

Chapter 12

Snake

NCERT Question Answers

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

Answer

I agree to the fact that snakes generate both horror and fascination. Snakes are legless reptiles that glide their way through water and ground. They are carnivorous and thus, can be very dangerous. They can prey on objects larger than their heads which makes snakes a highly risky reptile to encounter. Of course it is because of these traits that people find it fascinating to keep snakes as their pet. They are lovely to look at because of their colours and designs on their bodies. Patterns on different species of snakes symbolise beauty.

2. 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
<i>The snake is trying to glide its way escaping from the stroke of the pursuing stick. Finally, he vanishes with its swift moves, into the reeds.</i>	<i>Curvings of thin long body, beautiful, graceful are his shapes, glides through, small and green, vanishes in the ripples among the green slim reeds.</i>	<i>The poet plea is not to kill the snake because it is beautiful, graceful and harmless to all.</i>

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

(f) He is guilt-ridden and 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

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

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

- (a) is domesticated
- (b) is innocent
- (c) is as harmless as cattle
- (d) drinks water just like cattle

Answer

(d) drinks water just like cattle

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

- (a) there are snakes in volcanic areas
- (b) the poet lived in a hot area
- (c) it was a really hot day when the snake came
- (d) Sicilian snakes are dangerous

Answer

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

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

- (a) he doesn't want to let the snake remain alive
- (b) he fears the snake
- (c) he doesn't want the snake to recede into darkness
- (d) he wants to kill it so that it doesn't return

Answer

(c) he doesn't want the snake to recede into darkness

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

- (a) loosening its shoulders
- (b) slipping in with majestic grace
- (c) moving slowly
- (d) moving fast

Answer

(b) slipping in with majestic grace

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

- (a) is like a king enduring banishment
- (b) Is like a king due to be crowned
- (c) Is a majestic king who came for a while on earth
- (d) is a majestic creature forced to go into exile by man

Answer

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

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

- (a) the snake going into the dreadful hole
- (b) the accursed modern education

- (c) the act of throwing a log of wood at the snake
- (d) the act of killing the snake

Answer

- (c) the act of throwing a log of wood at the snake

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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 was second to come over there. The snake was the first comer. Unless the snake was gone, he couldn't go to the trough.

- (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

From the above mentioned stanzas, the picture of the snake emerges very beautiful and clear.

The snake is yellow-brown or golden-brown in colour. It weakly trails his soft belly over the edge of the stone trough. It seems tired and thirsty and drank water slowly. Just like a cattle, it raises its head and then drinks some more water. It has a two-forked tongue, which it flickered and mused while drinking.

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

Answer

It was a very hot day in Sicily, in the summer month of July. The earth was parched and dry and Mount Etna was sending out fumes, which made the day even more hot. But the water trough was under the scented Carob- tree.

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

Answer

By this the poet wants to convey that there is intense heat inside the hole of the earth as it is

burning.

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

Answer

No, the snake was not conscious of the poet's presence. He looked around vaguely but did not notice the poet. If he had been conscious, then the snake would not have mused in between drinking water nor would have taken so much time in drinking water. It would have vanished very quickly.

(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 as it looked dreamily after drinking the water. The expressions used to justify the same are: 'and flickered his two-forked tongue', 'mused a moment', 'he drank enough', 'and lifted his head dreamily.'

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

Answer

The poet is both afraid of the snake and is also fascinated by it. Social education had taught the poet that all snakes are poisonous so they must be struck down, whereas the snake's dignified manner evokes the poet's admiration. These dual responses were like two voices that make the poet strike at the snake, much against his wishes.

(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 irony of the situation lies in the fact that the poet likes the snake for its beauty and considered it like a king and a guest, yet he hit the snake with a log. Moreover, though he did not want it to go, his act forces the snake to leave immediately.

(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 expressions are: 'and flickered his two-forked tongue/ from his lips', 'and mused a moment', 'But must I confess, I liked him', 'How glad I was...', 'like a guest in quiet', 'I stared with fascination', 'Like a king in exile.'

(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

The snake's movement at the beginning is 'slack' and relaxed. He takes a lot of time to drink water and sips and enjoys it by licking his lips. After drinking water, he moves as 'dreamily, as one who is drunk' and very slowly goes back to the crack in the wall. When the poet throws a log at his tail, he vanishes very quickly, with the speed of lightning, in an undignified manner.

(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

The expressions are 'A sort of horror, a sort of protest', 'I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!', 'I despised myself', 'to expiate', 'A pettiness'.

The poet feels this way because he feels regret and realizes that he shouldn't have thrown a log to kill the snake.

(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 Ancient Mariner had also killed the albatross for no reason and here also the snake had proved to be harmless, yet the poet tried to kill it. Later on both the mariner and the poet regret their decision. The Mariner has to make amends by being punished and here also the poet is already thinking of compensating for the crime committed.

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

Answer

It means that the poet has something to regret for ever. This is that he shouldn't have thrown a log to kill the snake.

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

Dear Diary,

Today's entry is based upon my incidental meeting with a snake, yellow-brown in colour, who had come to drink water at the water-trough outside my house. To my surprise, I felt no fear, no aversion but a strange kind of bonding and fascination took possession of me. The snake was drinking water in a very relaxed manner and his majestic movements cast a spell on me. I stood there, with an empty pitcher, with no desire to disturb him. Since it was a very very hot day, I wanted the snake to have his fill, since he had come from a dark and horrible crack in the wall.

The reasoning of my mind, my rational and social belief told me to kill the snake, but my natural instincts told me not to. I don't know why, but my social education prompted me to kill the snake. I picked up a log and tried to strike the snake. The snake vanished at once, but a guilt, a void remained in my heart. I don't know why we submit before our egoism, ignorance, barbarity. O God! how I curse myself. What reason do we have to deprive others of their right to live? We preach of love and sympathy, yet we get misguided by our social beliefs and not natural instincts. I know snakes are poisonous but that snake had not harmed me and yet I behaved like a coward. Yes, I will have to make amends somehow.

How! I wonder!

D.H. Lawrence

8. 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

By using alliteration, sibilance and onomatopoeia, D.H. Lawrence has succeeded in creating a kind of visual and sensory effect on us. In line 'And trailed his yellow- brown slackness, soft-bellied down,' we feel the onomatopoeia effect in 'trailed', 'slackness', and 'soft- bellied down.' We almost hear both the sound and the movement of the snake. Equally in line 'And flickered his two- forked tongue,' /f/ sound (sibilance) and onomatopoeic effect in 'flickered' lend a visual and sensory movement to the snake.

In the line 'Softly drank through his straight/ gum, into this slack long body/ Silently', the

/s/ sound conveys the snake's feature of the snake through sibilance. In doing so, the poet has been successful in bringing out the image of the snake through the sound, movement and shape. Another example of onomatopoeic word 'slowly' and /s/ sound indicates the use of sibilance, conveys this effect: 'And slowly turned his head,/ And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream'.

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:

Hot, hot day;

Earth brown, earth golden;

Was it cowardice, was it perversity, was it humility;

I was afraid, I was most afraid;

And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream.

Simile:

As drinking/ cattle do;

And lifted around like a god;

And slowly, very slowly, as if thrice a dream;

And lifted his head, dreamily, as one who has drunken;

and I, like a second comer;

like a king in exile;

he had come like a guest;

writhed like lightning.