

8 Poetry

The serf by Roy Campbell



Roy Campbell

The serf was written by Roy Campbell (1901-1957). Campbell was born in Durban and moved to Europe in his later life. He was a fluent Zulu speaker. Campbell was critical of the white colonial rulers of South Africa because he felt that they were arrogant and would not accept any ideas except their own.

1. Themes

The theme of the poem is **power** and **oppression**.

The poet watches a poor farm worker (a **serf**) ploughing a field. This ploughman is doing harsh work under difficult conditions. He has no power to change his life or job and works patiently and slowly. This man was once the proud warrior of a great tribe that lived on this land. Now he works on land belonging to a rich farmer.

The poet suggests that this worker's close relationship to the land and his slow patience will mean that one day the land will belong to him again and he will defeat the powerful people who have taken his land.

vocab

Serf: The lowest level of farm worker in medieval Europe (5th – 15th century). Serfs were treated like slaves.

The serf

by Roy Campbell

Octave	}	His naked skin clothed in the <u>torrid</u> mist	
		That puffs in smoke around the patient hooves,	
		The ploughman <u>drives</u> , a slow <u>somnambulist</u> ,	
		And through the <u>green</u> his <u>crimson</u> <u>furrow</u> <u>grooves</u> .	
		His heart, more deeply than he wounds the <u>plain</u> ,	line 5
		Long by the <u>rasping</u> <u>share</u> of <u>insult</u> torn,	
Sestet	}	Red <u>clod</u> , to which the war-cry once was rain	
		And tribal spears the fatal <u>sheaves</u> of corn,	
		Lies <u>fallow</u> now. But as the turf divides	
		I see in the slow progress of his <u>strides</u>	line 10
		Over the toppled clods and falling flowers,	
		The timeless, <u>surly</u> patience of the serf	
That moves the nearest to the naked earth			
And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.			

words to know

Definitions of words from the poem:

Line 1:	torrid	very hot, scorching heat
Line 3:	drives	pushes forward like a machine
	somnambulist	a person who walks while asleep
Line 4:	green	refers to the grass
	crimson	deep purplish red
	furrow	a line cut in the soil
	grooves	a long narrow cut into the soil
Line 5:	plain	a field
Line 6:	rasping	scraping, scratching
	share (also called a ploughshare)	a tool for making furrows or grooves in the soil so that seeds can be planted
	insult	abuse, humiliation
Line 7:	clod	a lump of soil, clay or mud
Line 8:	sheaves	stems of maize or corn
Line 9:	fallow	empty, no crops planted
Line 10:	strides	long steps or paces
Line 12:	surly	bad-tempered, rude



2. Type and form



In exam questions, “form” is sometimes called the “style” or “type” of poem. All three terms describe the layout of the poem on the page.

The form of this poem is a Miltonic sonnet (also known as a Petrarchan or Italian sonnet). It has 14 lines made up of:

- An **octave** of eight lines (which describes the problem).
- A **sestet** (six lines at the end of the poem which give the solution).

The rhyme scheme is abab abab cdeed.

3. Analysis

Octave (lines 1 – 4)

His naked skin clothed in the torrid mist
That puffs in smoke around the patient hooves,
The ploughman drives, a slow somnambulist,
And through the green his crimson furrow grooves.

The octave introduces the **problem** of the poem as he describes the hard life of the serf. The poet uses a **metaphor** to describe the ploughman. In line 1, the ploughman is “clothed” in a “torrid mist”. There is so much dust coming from the feet of the animal pulling the plough that it is compared to a “mist” (a cloud) which makes it hard to see the ploughman. The dust is also compared to clothes as it falls onto his skin (line 3).

The poet says that the ploughman is a “slow somnambulist” (line 3). He compares the way the ploughman walks to the way people walk when they

are asleep – slowly, as if they are in a dream. This is emphasised by the use of **alliteration** – the repeated “s” sounds in the words. The “s” sound also appears for emphasis in line 10, “the slow progress of his strides”.

The green grass of the field turns “crimson” (red) as the ploughshare cuts a line, “grooves”, into the earth and turns the red soil to the top of the “furrow” (line 4). The poet’s use of “green” in line 4 is an example of **metonymy**.

Octave (lines 5 – 8)

His heart, more deeply than he wounds the plain,
Long by the rasping share of insult torn,
Red clod, to which the war-cry once was rain
And tribal spears the fatal sheaves of corn,
Lies fallow now.

5

The problem presented in the first 4 lines of the octave continues as the poet explains that, not only is the ploughman poor and doing hard labour, he is also broken-hearted and sad. “His heart” is hurt (“torn”) “Long by the rasping share of insult” (lines 5-6). These insults would have been all the horrible things done to the ploughman and his people – losing his land, being forced to work like a slave, losing his pride.

In two **metaphors** (lines 5-6), “His heart, more deeply than he wounds the plain/Long by the rasping share of insult torn”, the action of ploughing through the soil is compared to wounding. It cuts the ground and the red soil which is brought up by the plough is the colour of blood. The ploughman’s heart is compared to the ground that he ploughs – his heart has been hurt and wounded by “insult” (line 6). This **metaphor** compares the ploughman’s heart to the red soil.

Now that his heart is sad, it is empty, without feeling. In line 9 (the first line of the sestet), his heart is compared to a field which “lies fallow now” (line 9) with no crops planted. The poet also uses a **metaphor** to explain how the ploughman was once a great warrior – the cries of war that were good for his heart are compared to rain, which is good for the “clod” (soil), in which seeds will be planted, and once, instead of “sheaves” of corn (line 8), this man had spears.

The poet uses an **oxymoron**, “fatal sheaves” in line 8. The word “sheaves” has connotations of growth and health; while the word “fatal” means resulting in death. This may mean that the planting of crops caused the end of a way of life for the warriors who used to hunt for their food.

vocab

Metonymy: A figure of speech in which a thing or a concept is not called by its own name, but by the name of something associated with it in meaning. Here, the poet uses the word “green” to refer to the grass.

Poets use alliteration for two reasons: to emphasise certain words; and to create the actual sound that the thing they are writing about makes.



vocab

Oxymoron: Combines two words that seem to contradict or oppose each other.

