

Explanation of the Poem

1. He stalks in his vivid stripes
The few steps of his cage,
On pads of velvet quiet,
In his quiet rage.

Exp- The tiger in the zoo walks in the limited space provided to it in the cage. It takes a few steps. There are stripes on its body which are quite prominent (noticeable). Its paws are soft like velvet. No noise is produced when it walks on its 'pads of velvet'. The tiger is silent but in rage (anger).

2. He should be lurking in shadow,
Sliding through long grass
Near the water hole
Where plump deer pass.

Exp- Now, the poet suggests that the cage is not the proper place for the tiger. It is not its natural habitat. The tiger in the cage is a victim of human cruelty. Usually, tigers are found sitting under some bushes or long grasses near a stream or water hole. As soon as they see their prey like deer coming there to drink water, they slide silently through the grass and kill them. The poet wants to convey that this tiger should be there in the forest, its natural habitat.

3. He should be snarling around houses
At the jungle's edge,
Baring his white fangs, his claws,
Terrorising the village!

Exp- The poet proceeds further giving another suggestion that the tiger should be sitting at the jungle's edge in close vicinity of a village. It should be terrorising the people passing that way by showing its sharp teeth, baring its claws and producing low sound of anger.

4. But he's locked in a concrete cell,
His strength behind bars,
Stalking the length of his cage,
Ignoring visitors.

Exp- The poet expresses deep sympathy at the plight (unpleasant situation) of the tiger, that is imprisoned in a cell made of concrete (mixed material like cement, sand, small pieces of stone and water). He cannot come out of it because strong bars fixed at the concrete cell stop him. Thus, the poet says that the tiger's strength is locked behind the bars. The tiger shows no interest in looking at the visitors. Rather, he keeps on stalking (walking in angry and proud manner) in the limited space of the cage.

5. He hears the last voice at night,
The patrolling cars,
And stares with his brilliant eyes
At the brilliant stars.

The poet again takes the reader to the cage where the tiger is sitting in the cage and feeling unpleasant and restless. He hears the sound created by the patrolling cars of the zoo authorities. He shows no interest in them and stares at the shining stars with his brilliant eyes.

Thus, the poem ends up at the point where it had started.

The poet raises a moral issue here. He intends to present a strong case against the cruelty on animals, which are kept in cages.

POETIC DEVICES

Rhyme scheme

Each of the five stanzas of "A tiger in the Zoo" follows the same simple rhyme scheme – ABCB.

Personification

This poetic device is used to bestow human qualities on something that is not human. In this poem, the poet uses the device of personification with respect to the tiger that is mentioned in the title of the poem. He refers to the tiger not as "it" but as "he".

Metaphor

This poetic device is used when a covert comparison is made between two different things or ideas. In this poem, the poet uses the device of metaphor in the 3rd line of the 1st stanza, when he compares the pads of the tiger's feet with velvet, since both are soft and smooth when touched.

Metonymy

This poetic device consists of the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant. In this poem, the poet uses the device of metonymy in the 2nd line of the 4th stanza. He uses the word "strength" to mean the body of the tiger, where the entire strength of this majestic creature resides and which is locked up within a cage in the zoo.

ANSWERS TO NCERT QUESTIONS

THINKING ABOUT THE POEM

1. Read the poem again, and work in pairs or groups to do the following tasks.

(i) Find the words that describe the movements and actions of the tiger in the cage and in the wild. Arrange them in two columns.

(ii) Find the words that describe the two places, and arrange them in two columns.

Now try to share ideas about how the poet uses words and images to contrast the two situations.

Ans. (i)

In the cage	In the wild
stalks	lurking in shadow
few steps of his cage	sliding through long grass
quiet rage	snarling around houses
locked in a concrete cell	baring his white fangs, his claws
stalking the length of his cage	terrorising the village
ignoring visitors	
stares at the brilliant stars	

(ii)

Cage	Wild
few steps of his cage	shadow
concrete cell	long grass
locked	water hole
behind bars	plump deer
visitors	houses at the jungle's edge
patrolling cars	village
stares at the brilliant stars	

2. Notice the use of a word repeated in lines such as these:

(i)

On pads of velvet quiet,

In his quiet rage.

(ii)

And stares with his brilliant eyes

At the brilliant stars.

What do you think is the effect of this repetition?

Ans. This repetition is a poetic device used by the poet in order to increase the intensity of the tiger's rage and his helpless silence. 'Velvet quiet' refers to the quiet velvet pads of the tiger, which cannot run or leap. They can only walk around the limited space in the cage. The use of 'quiet rage' symbolises the anger and ferocity that is building up inside the tiger as it wants to run out into forest and attack the deer, but the rage is quiet because it cannot come out in the open as it is in the cage. This repeated use of 'quiet' has brought immense beauty to the poem. Similarly, the use of 'brilliant' for the tiger's eyes as well as the stars also brings out the magnificence of these lines. The tiger has dreams of being free in its 'brilliant' eyes. It sees the stars (that have also been described as brilliant) with the same eyes. It stares at the brilliant stars with its brilliant eyes thinking about how beautiful its life could be in the forest. The repetitiveness of these words gives a wonderful effect to the poem.

