

11. Snake (Poetry)

Text Book Questions

1. Snakes generate both horror and fascination. Do you agree? Why? Why not?

Answer:

Snakes generate both horror and fascination because our reasoning often misleads us. Though snakes are creations of nature, we are afraid of them. Snakes also fascinate us but we do not understand the beauty of nature, and being human, we have the impulse to kill it even though we are astounded by its beauty. Snakes are found in different colours and different sizes. They say that nature is more powerful than human beings. But still they generate horror which is just because of small instincts of natural world

Read what W.W.E. Ross feels when he sees a snake and fill in the table given below :

The Snake Trying

The snake trying to escape the
pursuing stick, with sudden curvings
of thin long body. How beautiful and
graceful are his shapes !
He glides through the water away
from the stroke. O let him go over the
water into the reeds to hide without
hurt. Small and green he is harmless
even to children Along the sand
he lay until observed
and chased away, and now
he vanishes in the ripples
among the green slim reeds.

What is the snake doing?	Words to describe the snake	Poet's plea

Answer:

What is the snake doing?	Words to describe the snake	Poet's plea
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The snake is gliding through the water to escape the stroke of the stick. • The snake vanishes in the green slim reeds. 	thin, long, beautiful, graceful, small, green, harmless.	to let the snake go unhurt into the reeds

3. Read the poem by D.H. Lawrence about his encounter with a snake

Answer:

Students Do Your Self.

4. Given below is the summary of the poem Snake in short paragraphs. However they are jumbled. Work in pairs and put the summary into a logical sequence.

(a) After drinking water to satisfaction, the snake raised his head dreamily and flickered his forked tongue and licked his lips. The snake looked around like a God and then slowly proceeded to curve round and move away from the water trough.

(b) The poet felt much like the ancient mariner who had killed the albatross for no reason. He wishes that the snake would come back. He thinks of the snake as a king in exile who has to be crowned again. He also regrets having missed his opportunity of knowing and understanding one of the lords of life.

(c) As the snake put his head into the hole to retreat into the earth, the poet was filled with a protest against the idea of the snake withdrawing into his hole. The poet put down his pitcher, picked up a log and hurled it at the snake. The snake twisted violently and with great alacrity vanished into the hole in the wall.

(d) A snake visited the poet's water trough on a hot afternoon to quench his thirst. The poet who had also gone to the trough to fill water in a pitcher waited for the snake since he had come at the trough prior to the poet.

(e) The voices of education inside the poet tell him that it was the fear for the snake that made him refrain from killing him. However, the poet feels that though he was quite afraid of the snake, he did actually feel honoured that a

snake had come to seek his hospitality from the deep recesses of the earth.

(f) He is guilt-ridden. He feels that he has to atone for the meanness of his action of throwing a log at the snake.

(g) The snake rested his throat upon the stone bottom and sipped the water into his slack long body. After drinking water, he raised his head just like cattle do and flashed his forked tongue, thought for a moment and then bent down to drink some more water.

(h) Education and social conventions make the poet think that the golden brown poisonous snake must be killed and that as a brave man he must undertake the task of killing the snake.

(i) The poet instantly felt sorry for his unrefined and contemptible act and cursed the voices of education and civilization that had shaped his thought processes and urged him to kill the snake.

(j) However, the poet instinctively likes the snake, treats him like a guest and feels honoured that it had come to drink at his water trough. The poet questions himself and wonders whether his not daring to kill the snake proved that he was a coward and whether his desire to talk to the snake reflected his perversity.

Answer:

The logical sequence will be:

1. – (d)
2. – (g)
3. – (a)
4. – (h)
5. – (e)
6. – (c)
7. – (f)
8. – (b)
9. – (i)
10. – (j)

5. Based on your reading of the poem, answer the following questions by ticking the correct options:

(a) 'he lifted his head from his drinking as cattle do'—The poet wants to convey that the snake

- (i) is domesticated**
- (ii) is innocent**
- (iii) is as harmless as cattle**
- (iv) drinks water just like cattle**

Answer:

(iii) is as harmless as cattle

(b) 'Sicilian July', 'Etna smoking' and 'burning bowels of the earth' are images that convey that

- (i) there are snakes in volcanic areas**
- (ii) the poet lived in a hot area**
- (iii) it was a really hot day when the snake came**
- (iv) Sicilian snakes are dangerous**

Answer:

(iii) it was a really hot day when the snake came

(c) 'A sort of horror, a sort of protest overcame me'—The poet is filled with protest because

- (i) he doesn't want to let the snake remain alive**
- (ii) he fears the snake**
- (iii) he doesn't want the snake to recede into darkness**
- (iv) he wants to kill it so that it doesn't return**

Answer:

(iv) he wants to kill it so that it doesn't return

(d) In the line 'And as he slowly drew up, snake-easing his shoulders, and entered farther the phrase 'snake-easing his shoulders' means

- (i) loosening its shoulders**
- (ii) slipping in with majestic grace**
- (iii) moving slowly**
- (iv) moving fast**