Sestet (lines 9 – 14)

But as the turf divides
 I see in the slow progress of his strides
 Over the toppled clods and falling flowers,
 The timeless, surly patience of the serf
 That moves the nearest to the naked earth
 And ploughs down palaces, and thrones, and towers.

10

In the octave, the poet has told us the problem: the ploughman is tired, oppressed, working on land he does not own, and no longer a mighty warrior.

In the sestet, he now gives us the **solution** to this problem. As he watches the grass (“turf”) cut through by the blade of the ploughshare, the poet has a vision of the future. He believes that the slow, steady, patient “strides” (line 10) of the ploughman, who belongs to the land and to nature (the “naked earth”), will defeat his oppressors and break down their symbols of wealth and power: “palaces, and thrones, and towers” (line 14). The serf will one day be free again and own the land he works on.

The poet uses another **oxymoron** in line 10 – “surly patience”. Surly means bad-tempered or rude; and seems to be the opposite of “patience”, which means to quietly wait and endure what you are experiencing.

Note the **alliteration** used in line 11: “falling flowers”. The “f” sound emphasises how steadily and certainly the serf walks forward – towards making history turn to favour his people again.

4. Tone and mood

In the octave, the tone is **despairing** and **depressing** as it describes the hard labour and losses of the serf. The tone changes to become more **urgent** and **hopeful** in the sestet.

The **mood** of a poem is how it makes the reader feel. How does this poem make you feel? For example, happy, sad, angry, or indifferent.

summary

The serf

by Roy Campbell

1. Theme

Power and oppression.

2. Type and form

Miltonic sonnet:
14 lines

Octave:

8 lines

a
b
a
b
a
b
a
b

Octave: Lines 1 - 4

– “His naked skin clothed in the torrid mist”

Metaphor

– “slow somnambulist”

Alliteration (repeated “s”)

– “green”

Metonymy

Octave: Lines 5 - 8

– “His heart, more deeply than he wounds the plain”

Metaphor

– “Long by the rasping share of insult torn”

Metaphor

– “And tribal spears the fatal sheaves of corn”

Metaphor

– “fatal sheaves”

Oxymoron

Sestet:

6 lines

c
c
d
e
e
d

Sestet: Lines 9 - 14

– “surly patience”

Oxymoron

– “falling flowers”

Alliteration (repeated “f”)

3. Tone and mood

Tone: In the octave: **despairing** and **depressing**; in the sestet: **urgent** and **hopeful**.

Mood: How does this poem make you feel? Happy, sad, angry or indifferent? Always give reasons for your answer.



Activity 8

Refer to the poem on page 69 and answer the questions below.



The key word here is **hot**. Look for a synonym (a word that has the same meaning) for “hot” in the first line of the poem to answer the question.

1. Refer to lines 1-4 (“His naked skin ... crimson furrow grooves”).
Is the following statement TRUE or FALSE? Write “true” or “false” and quote a SINGLE word to support your answer.
The serf is forced to work in very hot conditions. (2)
2. In your own words, explain the meaning of line 4. (2)
3. Refer to lines 5–6 (“His heart, more ... of insult torn”).
 - 3.1. Identify the figure of speech used here. (1)
 - 3.2. Explain why the poet uses this figure of speech. (2)
4. Choose the correct answer to complete the following sentence.
In line 6 the words “rasping share of insult” refer to the ...
A Ploughshare breaking the earth.
B Serf wounding the earth.
C Inhuman treatment of the serf.
D Serf insulting his master. (1)
5. Refer to the last six lines of the poem (“Lies follow now ... thrones, and towers”).
Discuss the speaker’s warning in these lines. State TWO points. (2)
6. Complete the following sentences by using the words provided in the list below. Write only the words next to the question number (6.1–6.3)

owner; labourer; ploughs; oppression; harvest; freedom
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This poem is about a farm (6.1) ... who (6.2) ... the earth. The serf represents patient revolutionaries whose sacrifice is responsible for human (6.3) ... (3)
7. Consider the poem as a whole. Do you feel sorry for the serf? Discuss your view. (2)
8. Give TWO reasons why the title “The serf” is a suitable one for this poem. (2)
9. Is this poem a South African poem? Quote two consecutive words from the poem to support your answer. (2)
10. The word “naked” is used twice in the poem. Complete the sentence below quoting phrases from the poem.
The word naked has been used negatively to show that the serf is poor because he has only his “naked...(10.1) “ and it has been used positively to show that he belongs to the land and to nature the “naked...(10.2)” (2)



You must give either a “Yes” or “No” answer and then give a reason to back up your view.

[21]

Answers to Activity 8

1. True, "torrid". ✓✓ (2)
2. The "green" grass is turned over as the ploughshare is pushed through it and the red colour of the soil is turned to the top. ✓✓ (2)
- 3.1. Metaphor ✓ (1)
- 3.2. His heart is being compared to a red clod/ soil. ✓✓
OR
The poet shows that both his heart and the earth are damaged/ broken. ✓✓
OR
The poet shows that the field is being damaged and his heart is broken/he has been hurt. ✓✓ (2)
4. C / inhuman treatment of the serf. ✓ (1)
5. The speaker is warning the oppressors, the rich people in power at the time, that their wealth and power will be broken down and the serf will slowly defeat the oppressors and be free. ✓✓
OR
A revolution is coming because the labourers will revolt. ✓✓
OR
Danger is coming because the labourers will revolt. ✓✓ (2)
- 6.1. labourer ✓
- 6.2. ploughs ✓
- 6.3. freedom ✓ (3)
7. YES, because he is tired ("sornambulist") and it is hot ("torrid")/ he is poor ("naked") and his heart is dry and sad (like a field without 'rain'). ✓✓
OR
NO, he is patient ("surly patience") and freedom will come to him one day and he will overthrow the oppressors ("break down palaces") and have his land again. ✓✓
OR
NO, many people earn a living in a hard way. He should be grateful he has a job. ✓✓ (2)
8. Serfs were poor and this worker has only a "naked skin"/ They were farm workers and he "ploughs" the field. ✓✓
OR
It is appropriate because "serf" means that you are owned by your master and subjected to hard labour, just as the serf in the poem is subjected to hard labour. ✓✓
OR
He is not allowed to leave/ seen as a possession/ not paid for his hard work. ✓✓ (2)
9. Yes. "tribal spears" ✓✓ (2)
10. The word "naked" has been used negatively to show that the serf is poor because he has only his "naked skin" ✓ and it has been used positively to show that he belongs to the land and to nature, the "naked earth" ✓. (2)

[21]

Answers to questions 3.2, 7 and 8 are based on your own interpretation. These are examples.



