

## **SNAKE**

### **POEM AT A GLANCE**

A snake came to the poet's water trough.  
The snake reached down from a crack in the earth-wall and came to the water-trough.  
He slipped with his straight gums into his slake long body.  
The poet came down the steps with the pitcher.  
The poet realized that he must wait as the snake had come to the water-trough before him.  
The snake lifted his head and looked at the poet as cattle do while drinking.  
It was a very hot day of July and the snake had come from the 'burning bowels of the earth.'  
The voice of his worldly education told him the yellow-brown snake was poisonous and must be killed.  
The poet confessed that he liked the snake and thought him as his guest.  
There is no doubt, that he feared the snake and couldn't kill him.  
Even so, the poet felt honoured that the snake had come to seek his hospitality.  
The snake quenched his thirst and proceeded to go away.  
He put his head into the dreadful black hole in the wall.  
A sort of horror or protest overcame the poet.  
He didn't like the snake deliberately going back into that black hole.  
He picked up a log of wood and threw at the snake.  
The poet immediately regretted at his 'vulgar' and 'mean' act.  
He was fascinated by the presence of the snake who seemed to him like a king.  
He wanted to atone for his 'pettiness'.

### **LITERARY DEVICES IN THE POEM**

#### **Similes**

- He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do
- And flickered his tongue like forked night on the air
- Seemed to me again like a king.

#### **Alliteration**

- Strange-scented shade, slackness soft-belled down, sipped with his straight mouth, burning bowels
- And depart peaceful, pacified
- The dark door of the secret earth.
- To lick his lips
- Broken bank of my wall-face
- He put his head into that dreadful hole
- Put down my pitcher
- Softly drank through his straight gums, into his slack long body, silently

**Repetition**

- On a hot, hot day
- I was afraid, I was most afraid
- And slowly, very slowly
- Like a king, like a king in exile

**Onomatopoeia**

- He sipped with his straight mouth

**SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS (2 Marks)****To be answered in not more than 30 words:****1. Where did the snake go and why?****Ans.** The snake went to the poet's water-trough to drink water.**2. How did the snake quench his thirst?****Ans.** The snake rested his throat upon the stone bottom and sipped water with his straight mouth. He quenched his thirst by drinking through his straight gums into his slack long body.**3. What did the voice of education tell the poet?****Ans.** The voice of education directed the poet to kill the snake. The poet knew that the golden snakes were venomous and so they must be killed. And this snake was of golden colour.**4. What was the instinctive approach of the poet towards the snake?****Ans.** Instinctively, the poet liked the snake and treated him like a guest. He felt honoured that snake had come to drink water from his water-trough.**5. Why does the poet make reference to the albatross?****Ans.** The mariner had killed the albatross without any reason. The poet also tried to kill the snake without any reason. He thinks that his act is similar to that of the mariner. So he makes reference to the albatross.**6. What did the poet wish?****Ans.** The poet wished that the snake would come back again.**7. How did the poet feel at the end of the poem?****Ans.** The poet felt guilt-ridden and repentant. He regretted the meanness of his action of throwing a log at the snake.**VALUE BASED QUESTION (4 Marks)****(To be answered not more than 100 words)****1. 'Why does the poet curse the voices of the education and civilization that urge him to kill the snake?'****Discuss the statement with reference to the following lines:**

'I thought how paltry, how vulgar, what a mean act!

I despised myself and the voices of my accursed human education.

And I thought of the albatross."

**Ans.** The poet describes his encounter with the snake who had come to quench his thirst. He came out from the crack and twisted over the edge of the stone-trough. It was a hot afternoon. The snake visited the water-trough to quench his thirst. The poet had also gone to the trough to fill water in a pitcher. 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 and bent down to drink some more water.

The voices of education inside the poet reminded him that it was the fear of the snake that made him refrain from killing him. The poet was quite afraid of

the snake, but he felt honoured that a snake had come to seek his hospitality from the deep recesses of the earth.

The snake drank water to his satisfaction and slowly proceeded to the curve. As he put his head into the hole. The poet was filled with a protest against the idea of the snake withdrawing into his hole. The poet picked up a log and threw it at the snake. The snake twisted violently and hurriedly vanished into the hole.

