

**upstream**: moving or situated in the opposite direction from that in which a river or stream flows

**equipment**: the necessary items for a particular purpose

**legend**: a traditional story

**harvest**: the season's crop
Did You Know

- The Lepchas are the original inhabitants of Sikkim.
- They live on the southern and eastern slopes of Mt Kanchenjunga in Bhutan and Nepal.
- The Lepcha language is known as Rongring.
- Lepcha villages consist of 15 to 20 houses, scattered on a hillside or in a forest.
- Lepcha dishes are less spicy than other Indian food.
- Their principal food crop is rice.

Comprehension

1. Fill in the blanks with a suitable word from the text.
   a) The Lepchas live on the slopes of ________.
   b) The Lepchas tried looking for the ________ but could not find them.
   c) Sanga went hunting to a ________ forest and came across a river.
   d) The unique branch had beautiful green ________ -like leaves and a golden bark.
   e) After sowing seeds, the Lepchas pray to their ________.

2. Complete the following sentences.
   a) According to the Lepchas, Kanchenjunga is ________.
   b) The ancestors of the Lepcha tribe are believed ________.
   c) Sanga thought that the boy and the girl were ________.
   d) The old woman gave Sanga seeds of ________.
   e) The old woman asked Sanga to ________.

3. Answer the following questions.
   a) What beliefs do the Lepchas have about Kanchenjunga?
   b) Why can’t anyone reach Mayel?
   c) How did Sanga know that he had reached Mayel?
d) What did the little girl tell Sanga about the ways of the Mayel world?

e) When do the Lepchas know it is the right time to work in the fields?

**Language**

4. **Fill in the blanks with the proper article:** – ‘a’, ‘an’ or ‘the’.
   a) The arrival of flocks of white birds indicates that they should go to work in  ____ fields.
   b) Sanga was  ____ young Lepcha.
   c) Leaving his hunting equipment, Sanga climbed up  ____ rocks.
   d) The old woman and Sanga were joined by  ____ old man.
   e) He saw  ____ little boy and a girl playing.

5. **Identify the adjectives in the given sentences.**
   a) The path towards Mayel is protected by fierce demons.
   b) An old woman welcomed him and offered him a simple meal.
   c) Sanga noticed a unique branch of a tree floating in the river.
   d) No ordinary person lives in Mayel.
   e) We shall send a flock of white birds as messengers to your village.

**Writing**

6. The life of a boy or a girl living in a village is different from that of a boy or a girl in a city. Write a composition in hundred words comparing the lives of the two.

**Speaking and Listening**

7. Divide the class into groups of five. Each group is given time to research the lives of the Lepchas.

   Students can then share their findings with the class—in the form of an interview/radio talk/speech/Presentation/poster.