9 Poetry

Mementos, 1 by W.D. Snodgrass



W.D. Snodgrass

This poem was written by W.D. Snodgrass (1926-2009). He was an American poet who won a number of prizes for his work. He also wrote essays and was an academic who taught at several US universities, finally retiring in 1994.

He is best known for writing very personal poems about his own life and loves. His poems are often about the pain of life that we do not show to one another when we meet in our busy lives: the pain of love lost, divorce, death, unsatisfying jobs and dreams which are not achieved.

Snodgrass wrote another poem, called *Mementos, 2*, which is why this poem is called *Mementos, 1*.

1. Themes

The theme of this poem is **memory**, and the power that **mementos** (such as photographs) have to bring back feelings and memories from the past.

The poet is looking through a collection of old papers when he comes across a photograph of his ex-wife. After his first shock, he feels glad for a moment. It was taken at their first dance and she looked young and very pretty. He remembers how that picture had helped him cope with his fear during the war, but then he feels bitter as he remembers how their marriage failed and ended in divorce.

However, he puts the photograph back to look at it again one day, which may mean that he still has some feelings for his wife. In this poem, he addresses his words to “you” – referring to the person in the photograph.

Mementos are small objects that we keep to remember our friends and special times in our lives. Examples are photographs or letters.



Mementos, 1

by W.D. Snodgrass

Stanza 1	<p>Sorting out letters and piles of my old <u>Canceled checks</u>, old <u>clippings</u>, and yellow note cards That meant something once, I happened to find Your picture. <i>That picture</i>. I stopped there cold, Like a man <u>raking</u> piles of dead leaves in his yard Who has <u>turned up</u> a <u>severed</u> hand.</p>	line 5
Stanza 2	<p>Still, that first second, I was glad: you stand Just as you stood – shy, <u>delicate</u>, <u>slender</u>, In that long gown of green <u>lace netting</u> and <u>daisies</u> That you wore to our first dance. The sight of you <u>stunned</u> Us all. Well, our needs were different, then, And our <u>ideals</u> came easy.</p>	line 10
Stanza 3	<p>Then through <u>the war</u> and those two long years Overseas, the Japanese dead in their shacks Among dishes, dolls, and lost shoes; I carried This <u>glimpse</u> of you, there, to <u>choke down</u> my fear, Prove it had been, that it might come back. That was before we got married.</p>	line 15
Stanza 4	<p>Before we <u>drained</u> out one another's force With lies, <u>self-denial</u>, unspoken <u>regret</u> And the sick eyes that blame; before the divorce And the <u>treachery</u>. Say it: before we met. Still, I put back your picture. Someday, <u>in due course</u>, I will find that it's still there.</p>	line 20

words to know

Definitions of words from the poem:

Line 2:	canceled checks	old cheques that have been paid up, no longer of value
	clippings	cuttings from newspapers and magazines
Line 4:	cold	frozen, still
Line 5:	raking	using a rake to collect leaves
Line 6:	severed	cut off from the body
Line 8:	delicate	small
	slender	slim, thin
Line 9:	gown	dress
	lace netting	delicate fabric
	daisies	small flowers

words to know

Line 10:	stunned	amazed
Line 12:	ideals	ideas of perfection / can also mean beliefs, goals
Line 13:	the war	reference to World War 2
Line 16:	glimpse	sight (the photo)
	choke	hold back
Line 19:	drained	emptied
	force	energy, life
Line 20:	self-denial	give up something, deny yourself something you want
	regret	feel sorry
Line 22:	treachery	disloyalty, unfaithfulness
Line 23:	in due course	later on



2. Type and form

This poem is of the type known as **confessional** poetry, in which the poet confesses or shares very personal and private thoughts and feelings. In this case, he shares his memories of and feelings about his first marriage.

One of the formal elements in the poem's structure is that there are four stanzas of six lines each and the lines are similar in length.

The poet uses some **rhyme**, but in no set pattern. For example, look at "old" and "cold" in stanza 1, or "force, divorce and course" in the last stanza.

He also uses **half-rhymes**, which are words that almost rhyme, but not quite. For example, look at "years / fear" in stanza 3.

3. Analysis

Stanza 1 (lines 1 – 6)

Sorting out letters and piles of my old
 Canceled checks, old clippings, and yellow note cards
 That meant something once, I happened to find
 Your picture. That picture. I stopped there cold,
 Like a man raking piles of dead leaves in his yard
 Who has turned up a severed hand.

5

This stanza describes the poet's reaction to finding an old photograph of his ex-wife. He is sorting out old papers, probably to throw away what he no longer needs. There are "**Canceled checks**" which are old cheques that have been paid and returned by the bank.

There are also pieces cut out from old newspapers or magazines that had interested him at the time, and old note cards which have turned yellow with age. Note how the words "canceled / old/ yellowed" (line 2) tell us that these papers have been there for a very long time; they had been important to him ("meant something") long ago.

Suddenly he finds a photograph of his ex-wife; perhaps he had forgotten about it, for he is shocked. Notice the short, sharp **punctuation** in line 4, with two full stops in four words: "Your picture. *That picture*. I stopped there cold". The short phrases and full stops make us stop short so that we experience the shock that the poet feels when he sees the picture. The italics used in "*That picture*" are for emphasis. We realise that he knows this photograph and it is a special picture of someone who was once very important to him.

The poet's use of the word "cold" in line 4 helps to describe his shock at seeing the picture. He then explains how he feels with a horrifying **simile**: he feels like someone innocently tidying up his garden when he finds, among the dead leaves, a "severed hand" (lines 4 and 5).

hint Note that "**Canceled checks**" is American spelling; we would write "cancelled cheques".

hint **Font** means the type of print or writing used. There are three main font types: standard, bold and italics. Bold is used for emphasis. *Italics* are also used for emphasis and for words which come from another language.

