

# A Tiger in the Zoo

This poem contrasts a tiger in the zoo with the tiger in its natural habitat. The poem moves from the zoo to the jungle, and back again to the zoo. Read the poem silently once, and say which stanzas speak about the tiger in the zoo, and which ones speak about the tiger in the jungle.

\* Natural instinct  
→ predator

→ a slow, deliberate movement used in hunting  
He stalks in his vivid stripes → powerful and beautiful appearance  
The few steps of his cage, contrast — natural habitat  
On pads of velvet quiet, predatory instinct despite confinement  
In his quiet rage, simmering anger and longing for freedom

He should be lurking in shadow, using natural camouflage and stealth to hunt prey  
Sliding through long grass  
Near the water hole knowledge of its environment and hunting  
Where plump deer pass. tactics healthy and plentiful food source

He should be snarling around houses Display of aggression to warn humans to stay away from its territory  
At the jungle's edge,  
Baring his white fangs, his claws,  
Terrorising the village!

Waste of Tiger's power and natural abilities  
↓  
Loss of freedom and purpose

But he's locked in a concrete cell, \* sense of sadness and resignation  
His strength behind bars, ↓ contemplate  
Stalking the length of his cage, the ethics of keeping wild animals in zoos.  
Ignoring visitors. tiger's detachment \* Conservation efforts \* forcefully capturing and confining wild animals  
→ emotional impact of captivity \* Preserve endangered species \* Scientific research and education \* denying natural habitat  
He hears the last voice at night, \* awareness about importance of wildlife \* Suffering and psychological stress  
The patrolling cars,  
And stares with his brilliant eyes  
At the brilliant stars.

LESLIE NORRIS

A connection between the tiger's inner world and the vastness of night sky  
→ Yearning for freedom  
→ Hope and resilience

\* Rhyme - ABCB

\* Personification (He, stalking, ignoring)

\* Metaphor (on pads of velvet)

\* Imagery

\* Enjambement

\* Symbolism

Stars ——— Concrete cell  
freedom, hope      Captivity and restriction

## Glossary

**snarls:** makes an angry, warning sound

## 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.

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?

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,

But if I were wild, food might poison me,

But if I were wild, water might drown me.

Then he stops thinking

And...

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.

PETER NIBLETT

## The Panther

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,  
has grown so weary that it cannot hold  
anything else. It seems to him there are  
a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,  
the movement of his powerful soft strides  
is like a ritual dance around a centre  
in which a mighty will stands paralysed.

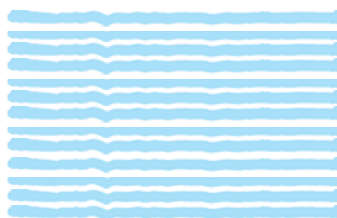
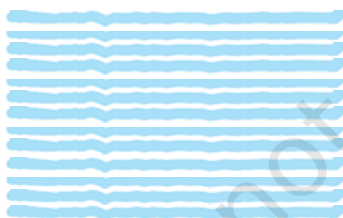
Only at times, the curtain of the pupils  
lifts, quietly. An image enters in,  
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,  
plunges into the heart and is gone.

RAINER MARIA RILKE

4. Take a point of view for or against zoos, or even consider both points of view and write a couple of paragraphs or speak about this topic for a couple of minutes in class.

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## The Greater Cats

The greater cats with golden eyes  
Stare out between the bars.  
Deserts are there, and different skies,  
And night with different stars.



VICTORIA SACKVILLE-WEST