

Source 1: 21st-century fiction

This extract is taken from a novel written in 2011 by Carol Birch about a boy's relationship with a group of exotic animals in London. In this extract, the boy has his first ever encounter with a tiger.

READ ↓

Jamrach's Menagerie*

Of course, I'd seen a cat before. You couldn't sleep for them in Bermondsey, creeping about over the roofs and wailing like devils. They lived in packs, spiky, wild-eyed, stalking the wooden walkways and bridges, fighting with the rats. But this cat ...

The sun himself came down and walked on earth.

Just as the birds of Bermondsey were small and brown, and those of my new home were large and rainbow-hued, so it seemed the cats of Ratcliffe Highway must be an altogether superior breed to our scrawny south-of-the-river mogs. This cat was the size of a small horse, solid, massively chested, rippling powerfully about the shoulders. He was gold, and the pattern painted so carefully all over him, so utterly perfect, was the blackest black in the world. His paws were the size of footstools, his chest snow white.

I'd seen him somewhere, his picture in a poster in London Street, over the river. He was jumping through a ring of fire and his mouth was open. A mythical beast.

I have no recall of one foot in front of the other, cobblestones under my feet. He drew me like honey draws a wasp. I had no fear. I came before the godly indifference of his face and looked into his clear yellow eyes. His nose was a slope of downy gold, his nostrils pink and moist as a pup's. He raised his thick, white dotted lips and smiled, and his whiskers bloomed. I became aware of my heart somewhere too high up, beating as if it was a little fist trying to get out.

Nothing in the world could have prevented me from lifting my hand and stroking the broad warm nap of his nose. Even now I feel how beautiful that touch was. Nothing had ever been so soft and clean. A ripple ran through his right shoulder as he raised his paw – bigger than my head – and lazily knocked me off my feet. It was like being felled by a cushion. I hit the ground but was not much hurt, only winded, and after that it was a dream. There was, I remember, much screaming and shouting, but from a distance, as if I was sinking underwater. The world turned upside down and went by me in a bright stream, the ground moved under me, my hair hung in my eyes. There was a kind of joy in me, I do know that – and nothing that could go by the name of fear, only a wildness. I was in his jaws. His breath burned the back of my neck. My bare toes trailed, hurting distantly. I could see his feet, tawny orange with white toes, pacing the ground away, gentle as feathers.

*group of animals



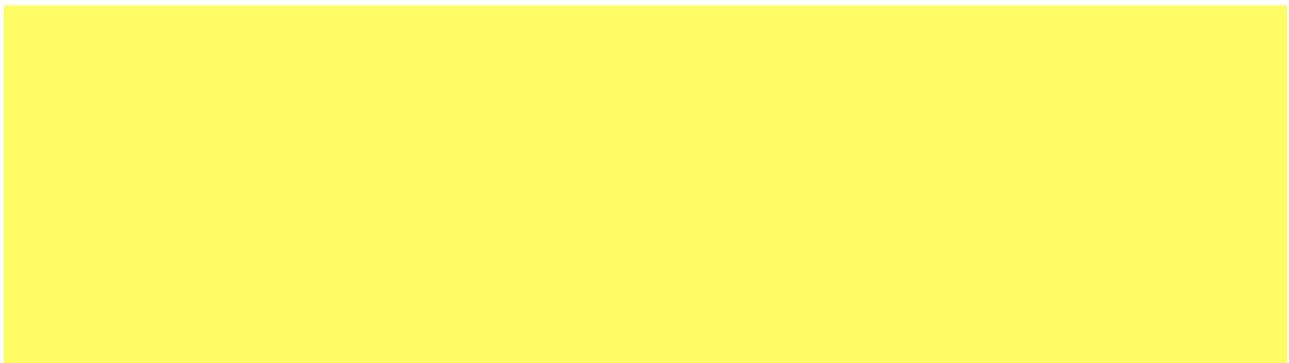
ACTIVITY

Match each word to its definition:

Word	Definition
mogs	flourished or became beautiful
rainbow-hued	completely
scrawny	covered with fine, soft hair
mythical	rainbow-coloured
utterly	pious or devoutly religious
rippling	like something out of a myth
recall	remember
cobblestones	small round stones used to cover road surfaces
indifference	unattractively thin and bony
godly	slightly wet
downy	lack of interest
moist	cats (especially ones which are not pedigree)
bloomed	moving in a way that resembles a series of small waves

ACTIVITY

Now write 4 of the words in 4 sentences



ACTIVITIES

Complete the activities 4 and 5 below:

Activities on *Jamrach's Menagerie*

Of course, I'd seen a cat before. You couldn't sleep for them in Bermondsey, creeping about over the roofs and wailing like devils. They lived in packs, spiky, wild-eyed, stalking the wooden walkways and bridges, fighting with the rats. But this cat ...

