**HOW TO TELL WILD ANIMAL ( CAROLYN WELLS )**

The poem ‘How to Tell Wild Animals’ by Carolyn Wells revolves around the dangerous ways to identify the wild animals. The poet tries to distinguish one animal from the other in a humorous way. The poet suggests that its very risky to be in such a close proximity to these wild beasts. The poem is, thus, very educative as it tells us about various features of wild animals. The poetess has described the wild animals very vividly and in a very lively manner.

**Summary**

The poet is describing the various wild animals in a very interesting way. These animals are very dangerous, but poetess is introducing them one by one in a very funny way. First of all, she tells us about the Asian lion. She says that if you are visiting the jungles of the east and there we see an animal that has tawny skin and may roar that we may die out of fear. It means we saw an Asian lion. Next, she explained the Bengal tiger as a royal animal that at once attacks and kills a man. She says in a humorous way that if this beautiful black striped animal kills us and eats, then we have surely met a Bengal tiger. After this, she says that if we met an animal with black-spotted skin and it at once jumps on you, then it is a leopard. Also, she says that if one will cry out in pain, then also it may be of no use as the leopard will not stop attacking him. Then she introduces the bear that she says will hug very tightly. The bear can kill a person by hugging him very tightly. Further, she asks a question to the readers that do we know the way of recognizing beasts that hunt their prey. Then she explains about hyenas having a smiling face always and the crocodiles which have tears in their eyes. It is quite visible when they are killing their prey. Lastly, in the list of animals, she introduces the Chameleon. She says that it is a lizard type creature which doesn’t have ears and wings just like a lizard. Only this information can help us to differentiate between a lizard and chameleon. She further says that the chameleon has a quality of changing its colour as per the colour of its surrounding and surface. Therefore, to explain this she says that if we look at the tree and if we are seeing the tree only, then certainly it means that there is a chameleon.

**Explanation of the poem**

**Stanza 1**

If ever you should go by chance  
To jungles in the east;                             
And if there should to you advance  
A large and tawny beast,  
If he roars at you as you’re dyin’  
You’ll know it is the Asian Lion...

**advance – to move forward towards sb/sth, often in order to attack or threaten  
tawny – brownish-yellow in colour  
beast – a dangerous animal**

**Exp –** The poet here cautions the readers against the wild beasts found in the jungle. He says that if by chance you happen to go to any forest in the east, you are likely to encounter a huge and terrible animal moving forward towards you. You will notice that it is brownish-yellow in colour. And if that beast roars loudly at you and you feel that you are going to die due to fear then you will come to know that it is the Asian lion.

**Stanza 2**

Or if some time when roaming round,  
A noble wild beast greets you,  
With black stripes on a yellow ground,            
Just notice if he eats you.  
This simple rule may help you learn  
The Bengal Tiger to discern.

***noble – here, very impressive in size  
ground – background or base ( here the yellow fur is referred)   
discern – make out, identify***

**Exp –** The poet says that it is very likely that while roaming in the forest, you may be greeted by a wild beast belonging to a royal clan. This wild animal is very impressive in size and his majestic body is covered with black stripes on a yellow hide. The poet cautions that if the readers notice this beast and that if he eats them, then this simple rule will teach them that it is a ‘Bengal Tiger’.

**Stanza 3**

If strolling forth, a beast you view,  
Whose hide with spots is peppered,                         
As soon as he has lept on you,  
You’ll know it is the Leopard.  
’Twill do no good to roar with pain,  
He’ll only lep and lep again.

***strolling – to walk somewhere in a slow relaxed way / walking casually  
forth – forwards, away from a place  
peppered – here, covered with spots  
lept (leap) – to jump high or a long way  
hide – animal skin***

**Exp –** The poet here helps the readers to identify a Leopard. He says that if you happen to walk in the forest, you might encounter a beast with spots on his skin. When this wild beast will jump at you, you will understand that it is a Leopard as he will keep jumping on you and will tear you apart. Moreover, it will be of no use then to shout or cry with pain because he will continue pouncing on you. So, be careful and don’t allow it to leap on you.

**Stanza 4**

 If when you’re walking round your yard  
You meet a creature there,  
Who hugs you very, very hard,               
Be sure it is a Bear.  
If you have any doubts, I guess  
He’ll give you just one more caress.

***Yard: backyard or the lawn area of a house  
Caress: A gentle touch***

**Exp –** The poet says that while you are walking in your yard, you may encounter a creature there. When this creature hugs you very tightly, then believe that it is a Bear. (Bears are thought to be good wrestlers and can give a really tight hug. Although a friendly hug is referred to as Bear hug, if a real Bear hugs you, then it may not feel friendly at all). The Bear hugs a man to kill him. The poet further says that in case of any doubt you will find that the Bear will embrace you once again till death.