Stanza 2 (lines 7 – 12)

Still, that first second, I was glad: you stand
 Just as you stood – shy, delicate, slender,
 In that long gown of green lace netting and daisies
 That you wore to our first dance. The sight of you stunned 10
 Us all. Well, our needs were different, then,
 And our ideals came easy.

This stanza describes the poet's memories of the time when the photograph was taken. In spite of the shock, the poet feels glad for a moment as it brings back a happy memory. The photograph was taken of his ex-wife at the first dance they had gone to together and she looked very beautiful in a lovely green lace dress with little daisies on it. Everyone there admired her ("stunned/ Us all." – line 10 and 11). In the 1940s people often went to dances, so their first dance suggests they had not been going out together for very long. At that time she was shy, small and slim, perhaps a little uncertain of herself.

The poet must also have been very young, about 18 years old. He reflects that when they were young, they had simpler needs and less complicated expectations of each other, and of life itself, perhaps. Their "ideals came easy" (line 12): young people are usually more idealistic and hopeful about what they believe and about their goals in life.



In the Second World War the Americans fought against the Japanese in the Pacific, and the poet joined the American navy in 1944, when he was about 18.

Stanza 3 (lines 13 – 18)

Then through the war and those two long years
 Overseas, the Japanese dead in their shacks
 Among dishes, dolls, and lost shoes; I carried 15
 This glimpse of you, there, to choke down my fear,
 Prove it had been, that it might come back.
 That was before we got married.

Now the poet remembers how this photograph had helped him cope with his fear during the two years he had spent at war.

By describing the two years as "long" (line 13), the poet tells us that this was a difficult and unhappy time. He saw the horrors of war in which not only soldiers but also Japanese civilians (ordinary people) suffered. He refers to Japanese people lying dead in their "shacks" amid the ordinary belongings of their everyday lives: "dishes, dolls and lost shoes" (line 15). In writing of this, the poet shows little emotion, unlike the feelings he expresses when he describes finding the photograph or the failure of his marriage.

He carried the photograph with him in the war as the "glimpse" (line 16) of her gave him comfort. A "glimpse" is a quick look at something. This does not mean that he took only quick looks at the picture. Rather, the picture itself is just a "quick look" at the real person.

The photograph helped him to push back (“choke back”) his fear and reminded him of a happy time in his life; it gave him hope that that he might find that happiness again. Notice the **metaphor** “choke” (line 16). When you choke, something is stopping your breathing, and so “choking” something down suggests that this is not an easy or comfortable thing to do. The poet ends this stanza by saying with a bitter **tone** that the photograph comforted “ ... before we got married” (line 18).

Stanza 4 (lines 19 – 24)

Before we drained out one another's force	
With lies, self-denial, unspoken regret	20
And the sick eyes that blame; before the divorce	
And the treachery. Say it: before we met. Still,	
I put back your picture. Someday, in due course,	
I will find that it's still there.	

In this stanza, the poet recalls the breakdown of the marriage and the unhappiness this brought.

The first line continues the thought of the last line of stanza 3. Once they were married they “drained out one another’s force” (line 19). In this **metaphor** the poet compares the way they took away each other’s enthusiasm for life (“force”) to the way water drains out of a pipe. When a pipe, or bath, is drained, it is left empty, and they were emptied of happiness. Notice that the poet says we – they were both to blame for their unhappiness.

The poet says the causes of this were the lies they told each other, and their self-denial (line 20). “Self-denial” suggests sacrifice. Perhaps they both felt they had given up dreams or things they wanted to do for the other person’s sake and then resented it and felt bitter about it. Both felt “regret” (line 20) – felt sorry – but did not say so; their feelings remained “unspoken” (line 20). The poet does not say what they regretted.

They blamed each other for their unhappiness with “sick eyes” (line 21). Their eyes were not literally “sick”; this is a **metaphor** suggesting that their feelings were reflected in their eyes – they felt anger and dislike and their eyes showed how each blamed and accused the other, neither taking responsibility for what they were doing to their marriage. Eventually they got divorced. The poet refers to their “treachery” (line 22); perhaps this was their betrayal of the ideals they used to have, or perhaps they were unfaithful or deliberately hurt each other in other ways.

He addresses his ex-wife directly when he writes: “Say it: before we met” (line 22). This line may have many meanings. The poet may mean that they were happy before they met. It could also mean that each had not known what sort of person the other would turn out to be.

However, he does not throw the picture away, but puts it back to look at again some other time. There are a number of possible reasons why he keeps the photograph:

- At a later date he may feel differently about these memories.
- He still cannot cope with the hurt, but may be able to deal with it better in the future.
- In spite of painful memories of marriage, the photograph still reminds him of a time when he and his ex-wife were happy and in love.
- He has not come to terms with the divorce yet.
- He still has feelings for his ex-wife.

The poet's bitterness and pain are expressed in the first four lines, but the last two lines of the poem have a more gentle tone as he decides to keep the picture.

4. Tone and mood

Overall, the poem has a **conversational** tone, as though the poet were talking directly to his ex-wife.

However, the tone changes through the poem. The tone is one of **horror** when he first discovers his ex-wife's picture, and changes to a **happy** tone as he remembers good times with her. The tone becomes **bitter** and **sad** as he remembers the war and the breakdown of their marriage. The final lines, though, have a **hopeful** tone.

The **mood** of a poem is how it makes the reader feel. How does this poem make you feel? For example, happy, sad, angry, or indifferent.