The poet regretted his action and cursed the voices of education that had urged him to kill the snake. For a moment he felt like the ancient mariner who had killed the albatross for no reason. He wished that the snake would come back. He felt that had to atone for the meanness of his action of throwing a log at the snake.

### MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTION

(3 Marks)

(Reference to Context)

Read the extracts given below and answer the following question by choosing the most appropriate answer:

(1)

“A snake came to my water-trough  
On a hot, hot day, and I in pyjamas for the heat,  
To drink there.  
In the deep, strange-scanted shade of the great dark carob tree  
I came down the steps with my pitcher  
And must wait, must stand and wait,  
For there he was at the trough before me.”

**(i) The poet went to his water-trough to**

- (a) Drink water
- (b) See the snake
- (c) Escape the heat of the day
- (d) Fill his pitcher with water

**(ii) The snake visited the water-trough on a hot day to**

- (a) Rest under a tree near the water-trough
- (b) Hide himself behind the trough
- (c) Drink water at the water-trough
- (d) Escape the presence of the poet.

**(iii) What figure of speech does the poet use in the sixth line?**

- (a) Simile
- (b) Image
- (c) Repetition
- (d) Alliteration

**ANSWER: (i) (d)      (ii) (c)      (iii) (c)**

(2)

He sipped with his straight mouth  
Softly drank through his straight  
Gums, into his slack long body  
Silently,

Someone was before me at any water trough,  
And I, like a second corner, waiting.

**(i) The snake drank the water**

- (a) Gently
- (b) Silently
- (c) Softly
- (d) Hurriedly

**(ii) The literary device used by the poet in the first line is**

- (a) Simile
- (b) Alliteration
- (c) Metaphor
- (d) Onomatopoeia

**(iii) 'Someone' in the fifth line refers to the**

- (a) Snake
- (b) Poet
- (c) Trough
- (d) Tree

**ANSWER: (i) (c) (ii) (b) (iii) (a)**

**(3)**

He lifted his head from his drinking, as cattle do  
And looked at me vaguely, as drinking cattle do  
And flickered his two-forked tongue  
From his lips, and mused a moment  
And stooped and drank a little more

**(i) What literary device does the poet use in the first line?**

- (a) Alliteration
- (b) Simile
- (c) Image
- (d) Metaphor

**(ii) The snake looked at the poet**

- (a) Silently
- (b) Stealthily
- (c) Vaguely
- (d) Carefully

**(iii) Before drinking a little more water, the snake**

- (a) Mused
- (b) Stooped
- (c) Mused and stooped
- (d) Hissed forward

**ANSWER: (i) (b) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)**

#### **EXTRACT BASED COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

**(3 Marks)**

The voice of my education said to me  
He must be killed  
For in Sicily the black, black snakes are  
Innocent, the gold are venomous  
And voice in me said, if you were a man

You would take a stick and break him now  
And finish him off.

- (i) **What told poet to kill the snake?**
- (ii) **In Sicily, what colour are venomous snakes?**
- (iii) **What literary device does the poet use in the third line?**

**ANSWER**

- (i) It was his education that told the poet to kill the snake.
- (ii) In Sicily, venomous snake are of golden colour.
- (iii) It is repetition.

(2)

But I must confess how I liked him  
How glad I was he had come like a guest  
In quiet, to drink at my water trough  
And depart peaceful, pacified and thankless  
Into the burning bowels of this earth?

- (i) **How did the poet treat the snake?**
- (ii) **What figure of speech does the poet use in the third line?**
- (iii) **What does 'burning bowels of this earth' mean?**

**ANSWER**

- (i) The poet treated the snake as a guest.
- (ii) It is alliteration.
- (iii) It means the bottom of the earth.

(3)

And truly I was afraid, I was most afraid,  
But even so, honoured still more  
That he should seek my hospitality  
From out the dark door of the secrete earth

- (i) **What is the figure of speech used in the first line?**
- (ii) **Why did the poet feel honoured?**
- (iii) **What does 'the dark door of the secret earth' mean?**

**ANSWER**

- (i) It is repetition
- (ii) The poet felt honoured because the snake had come to seek his hospitality.
- (iii) It means the bottom of the earth.