**Stanza 5**

Though to distinguish beasts of prey                 
A novice might nonplus,  
The Crocodile you always may  
Tell from the Hyena thus:  
Hyenas come with merry smiles;

But if they weep they’re Crocodiles

**Distinguish: Differentiate**

**beasts of prey – an animal, a bird that is hunted, killed or eaten by another.  
novice – someone new to a job  
nonplus – be puzzled, confused, surprised  
Hyena – a wild animal like a dog, that eats the meat of animals that are already dead and has a cry like human laugh**

**Exp –** The poet here says that a novice (beginner) may be puzzled and confused and thus might not be able to distinguish between the different wild animals. Hence, the poet helps to differentiate the Crocodile from the Hyena. He says that a Hyena always laughs as it swallows its victim. A Crocodile on the other hand, is said to shed tears while eating its prey. The poet, thus, warns the readers to not wait for a Hyena to laugh or for a Crocodile to weep.

The true Chameleon is small,  
A lizard sort of thing;  
He hasn’t any ears at all,  
And not a single wing.  
If there is nothing on the tree,   
’Tis the chameleon you see.

**Chameleon – a small lizard that can change colour according to its surroundings**

**Exp –** The poet describes a Chameleon in this stanza. He says a Chameleon is a small garden lizard. It doesn’t have ears or wings. The poet, further, says that if you are unable to see a thing on the tree, then chances are that a Chameleon is sitting there. A Chameleon is an expert at camouflage. It changes colour as per its surroundings and is therefore difficult to see. This capacity of camouflage helps the lizard in saving it from hunters.

**POETIC DEVICES**

* Rhyme scheme: ababcc
* Inversion: Change in the format of a sentence (if there should to you advance)
* Allusion: Reference to a famous thing, place, species of animal, (Asian Lion) (Bengal Tiger)
* Alliteration:(roaming round) ( when walking ) ( be bear ) (novice-nonplus) (hugs hard )
* Inversion: Change in the format of a sentence (if there should to you advance) (The Bengal Tiger to discern)
* Poetic license: A liberty to the poet to change the spellings in order to create rhyme or rhythm in a poem (use of lept instead of leapt)
* Repetition: use of ‘lep’ word in the last line.
* Enjambment: Continuation of a sentence to the next line

**QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

Q 1: Does ‘dying’ really rhyme with ‘lion’? Can you say it in such a way that it does?

Ans : No, ‘dying’ does not rhyme with ‘lion’. It is for this reason that the poet has used ‘dyin’ so that when we pronounce it, it rhymes with ‘lion’.

Q 2: How does the poet suggest that you identify the lion and the tiger? When can you do so, according to him?

Ans : The poet differentiates between the two in the following manner-

He says that if the beast is of yellow- brown colour that is tawny colour and it roars out so fiercely that you may die out of fear, then this is an Asian lion.  
Whereas, if the animal has black stripes on yellow background of the skin and he attacks to kill you, then it is a Bengal tiger. We can identify it when it eats us.

Q 3: Do you think the words ‘lept’ and ‘lep’ in the third stanza are spelt correctly? Why does the poet spell them like this?

Ans : No, the words ‘lept’ and ‘lep’ are spelt incorrectly. Their correct spellings are ‘leapt’ and ‘leap’ respectively. The poet has spelled them like this in order to maintain the rhythm of the poem. When spelled this way, they rhyme with the first part of ‘leopard’, thus giving emphasis to ‘leopard’ in each line.

Q4: Look at the line “A novice might nonplus”. How would you write this ‘correctly’? Why is the poet’s ‘incorrect’ line better in the poem?

Ans : The line “A novice might nonplus” can be correctly written as “A novice might be nonplussed”. The poet’s incorrect line is better in the poem as it maintains the rhyme scheme of the poem. By writing it incorrectly, ‘nonplus’ rhymes with ‘thus’.

Q 5 : Much of the humour in the poem arises from the way language is used, although the ideas are funny as well. If there are particular lines in the poem that you especially like, share these with the class, speaking briefly about what it is about the ideas or the language that you like or find funny?

Ans : Yes, it is true that the poet has used the language in a way that it arises humour. The poet has used many lines that are funny. One such is ‘If he roars at you as you’re dyin’.You’ll know it is the Asian Lion...’ or the other one is ‘A noble wild beast greets you’. So his idea of explaining the characteristics of the wild animals is quite funny.

Q 6 : How does a leopard behave when he sees someone?    **[CBSE 2016]**  
  
Ans : As leopard has black spots all over its body. As soon as it sees someone, it leaps over him at once. It keeps on pouncing continuously on its victim, attacks him and starts eating him.

Q 7: ‘Humour is the best medicine for every ailment in life’. Comment.   **[CBSE 2013]**  
  
Ans : Humour is infectious. When humour is shared, it binds people together and increases happiness. Humour strengthens our immune system, boosts our energy, diminishes pain and protects us from the damaging effects of stress. It is the priceless medicine for every ailment in life. The poet, in the poem ‘How to tell Wild Animals’ creates humour by describing various beasts of prey. The way the poet explains the things is very funny yet interesting. The poet has depicted the wildlife very vividly and in a lively manner. While reading the poem, the readers enjoy the poet’s work and it leaves them refreshed and happy.