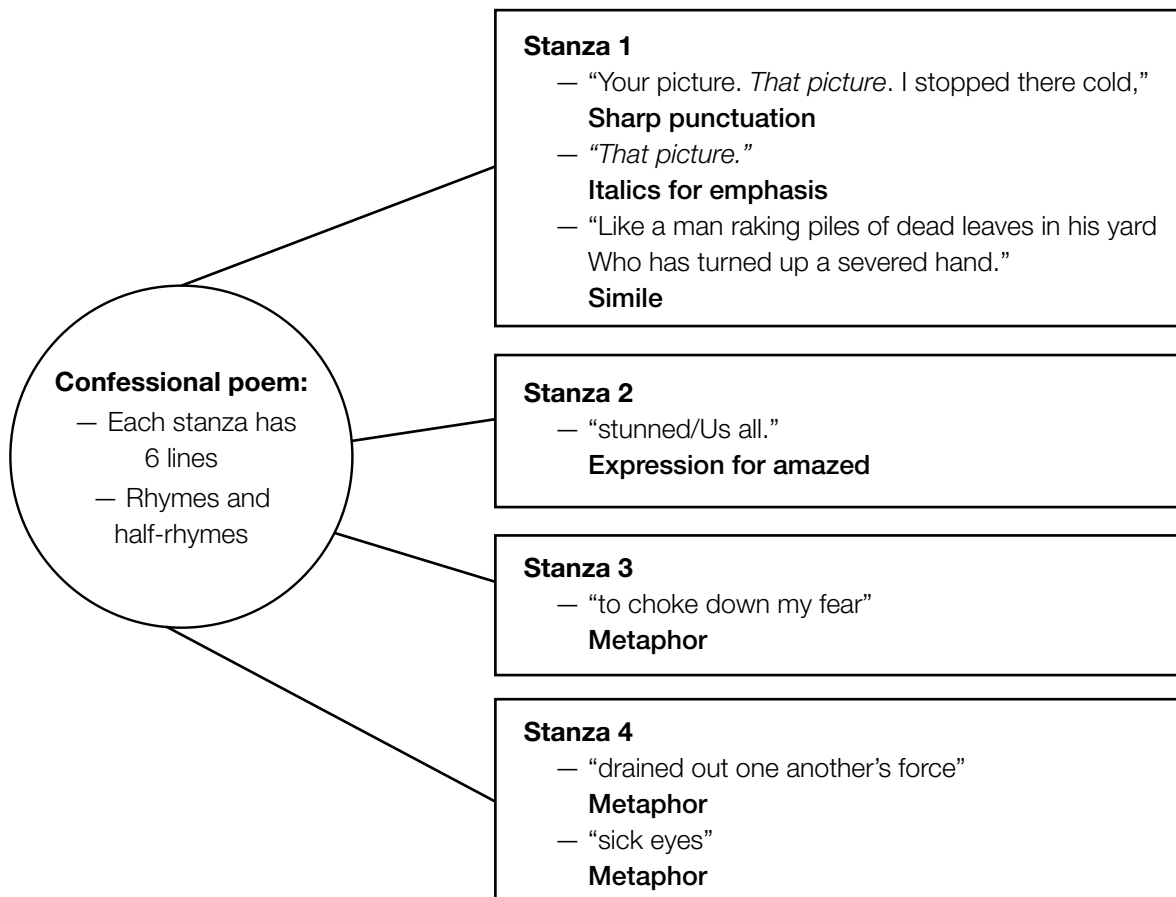
summary

Mementos, 1 by WD Snodgrass

1. Theme

The theme is memory, and the power of mementos to bring back past feelings and memories.

2. Type and form



3. Tone and mood

Tone: Overall, it has a conversational tone. It shifts through the poem from one of horror; to a happy tone; to a bitter and sad tone; and ends on a more gentle and hopeful tone.

Mood: How does this poem make you feel? Happy, sad, angry or indifferent? Always give reasons for your answer.



Activity 9

Refer to the poem on page 77 and answer the questions below.

- Complete the following sentences by using the words provided in the list below.

stunned; mother; shocked; disappointed; ex-wife; glad

The speaker is sorting out old papers when he finds a photograph of his (1.1) ... Initially, he is (1.2) ... but then he is (1.3) ... to find it as it brings back old memories. (3)

- Refer to line 4 (“Your picture. *That picture*. I stopped there cold,”).

Explain why the words “That picture” are written in a different font (letter type).

(1)

- Refer to lines 4–6 (“I stopped there ... a severed hand.”).

- Identify the figure of speech used here.

- Explain why the poet has used this figure of speech. (2)

- Choose the correct answer to complete the following sentence.

In line 10, the word “stunned” suggests that the girl was ...

A gorgeous.

B scary.

C motionless.

D happy. (1)

- Refer to lines 11–12 (“Well, our needs ... ideals came easy.”).

Using your own words, say what the speaker and his wife’s lives were like when they were young. (1)

- Refer to stanza 3. (3)

- Quote THREE separate words to show that not only soldiers were affected by the war.

- Explain what the photograph meant to the speaker during the war. (1)

- Refer to the last stanza.

- Is the following statement TRUE or FALSE? Give a reason for your answer.

The speaker’s wife was responsible for the breakdown of their marriage. (2)



You must not quote from the poem here, but write down your own words based on what you understand from these lines.

- 7.2. What does the speaker's decision to keep the photograph reveal about him? (1)
8. In the first stanza, the tone of the speaker is one of shock. What is the tone in the last stanza? (1)
9. After reading this poem, do you think it is a good idea to use old photographs as a way of remembering the past? Discuss your view. (2)
- [18]

Answers to Activity 9

- 1.1. Ex-wife ✓
- 1.2. Shocked ✓
- 1.3. Glad ✓ (3)
2. It emphasises/shows the importance of the photo/It shocks him./It refers to a particular picture of relevance/significance. ✓ (1)
- 3.1. Simile ✓ (1)
- 3.2. Finding this photograph is as shocking/unexpected as finding a severed hand in your garden. ✓
4. A /gorgeous ✓ (1)
5. Simple/carefree/uncomplicated ✓ (1)
- 6.1. "shacks" ✓
"dishes" ✓
"dolls" ✓ (3)
- 6.2. It helped him cope with his fears/it helped him to choke down his fears. ✓ (1)
- 7.1. False.
Both of them were responsible. ✓✓
OR
They drained one another's force. ✓✓ (2)
- 7.2. He is not ready to let go./The photograph still has meaning for him./He has not come to terms with the divorce yet./He still has feelings for his ex-wife. ✓ (1)
8. The tone becomes gentler/accepting/agreeable/forgiving. ✓ (1)
9. Yes, people need real objects like photographs to remember the past. ✓✓
OR
No, memories should not depend on objects such as photographs. ✓✓ (2)

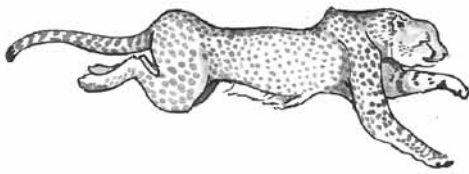
[18]

hint You must give a reason for your answer to question 7.1 to get 2 marks.

hint This answer is based on your own opinion. These are examples of correct answers.

