

# 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.*

He stalks in his vivid stripes  
The few steps of his cage,  
On pads of velvet quiet,  
In his quiet rage.

He should be lurking in shadow,  
Sliding through long grass  
Near the water hole  
Where plump deer pass.

He should be snarling around houses  
At the jungle's edge,  
Baring his white fangs, his claws,  
Terrorising the village!

But he's locked in a concrete cell,  
His strength behind bars,  
Stalking the length of his cage,  
Ignoring visitors.

He hears the last voice at night,  
The patrolling cars,  
And stares with his brilliant eyes  
At the brilliant stars.

LESLIE NORRIS

## 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.

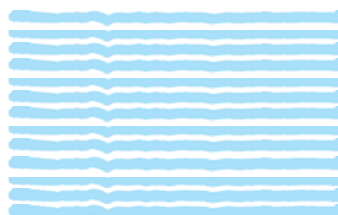
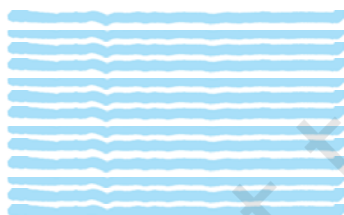
Only at times, the curtain of the pupils  
lifts, quietly. An image enters in,  
rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles,  
plunges into the heart and is gone.

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