3. Read the following two poems — one about a tiger and the other about a panther. Then discuss:

Are zoos necessary for the protection or conservation of some species of animals? Are they useful for educating the public? Are there alternatives to zoos?

The Tiger

The tiger behind the bars of his cage growls,

The tiger behind the bars of his cage snarls,

The tiger behind the bars of his cage roars.

Then he thinks,

It would be nice not to be behind bars all

The time

Because they spoil my view

I wish I were wild, not on show.

But if I were wild, hunters might shoot me,

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow: (4 Marks each)

1. He stalks in his vivid stripes
The few steps of his cage,
On pads of velvet quiet,
In his quiet rage.

- (a) Who is 'he' in the above lines?
- (b) Where is he?
- (c) Where and how is he walking?
- (d) In which mood is he? Why?

- Ans. (a) 'He' in the above lines is the tiger.
(b) He is in a small cage.
(c) He is walking in his cage slowly and quietly with firm strides in a proud manner.
(d) He is angry because instead of moving freely in the forest, he is confined to a small cage.

2. He should be lurking in shadow,
Sliding through long grass
Near the water hole
Where plump deer pass.

- (a) Where is the tiger hiding?
- (b) Who is going to be his prey?
- (c) Why should he be lurking in shadow?
- (d) What is the rhyme scheme of these lines?

- Ans. (a) He is hiding in a shadowy dark place in the long grass.
(b) A fat deer who will come that way to drink water is going to be his prey.
(c) He should be lurking in shadow to attack the deer who comes to drink water at the water hole.
(d) The rhyme scheme of these lines is: a b c b.

3. He should be snarling around houses
At the jungle's edge,
Baring his white fangs, his claws,
Terrorising the village!

- (a) The poet says 'He should be', which means that he is not doing it at present, so where is he and what is he doing?
- (b) Where should 'he' be?
- (c) Where is he snarling around houses?
- (d) How does he terrorise the villagers?

- Ans. (a) He is in a village showing his white teeth and claws. He is terrorising villagers.
 (b) 'He' should be in the forest.
 (c) He is snarling around houses at the jungle's edge.
 (d) He terrorises the villagers by showing his sharp teeth and claws, and by growling.

4. But he's locked in a concrete cell,
 His strength behind bars,
 Stalking the length of his cage,
 Ignoring visitors.

- (a) What does the expression— 'stalking the length of his cage' imply?
 (b) Was he interested in the visitors?
 (c) What is his attitude towards visitors?
 (d) What kind of enclosure was the tiger kept in?

- Ans. (a) It means the tiger was walking from one end of the cage to another as if trying to measure the length of the cage.
 (b) No, he was not interested in the visitors.
 (c) He is ignoring the visitors.
 (d) He was kept in a cell made of concrete walls and long, strong bars, so that the tiger could not escape.

5. He hears the last voice at night,
 The patrolling cars,
 And stares with his brilliant eyes
 At the brilliant stars.

- (a) What does he hear at night in the zoo?
 (b) What do you think he might be hearing when he was in the forest?
 (c) How do the eyes of a tiger look at night?
 (d) Why do they look so?

- Ans. (a) He hears the sounds of the cars of guard, making rounds to check if everything is right.
 (b) He must be hearing the sound of other wild animals.
 (c) At night, the eyes of a tiger look bright and shining.
 (d) They look so because of the characteristic of cat family to which they belong.

Short Answer Questions

(30-40 words: 2 Marks each)

1. What do you understand by 'His strength behind bars'? What kind of a cage is he locked in?

Ans. The tiger is wretched in its cage. His power is confined behind the bars. He was locked in a small cage where he is devoid of freedom. He feels unhappy, frustrated, restless and angry.

2. Is it safe to allow tigers to live in their natural habitat these days?

Ans. Although it is ideal for tigers to live in the wild, today, it will mean certain death for them. Fast diminishing jungles and danger posed by poachers have pushed tigers to the brink of extinction, making their natural home unsafe.

3. The tiger in the poem, 'A Tiger in the Zoo' has some obvious limitations. Describe them in contrast to its natural habitat.

Ans. The tiger in the zoo was confined to a small space. He was angry that he couldn't be free to move, hunt and do what he pleased. He was forced to be a showpiece; and the cage's bars obstructed his view of the starry night. This was all unlike his natural habitat where he hunted fiercely and slept fitfully.