10 Poetry

Cheetah by Charles Eglington



Did you know?

The cheetah is the world's fastest land animal – it can reach speeds of up to 96 kilometres per hour!

This poem was written by Charles Eglington (1918-1971). Eglington was born in Johannesburg and graduated from Wits University. He spent his life working in the media as a newspaper journalist, a translator and also in radio. Many of his poems are about animals.

1. Themes

The main themes in this poem are that **appearances can be misleading**; and that **in nature only the strongest survive**.

The poet tells the story of an ordinary event among wild animals in nature – a hunter catching its prey. In the first part of the poem, the poet describes a young cheetah lying relaxed in the long grass of the bushveld, while a herd of buck grazes nearby. The buck do not know that the cheetah is close by.

The big cat is waiting for darkness before hunger makes it go out and hunt. Then the cheetah races forward towards the herd, which smells it and begins to run in panic. The chase is like a lottery, as the buck do not know which one of them will be caught. The cheetah leaps on one unlucky buck and kills it. (Cheetahs knock their prey down, jump on it and then bite its neck to kill it.)

Cheetah

by Charles Eglinton

Stanza 1	<p><u>Indolent</u> and kitten-eyed, This is the bushveld's <u>innocent</u> The <u>stealthy</u> leopard <u>parodied</u> With <u>grinning</u>, <u>gangling</u> <u>pup-content</u>.</p>	
Stanza 2	<p><u>Slouching</u> through the <u>tawny</u> grass Or <u>loose-limbed</u> <u>lolling</u> in the shade, <u>Purring</u> for the sun to pass And build a <u>twilight</u> <u>barricade</u>.</p>	5
Stanza 3	<p>Around the <u>vast</u> <u>arena</u> where, In <u>scattered</u> herds, his <u>grazing</u> <u>prey</u> Do not suspect in what wild fear They'll join with him in <u>fatal</u> play;</p>	10
Stanza 4	<p>Till hunger draws <u>slack sinews</u> tight As <u>vibrant</u> as a hunter's bow; Then, like a <u>fleck</u> of <u>mottled</u> light, He slides across the still plateau.</p>	15
Stanza 5	<p>A <u>tremor</u> <u>rakes</u> the herds: they scent The <u>pungent</u> breeze of his <u>advance</u>; Heads <u>rear</u> and <u>jerk</u> in <u>vigilant</u> <u>Compliance</u> with the game of chance.</p>	20
Stanza 6	<p>In which, of thousands, only one Is <u>centred</u> in the cheetah's eye; They <u>wheel</u> and then <u>stampede</u>, for none Knows which it is that has to die.</p>	
Stanza 7	<p>His <u>stealth</u> and <u>swiftness</u> fling a <u>noose</u> And as his <u>loping</u> <u>strides</u> begin To <u>blur</u> with speed, he ropes the loose Buck on the red <u>horizon</u> in.</p>	25

words to know

Definitions of words from the poem:

Line 1:	indolent	lazy
Line 2:	innocent	harmless
Line 3:	stealthy	quiet, sneaky, secret, dangerous
	parodied	copy in a funny way
Line 4:	grinning	smiling
	gangling	long-legged, awkward, clumsy
	pup-content	happy
Line 5:	Slouching	moving casually, relaxed
	tawny	yellowish-brown
Line 6:	loose-limbed	with relaxed legs
	lolling	lying back, relaxing
Line 7:	purring	sound made by a happy cat
Line 8:	twilight	early evening
	barricade	barrier, wall
Line 9:	vast	very big
	arena	stadium, sports field
Line 10:	scattered	spread out
	grazing	eating grass
	prey	something or somebody who is being hunted
Line 11:	do not suspect	have no thoughts, do not expect
Line 12:	fatal	ending in death
Line 13:	slack	loose
	sinews	tough fibres that tie muscles to bone
Line 14:	vibrant	full of life, energy
	bow	weapon used to shoot arrows
Line 15:	fleck	tiny spot
	mottled	patches of light and dark, full of shadows
Line 16:	slides	moves smoothly, swiftly, quietly
	plateau	flat raised ground
Line 17:	tremor	shaking, shiver
	rakes	moves through
	scent	smell
Line 18:	pungent	strong smell
	advance	moving towards them
Line 19:	rear	lift quickly
	jerk	pull up quickly
	vigilant	watchful, senses danger
Line 20:	compliance	giving in to, obeying the rules

words to know

Line 22:	centred	in the middle of, focused, given attention
Line 23:	wheel	turn
	stampede	run away in terror and panic
Line 25:	swiftness	quickness
	fling	throw
	noose	circle of rope
Line 26:	loping	running
	strides	big steps
Line 27:	blur	look unclear and fuzzy
Line 28:	horizon	far distance



2. Type and form

This is a **narrative poem** that tells the story of how the cheetah hunts its prey.

The poem has a formal structure (the way it is set out) with seven stanzas of four lines each (quatrains) that have a regular pattern of **rhyme** (abab).

Each of the seven stanzas tells a different part of the story. Some stanzas focus on the cheetah, others on the buck. In the last stanza, the two come together when the cheetah catches a buck. The poem's structure (the form) and the hunt described in the poem (the content) are closely linked in an effective way.

3. Analysis

Stanza 1 (lines 1 – 4)

Indolent and kitten-eyed,
This is the bushveld's innocent
The stealthy leopard parodied
With grinning, gangling pup-content.

In stanza one, the poet describes the cheetah as seeming to be harmless. The poet uses imagery as if he is describing a harmless young animal – the cheetah looks “innocent”. The **metaphor** “kitten-eyed” (line 1), compares the cheetah’s big eyes to those of a sweet kitten. The poet feels the leopard is a more impressive-looking animal and that the cheetah is a “parody” (or funny copy) of a leopard.

Both the leopard and the cheetah are big cats that have spots, but where the leopard is described as “stealthy” (line 2), which suggests it is secret and dangerous, the cheetah seems to smile in a rather silly way. The **metaphor** “pup-content” (line 4) compares it to a happy (and harmless) puppy.

