

Poetry

A Tomcat Is p. 3



SUMMARY

What is a tomcat? To poet J. Patrick Lewis, it's a lot of things rolled into one, as seen in this delightful poem.

LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

- Understanding main idea
- Identifying meter
- Understanding literary devices (imagery and metaphor)

MAIN TEACHING OBJECTIVES

After reading this poem, students should be able to:

- Discuss why the poet describes a tomcat in many different ways
- Describe the meter of the poem
- Understand how the poet uses imagery and metaphors to describe a cat

BEFORE READING

Ask students what a tomcat is. *It's a*

male cat. Ask how many students own tomcats themselves. Have them turn to page 3 and look at the title of the poem and the illustration. Before they read the poem, have volunteers complete the sentence, "A tomcat is . . ."

DURING READING

Identifying meter: Read the poem to the class. Pause after the third verse and ask the class to say the rhythm of the poem with the syllable DAH: dah DAH dah dah DAH dah / dah DAH dah dah DAH / etc. Did they notice that this rhythm is repeated in every verse? Have them listen for it as you read the last two verses. Tell them the rhythm of a poem is called the meter.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ WRITING PROMPTS

- What does each line of this poem do? Why do you think the poet chose to do

this? (understanding main idea) *Each line describes a tomcat in a different way. The poet probably wanted to show the many different qualities of a tomcat.*

- The poet describes the cat's feet as "needle-point claws" and "marshmallow paws." What does this tell you about them? (understanding metaphors) *They have nails or claws as sharp as needles and pads of their feet as soft as marshmallows.*
- What could you conclude about how the author feels about tomcats? (drawing conclusions) *It seems to like them and doesn't take their faults too seriously.*

AFTER READING

Writing a descriptive poem: Ask students to think of someone or something they are fond of. Have them write down descriptions of their subject, using metaphors, similes, and creative images. Invite them to use these descriptions in a poem, similar to "A Tomcat Is."

Harlem Night Song p. 21



SUMMARY

Langston Hughes's lyrical poetic voice has universal appeal. This poem puts readers on a dreamy Harlem street, walking with someone they love.

LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

- Understanding setting
- Identifying mood
- Identifying literary devices (metaphor)

MAIN TEACHING OBJECTIVES

After reading this poem, students should be able to:

- Understand the setting and its role in the poem
- Identify the metaphor in the poem
- Describe the mood of the poem

BEFORE READING

Background information: Ask students if they know where Harlem is: It's a neighborhood of New York City, where many African-Americans settled in the 1920s-40s when they moved north from southern states, looking for jobs and opportunities. A creative movement, known as the Harlem Renaissance, started there: Artists of all genres interpreted their experiences and environment through art. Langston Hughes is known as the poet laureate of Harlem.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/ WRITING PROMPTS

- How would you describe the mood of this poem? (identifying mood) *The mood is relaxed, dreamy, in love.*
- What metaphor does the poet use? What does it mean? (identifying meta-

phor) *"Stars are great drops of golden dew." The stars are golden and sparkly like dew drops.*

- What lines are repeated? Why do you think the poet repeated them? (understanding poetic structure) *The repetition helps create a timeless feeling: The narrator has time to repeat what's important.*
- How does the illustration add to this poem? (visual literacy) *Answers may include that it shows what the poem describes, or that it echoes the feeling from the poem of the couple in harmony with their environment.*

AFTER READING

Creating a setting: Ask students to imagine themselves in a place they love. Have them write a poem or draw a picture reflecting their feelings about the special setting.



Reproducibles

Skills and Test-Prep Online

Go to www.scholastic.com/storyworks to print out the following activities that can be used with these poems:

A TOMCAT IS

- Comprehension Quiz
- Critical Thinking Questions
- Rhyming
- Understanding Metaphors

HARLEM NIGHT SONG

- Comprehension Quiz
- Critical Thinking Questions
- Understanding Mood