Answer:

(iii) moving slowly

(e) 'He seemed to me like a king in exile ...' The poet refers to the snake as such to emphasize that the snake

(i) is like a king enduring banishment

(ii) is like a king due to be crowned

(iii) is a majestic king who came for a while on earth

(iv) is a majestic creature forced to go into exile by man

Answer:

(iv) is a majestic creature forced to go into exile by man

(f) 'I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act'— The poet is referring to

(i) the snake going into the dreadful hole

(ii) the accursed modern education

(iii) the act of throwing a log of wood at the snake

(iv) the act of killing the snake

Answer:

(iii) the act of throwing a log of wood at the snake

6. Answer the following questions briefly:

(a) Why does the poet decide to stand and wait till the snake has finished drinking? What does this tell you about the poet? (Notice that he uses 'someone' instead of 'something' for the snake.)

Answer:

The poet decides to stand and wait till the snake has finished drinking because he thinks that the snake came before him. The poet stands waiting with his pitcher 'I came down with my pitcher' and feels that there is some guest at the water trough. The poet feels himself honoured that someone has come to drink water from his trough. This shows that the poet is a lover of nature who sees the snake as a big creation of nature.

(b) In stanza 2 and 3, the poet gives a vivid description of the snake by using suggestive expressions. What picture of the snake do you form on the basis of this description?

Answer:

The snake that came to the water-trough down from a fissure in the earth wall was yellow- brown slack, soft-bellied. He sipped with his straight mouth, softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body, silently.

(c) How does the poet describe the day and the atmosphere when he saw the snake?

Answer:

It was a hot day. The poet came out in pyjamas because of the heat, to fill his pitcher. It seemed to be a day of 'Sicilian July, with Etna smoking. The atmosphere was gloomy when the snake emerged from the fissure to drink water at the trough.

(d) What does the poet want to convey by saying that the snake emerges from the 'burning bowels of the earth'?

Answer:

The poet wants to convey that the snake came out of the dark hell. He means that the snake comes out of the fissure from the bottom of the earth which is all dark and black as hell.

(e) Do you think the snake was conscious of the poet's presence? How do you know?

Answer:

The snake was not conscious of the poet's presence for it came very peacefully trailing his yellow-brown belly down over the edge of the stone water trough. It rested its throat upon the bottom where the water was dripping and sipped with his straight mouth softly into his slack long body.

(f) How do we know that the snake's thirst was satiated? Pick out the expressions that convey this.

Answer:

The snake's thirst was satiated for, after drinking silently he lifted his head 'as cat do' satisfied and flickered his forked tongue from his lips 'as one who has drunken' and slowly proceeded to draw his slow length curving round And climb again the broken bank of my wall-face.

(g) The poet has a dual attitude towards the snake. Why does he experience conflicting emotions on seeing the snake?

Answer:

On seeing the snake the poet has conflicting emotions. There is something that actually wants him to like the snake but at the same time his education preaches him to kill it as it might be dangerous to him. He also sees it as his guest and feels honoured that a guest has come to drink water. Hence, he is covered with guilt after throwing the log on the poor innocent snake.

(h) The poet is filled with horror and protest when the snake prepares to retreat and bury itself in the “horrid black”, ‘dreadful’ hole. In the light of this statement, bring out the irony of his act of throwing a log at the snake.

Answer:

The snake moved slowly into the hole and suddenly the poet ‘picked up a log and threw it at the water-trough to kill the snake’. The snake hearing the ‘clatter’ hastily moved ‘into the black hole’. The poet now regretted his action and blamed himself for acting the way he did. He wished the snake could come back for him to crown it like a king.

(i) The poet seems to be full of admiration and respect for the snake. He almost regards him like a majestic god. Pick out at least four expressions from the poem that reflect these emotions.

Answer:

The poet is full of admiration and respect for the snake. He respects it like a guest who has come to his water-trough to drink water. He ‘stands and waits’ to fill his pitcher and tells the snake to drink because it came before him. He considers him ‘like a god’ and wishes the snake would come back so that he could crown him ‘like a king’. He feels he had missed his ‘chance with one of the lords’, when the snake recedes back into its hole.

(j) What is the difference between the snake’s movement at the beginning of the poem and later when the poet strikes it with a log of wood? You may use relevant vocabulary from the poem to highlight the difference.

Answer:

When the snake comes to the water-trough he ‘trails his yellow-brown soft-belly’ smoothly down silently. And when he has drunk the water he looked around like a god slowly proceeding to go into the fissure but when the poet picked up a ‘clumsy

log' and threw at the snake it 'writhed like lightning and was gone into the black hole'.

(k) The poet experiences feelings of self-derision, guilt and regret after hitting the snake. Pick out expressions that suggest this. Why does he feel like this?

Answer:

After hitting the snake the poet has feelings of self-derision, guilt and regret. He blames the voice of education that lures him to hit the snake. He thinks how 'paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!' He despises himself and his inner voice curses human education'.