The word “gangling” means it has long, loose legs that make it seem rather awkward and clumsy. The words for baby animals like “kitten” and “pup” suggest it is young, as does “gangling”, as teenage animals (including people) often seem to have long, thin bodies before they grow older, stronger and more muscular.

The first and third line of each stanza ends with a rhyming word. The second and fourth lines also end in a rhyme, for example “grass” and “pass” rhyme in stanza 2.



Stanza 2 (lines 5 – 8)

Slouching through the tawny grass
Or loose-limbed lolling in the shade,
Purring for the sun to pass
And build a twilight barricade.

5

The cheetah moves lazily and casually (“slouching” in line 5) through the grass or lies back, (“lolling” in line 6) in the shade during the day. Notice how the **alliteration** links the words “Loose-limbed lolling” in line 5, emphasising how relaxed the animal is.

The big cat purrs like a happy house cat as it waits patiently for the sun to set. Again, this makes the cheetah seem harmless, as cats purr when they are relaxed and content. At twilight it is growing dark and the **metaphor** “barricade” (line 8) compares the darkness to a wall or barrier that will hide the cheetah when it hunts. Barricades are often built across streets during wars or riots, so the poet’s **diction** (choice of words) creates a more uneasy **tone** with the use of “barricade”.

Up to now, the herd of buck and the cheetah seem relaxed. By including the word “barricade”, the poet introduces tension at the end of the stanza. The barricade interrupts the relaxed **tone**.

Stanza 3 (lines 9 – 12)

Around the vast arena where,
 In scattered herds, his grazing prey
 Do not suspect in what wild fear
 They'll join with him in fatal play;

10

The tension in the poem grows. The poet sets the scene for the hunt. The huge grasslands (“vast arena” line 9), the herds of buck that are spread about (“scattered”) as they graze and have no idea that there is a cheetah nearby waiting to kill one of them, its “prey” (line 10). In this stanza, the poet uses an **extended metaphor** which is carried on in the first and last lines of the stanza. The hunt is compared to a game that is played to the death in an “arena”. This game or “fatal play” (line 12) is an oxymoron, because “play” suggests a game, but “fatal” means deadly, so this game will end in a death.

This creates a visual image (a picture we can see in our minds) of the games in the Coliseum, the great sports stadium of ancient Rome, when spectators enjoyed watching men fight with swords and the loser was often killed. As we read, we feel fearful for the unsuspecting buck that do not know of the danger that is coming. We begin to sympathise with the “wild fear” (line 9) they will feel when the cheetah begins its chase. Notice how vividly and strikingly the poet’s diction in “wild fear” conveys the panic the buck are going to feel. The uneasy **tone** becomes stronger now.

Stanza 4 (lines 13 – 16)

Till hunger draws slack sinews tight
 As vibrant as a hunter’s bow;
 Then, like a fleck of mottled light,
 He slides across the still plateau.

15

This stanza describes the cheetah as it attacks. The animal now changes from a harmless-seeming young animal into a dangerous predator (hunter) as it begins its chase. Unlike the ancient Romans, for whom killing was a sport, the cheetah hunts only to eat and survive.

When it starts to think about hunting its body changes from relaxed to tense. The poet uses a **simile** that compares it to a bow. When an archer (who shoots with bow and arrow) gets ready to shoot the arrow, he pulls back the string of the bow very tightly so that the arrow will shoot forward with great speed and power. In the same way, when the cheetah is hungry and ready to hunt, it tenses all the muscles in its body (“slack sinews tight” in line 13). As it jumps forward, the cheetah’s body bends in a curve like a bow and it is no longer “slack” (relaxed) but “vibrant” – filled with energy and life.

The poet uses a **simile** “like a mottled fleck of light” (line 15) to describe the cheetah’s speed, as its spotted body moves as fast as a flashing spot

of light. It moves so smoothly and quickly that it seems to “slide” across the flat ground (line 16). Notice how the **alliteration** of the hissing “s” sound in “slide/still” emphasises its speed. The cheetah’s movement is purposeful, controlled and confident.

Stanza 5 (lines 17 – 20)

A tremor rakes the herds: they scent
The pungent breeze of his advance;
Heads rear and jerk in vigilant
Compliance with the game of chance.

20

The poet now describes the reaction of the herd. The buck catch the strong (“pungent”) smell of the cheetah, perhaps carried to them on the wind. They all shiver (“tremor”) with fear (line 17). The **metaphor** “rakes” describes the way the shiver of fear (“tremor”) runs through the herd the way a rake (a garden instrument like a very big fork) can sweep along the ground.

All moving together at the same time, the buck at once raise their heads and become tense and watchful. In a **metaphor** the poet compares the buck to people taking part in a “game of chance” (line 20). They have no choice but “compliance” – they have to fit in with the rules of the “game” in which they know that any one of them might be attacked and killed by the cheetah. Unfortunately for the buck, the rules of nature are that some animals have to die so that others can survive.

Stanza 6 (lines 21 – 24)

In which, of thousands, only one
Is centred in the cheetah’s eye;
They wheel and then stampede, for none
Knows which it is that has to die.

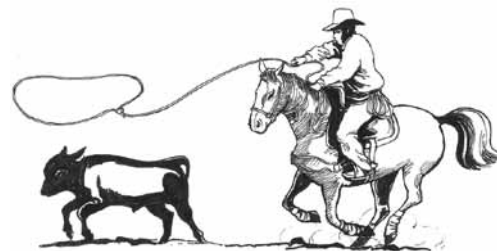
Of all the thousands of buck, the cheetah sets his eyes on only one. All his attention is on one buck. The buck all turn round quickly, they “wheel” and “stampede” (line 23) to get away. When herd animals (such as cows, horses or buck) are afraid, they stampede – the whole herd runs away in a mass panic. Their movement is uncontrolled. They know one of them will die, but do not know which of them the cheetah has chosen to kill.

The **rhyming** of “eye” (line 22) and “die” (line 24) links these two words to emphasise that the buck has no chance of escape. The buck is in the cheetah’s sight.

Stanza 7 (lines 25 – 28)

His stealth and swiftness fling a noose
 And as his loping strides begin
 To blur with speed, he ropes the loose
 Buck on the red horizon in.