4. What message does the poet want to convey through the poem, 'Tiger in the Zoo'?

Ans. The poet wants to convey that it is cruel to keep wild animals in small enclosures of the zoo, away from their natural habitat. They feel angry, helpless and unhappy, and remember their life and environment in the forest.

5. Why do you think the tiger was stalking in the cage? What does it show?

Ans. I think the tiger was feeling restless and uneasy in that small cage. He seems to be frustrated and helpless as he could not come out of the cage in the open and enjoy his freedom. He did not want to be a mere showpiece and a source of entertainment for human beings.

6. Describe the movement of the tiger in the cage and in the wild.

Ans. In the zoo, in his small cage and devoid of freedom, the tiger feels unhappy rather frustrated, restless and angry. In the forest, he enjoys moving majestically, wherever he wants, terrorises the villagers by displaying his sharp teeth and claws. He is happy in the forest, enjoying his liberty and surroundings, but not in the zoo.

7. What does the poet say about a tiger in his natural surroundings?

Ans. The poet says that the tiger should be in the jungle. It is his natural habitat. In the jungle, he moves in the long grass near a water hole. He hides in shadow to hunt the deer for his food.

8. Where is the strength of the tiger and how does he treat the visitors?

Ans. The tiger is imprisoned in a cage. So his strength is behind the bars. He paces to-and-fro the length of the cage. Visitors come to his cage, but he ignores those visitors.

9. How does the tiger terrify the villagers?

Ans. The tiger prowls around the houses of the villagers. He terrifies them by snarling at them. Their houses are situated near the jungle. He terrifies the villagers by baring his fangs and showing his long claws.

10. How does the tiger behave at night?

Ans. At night, the tiger feels lonely. He hears the sound of the patrolling cars. He looks through the bars at the shining stars. His eyes are also shining.

11. How does the poet contrast the tiger in the cage with the tiger in the forest?

Ans. The poet says that the caged tiger is imprisoned. He is not free. He is angry. On the other hand, the tiger in the jungle is free. He walks on the tall grass and hunts the deer that passes near the water hole.

12. How does the tiger walk in the cage?

Ans. The tiger walks in the cage in a proud manner. He walks quietly. But his eyes show that he is very angry at having been imprisoned in the cage. But he can't do anything for his freedom.

Long Answer Questions

(100-150 words: 8 Marks each)

1. **Animals, big and small, are being used by humans for their selfish ends? What is your opinion regarding the exploitation of animals? Explain.**

Ans. It is true that animals, big and small, are being used by humans for their selfish ends. We use them for our own benefits. Animals are killed, poached and captured for commercial benefits. Humans have encroached on their space and sheltered them in zoos which is truly inhuman. In the poem, the poet has shown the plight of a tiger. He is captured and confined in a small cage. He is frustrated, angry and restless. It longs for freedom. Confinement brings bondage and bondage is cruelty.

Every day, we see many animals suffering due to humans. Monkeys are captured and made to dance on roads. Elephants are chained and forced to lift heavy loads. Many animals are sheltered in zoos for the entertainment of human beings. They are kept in poor conditions. They are treated inhumanly. We should learn to respect nature and its inhabitants. After all, these animals share the earth with us.

2. **Some animals are becoming extinct; the tiger is one such animal. What do you think could be the reason? Should this decrease in number be stopped? Why?**

Ans. The primary threats to the survival of tigers are poaching and habitat loss due to intensive development. The tigers are getting extinct. They are on the list of endangered species and the reason behind it is human interference. Humans hunt tigers for their commercial benefits. The loss of habitat also leads to a reduction in prey animals, so the area can support fewer tigers. Moreover, tigers are poached for trophies such as teeth and fur, and for traditional medicines. The growing population clears the forest areas to make them agricultural land for food. This creates a problem of the tiger's habitat. Tigers are the backbone of food web and forest, hence should be protected.

3. **The tiger in the poem is feeling miserable in a concrete cell. Does it not amount to cruelty? Express your opinion about keeping wild animals in zoos. Is there any lesson for humans?**

Ans. The tiger in the poem is wretched in its cage. It longs for freedom. It may be well looked after, but the fact of the matter is that unless one is free, one is not alive. Confinement brings bondage, and bondage is cruelty. One may argue that at least this way they all will not be killed and become extinct. However, taking away one's freedom to keep one alive kills the desire to live anyhow. Even humans throughout the world oppose the chains of slavery and oppression. How are other living creatures any different? Humans have encroached on their space, and sheltering them in zoos is truly inhuman. Humans must learn to respect nature, for humans exist only due to nature.

SELF-ASSESSMENT TEST

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1.

He hears the last voice at night,
The patrolling cars,
And stares with his brilliant eyes
And the brilliant eyes.