(l) You have already read Coleridge's poem The Ancient Mariner in which an albatross is killed by the mariner. Why does the poet make an allusion to the albatross?

Answer:

The poet places the blame on the voice of education for his action to have tempted him into hitting the snake and hopes he need not pay for his negative action like the sailor that killed 'the albatross'. The poet wishes the snake to come back for him to crown it like a king but believes it would never do so and sees it 'like a king in exile'.

(m) I have something to expiate'-Explain.

Answer:

Although the poet hits the snake under the influence of his education he feels sorry and wishes the snake would come back so the poet could crown it like a king but he misses the chance. He thinks he has to make amends for this petty mistake.

7. The encounter with the snake and the dual response of the poet to his presence at the water trough reflect a conflict between civilized social education and natural human instincts. The poet writes a diary entry highlighting how he was torn between the two voices. Write his diary.

Answer:

I have a reaction of fear and fascination for the snake. There is a conflict between my natural feelings and my rational thinking. I have feelings of affection as if crushed by our social education. My reasoning often misleads me. Although I hit the snake under the influence of my education, yet I feel sorry for my mean act. So my natural instinct prevails in the end.

By nature I am sympathetic, considerate and peace loving but education turns me into a brute and kills the natural man in me. I mean to say this education also makes me egoistic and selfish which urges me to kill the snake to satisfy my social needs.

The nature of the conflict which grips my mind at the sight of the snake draws the conflict between the use of rational powers and intuitive powers. I listen to my rational voice and attack the snake only to regret my mean and vulgar act.

My education with forces of ignorance, cruelty and barbarity makes me think that our rationality and intellect produce in us fears, doubts and superstitions. It is our instinctive nature which prompts us to do the acts of goodness.

8. Alliteration is the repetition of sounds in words, usually the first sound. Sibilance is a special form of alliteration using the softer consonants that create hissing sounds, or sibilant sounds. These consonants and digraphs include s, sh, th, ch, z, f, x, and soft c.

Onomatopoeia is a word that imitates the sound it represents for a rhetorical or artistic effect of bringing out the full flavor of words. The sounds literally make the meaning in such words as “buzz,” “crash,” “whirr,” “clang” “hiss,” “purr,” “squeak,” etc. It is also used by poets to convey their subject to the reader. For example, In the last lines of Sir Alfred Tennyson’s poem ‘Come Down, O Maid’, m and n sounds produce an atmosphere of murmuring Insects:

... the moan of doves in immemorial elms,
And murmuring of innumerable bees.
Notice how D H Lawrence uses both these devices effectively in the following stanza.
He reached down from a fissure in the earth-wall in the gloom
And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down, over the edge of the stone
trough
And rested his throat upon the stone bottom,
And where the water had dripped from the tap, in a small clearness,
He sipped with his straight mouth,
Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body,
Silently.

To what effect has the poet used these devices? How has it added to your understanding of the subject of the poem? You may record your understanding of snake characteristics under the following headings:
(a) Sound

(b) Movement

(c) Shape

Answer:

(a) Sound:

- He sipped with his straight mouth, Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body, silently-Alliteration (sibilance)

(b) Movement:

- And flickered his two forked tongue from his tips and mused a moment – Alliteration.
- And depart peaceful, pacified and thankless into the burning bowels of the earth. – Alliteration.

(c) Shape:

- And trailed his yellow-brown slackness soft-bellied down over the edge of the stone trough. – Alliteration (sibilance)
- Being garth-brown earth-golden, from the burning bowels of the earth.

9. The poet has also used both repetition and similes in the poem. For example—‘must wait, must stand and wait’ (repetition) and ‘looked at me vaguely as cattle do’ (simile).

Pick out examples of both and make a list of them in your notebooks. Give reasons why the poet uses these literary devices.

Answer:

Repetition	Simile
• And must wait, must stand and wait	• as cattle do, as drinking cattle do
• to feel so honoured I felt so honoured	• Lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do
• And slowly and slowly very slowly	• He had come like a guest in quiet.
• I was afraid	• And lifted his head dreamily, as one who has tongue.

• I was most afraid	• And flickered his tongue like a forked night on the air
• from the burning bowels of the earth	• And looked around like a God
• Into the burning bowels of the earth	• writhed like lightning • he seemed to me again like a king.

10. A calligram is a poem, phrase, or word in which the handwriting is arranged in a way that creates a visual image. The image created by the words expresses visually what the word, or words, say. In a poem, it manifests visually the theme presented by the text of the poem. Read the poem given below. Try to compose a calligram. You could pick a subject of your choice.

Snake

Snake glides
through grass
over
Pebbles
forked tongue
working
never
speaking
but its
body
whispers
listen.
Keith Bosley

Answer:

Kite-A Calligram poem

A Kite is soaring high in sky A dive and a dip It soars like a ship Beautiful and high Tying earth and sky
(Students may create more poems of their own)