25



In this last stanza, the poet returns to describing the cheetah. He again uses an **extended metaphor**, this time of a cowboy using a **lasso**.

The silent speed (“stealth and swiftness” in line 25) with which the cheetah runs towards the buck is compared to the rope and noose flying through the air. The cheetah’s long steps (“loping strides” in line 26) begin to go so fast that you cannot see the animal clearly; you see only a blur. The cowboy metaphor is continued when the cheetah leaps on the buck’s back to knock it to the ground, as this is compared to the rope pulling the animal in. The horizon is described as “red” (line 28). This could refer to the red of the setting sun but it also suggests that the land itself is stained with the blood of the dead buck.

Note that stanzas 6 and 7 are part of a continuous **run-on line** – this helps to suggest that the cheetah is gaining speed and its movements are not interrupted as it chases its prey.

There is a **contrast** between the description of the harmless looking cheetah in the first two stanzas and the dangerous hunter in the later stanzas.

4. Tone and mood

The tone of the poem is **relaxed**, like the cheetah, at the start. It becomes more **urgent** and **tense** as the poem progresses, starting with the **uneasy** tone at the end of stanza 3. The tone of **danger** increases later in the poem as the poet describes the hunt.

The **mood** of a poem is how it makes the reader feel. How does this poem make you feel? For example, happy, sad, angry, or indifferent.

vocab

Lasso: A long rope with a loop at the end called a noose.

To catch a cow, the cowboy throws the rope so that the loop falls round the animal’s neck so that he can pull it in.

vocab

Run-on line: The meaning runs on from one line to the next, without being broken by punctuation.

summary

Cheetah

by Charles Eglinton

1. Theme

The main themes are that appearances can be misleading; and that in nature, only the strongest survive.

2. Type and form**Narrative poem:**

- Each stanza has 4 lines
- Rhyme scheme abab

Stanza 1

- “kitten-eyed”
- Metaphor**
- “pup-content”
- Metaphor**

Stanza 2

- “loose-limbed lolling”
- Alliteration (repeated “l”)**
- “And build a twilight barricade.”
- Metaphor**

Stanza 3

- “The vast arena where ...
They’ll join with him in fatal play;”
- Extended metaphor**
- “fatal play”
- Oxymoron**

Stanza 4

- “As vibrant as a hunter’s bow;”
- Simile**
- “like a mottled fleck of light”
- Simile**
- “He slides across the still plateau”
- Alliteration (repeated “s”)**

Stanza 5

- “A tremor rakes the herds”
- Metaphor**
- “Compliance with the game of chance...
... for none” (lines 20 - 23)
- Extended metaphor**

Stanza 6

- “... for none / Knows which it is that has to die.”
- End of extended metaphor** (see stanza 5 above)

Stanza 7

- “His stealth and swiftness fling a noose...
He ropes the loose / Buck on the red horizon in.”
- Extended metaphor** (lines 25 - 28)

3. Tone and mood

Tone: A relaxed tone at first, but the tone changes to urgent, tense and uneasy.

Mood: How does this poem make you feel? Happy, sad, angry or indifferent? Always give reasons for your answer.



Activity 10

Refer to the poem on page 87 and answer the questions below.

1. Complete the following sentences by using the words provided in the list below.

young; snarling; awkward; old; smiling; graceful

The poet says that the cheetah is (1.1) ... but it has (1.2) ... movements and it appears to be (1.3) ... (3)

2. What does the word “indolent” in line 1 tell you about the cheetah? State TWO points. (2)

3. Choose the correct answer to complete the following sentence.

In line 3 the speaker’s tone shows that he feels ...

A the cheetah is better than the leopard.

B the leopard is better than the cheetah.

C the cheetah and the leopard are the same.

D the cheetah is quieter than the leopard. (1)

4. Refer to the words “twilight barricade” in line 8.

4.1. Identify the figure of speech used here. (1)

4.2. Explain why the poet uses this figure of speech. (2)

5. Which ONE WORD in stanza three shows that purpose of the hunt is to find food? (1)

6. Quote two **consecutive** words in this stanza that contradict each other (oxymoron), and suggest that the hunt is not really a “game”? (2)

hint Consecutive words means words next to each other.

7. Refer to line 14 (“And vibrant as a hunter’s bow”).

7.1. Identify the figure of speech used here. (1)

7.2. Explain why the poet has used this figure of speech. (2)

8. Refer to line 20 (“Compliance with the game of chance”).

Do you think the use of the word “compliance” is suitable? Discuss your view. (2)

hint These answers are based on your own opinion. Give reasons for your view.

9. What message does this poem have for you? (1)

[18]

hint

whole.

The words chosen must make sense in the sentence as a

hint

here are examples of correct answers.

These are open-ended answers.

The reasons given

hint

Any ONE of these answers will earn you 1 mark.

Answers to Activity 10

- 1.1. Smiling/young/graceful/awkward ✓
- 1.2. Awkward/graceful ✓
- 1.3. Young/smiling ✓ (3)
2. The cheetah is lazy/inactive/idle ✓✓ (2)
3. B / the leopard is better than the cheetah. ✓ (1)
- 4.1. Metaphor ✓ (1)
- 4.2. Night/darkness will become his shield from his prey ✓✓
OR
Night/darkness will conceal/hide him from his prey ✓✓
OR
Night /darkness will contain his prey ✓✓ (2)
5. "prey" ✓ (1)
- 6 "fatal play" ✓✓ (2)
- 7.1. Simile ✓ (1)
- 7.2. The poet compares the cheetah to a hunter's bow. When it is hunting, the cheetah has the speed and force of a hunter's bow and arrow. ✓✓
OR
To show that the cheetah is as fast/quick as a hunter's bow (arrow) ✓✓ (2)
8. Yes, when one sees no way out of a fatal situation, one gives in and accepts one's fate. ✓✓
OR
No, although the herd knows that one of them is to be killed, they still try and escape. ✓✓
OR
No, one does not simply accept one's fate when facing danger/ death/ There's always a chance of survival if one tries to escape. ✓✓ (2)
9. Cruelty of nature ✓
Survival of the fittest ✓
Appearances can be misleading ✓
The cycle of life/predators only kill for food ✓
In every situation in nature there is a killer and a victim. ✓ (1)

[18]



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