

Chapter 12 : Snake

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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.

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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.