The sun himself came down and walked on earth.

4. First, let's practise selecting quotations from a text.

Which word or phrase in the section above makes the cats sound ...

- a. dangerous?
- b. aggressive?
- c. evil or wicked?
- d. noisy?
- e. sneaky?

Now read the next part of the text, below:

Just as the birds of Bermondsey were small and brown, and those of my new home were large and rainbow-hued, so it seemed the cats of Ratcliffe Highway must be an altogether superior breed to our scrawny south-of-the-river mogs. This cat was the size of a small horse, solid, massively chested, rippling powerfully about the shoulders. He was gold, and the pattern painted so carefully all over him, so utterly perfect, was the blackest black in the world. His paws were the size of footstools, his chest snow white.

I'd seen him somewhere, his picture in a poster in London Street, over the river. He was jumping through a ring of fire and his mouth was open. A mythical beast.

5. List four things you learn about the tiger in this part of the text:

1.

2.

3.

4

READ ↓

Read this final part of the extract again:

Nothing in the world could have prevented me from lifting my hand and stroking the broad warm nap of his nose. Even now I feel how beautiful that touch was. Nothing had ever been so soft and clean. A ripple ran through his right shoulder as he raised his paw – bigger than my head – and lazily knocked me off my feet. It was like being felled by a cushion. I hit the ground but was not much hurt, only winded, and after that it was a dream. There was, I remember, much screaming and shouting, but from a distance, as if I was sinking underwater. The world turned upside down and went by me in a bright stream, the ground moved under me, my hair hung in my eyes. There was a kind of joy in me, I do know that – and nothing that could go by the name of fear, only a wildness. I was in his jaws. His breath burned the back of my neck. My bare toes trailed, hurting distantly. I could see his feet, tawny orange with white toes, pacing the ground away, gentle as feathers.

Inference is the skill of reading between the lines to work out things which are implied but not said to us directly.

You do this all the time in real life. If your friend is crying, you don't need them to tell you they are sad – you can infer it, based on the evidence.

Inference is really important in reading comprehension. Practise it now.

ACTIVITY

What can you infer from each of these quotations?

a. 'he raised his paw ... and lazily knocked me off my feet.'

b. 'The world turned upside down and went by me in a bright stream, the ground moved under me'

c. 'It was like being felled by a cushion.'

d. 'There was ... much screaming and shouting, but from a distance, as if I was sinking underwater.'

ACTIVITY

Finally, number these events in the order in which they happen in the story. You have been given the first event to get you started.

The boy falls to the ground, but isn't injured. The tiger carries the boy away.

The boy thinks the tiger feels really soft.

The boy hears shouts from people looking on. The tiger lifts his paw.

The boy looks at the tiger's paws as he walks. The boy strokes the tiger's nose.

The tiger picks the boy up.

The tiger knocks the boy off his feet.

ACTIVITIES

- Write a 500-word story of a character's first encounter with an animal they have never seen before. Use the extract for inspiration and think about which parts of the animal might be familiar or unfamiliar.
- Think of three possible titles for this extract that you feel capture the mood and/or theme.
- Complete a symbol storyboard for the extract in six stages. For example, the first symbol could be a river. Include a quick sketch and some notes of its significance.
- Imagine the boy reacts with terror at being held by the tiger. Rewrite the last paragraph of the extract to show this change in mood.

- Write down the three main events/actions in the extract. Play around with the order – for example start with the boy in the tiger’s mouth. Think about how these changes affect the reader’s response.
- Imagine you were part of the crowd that were ‘screaming and shouting’ and give a short account for a local newspaper.

ACTIVITY



1. Using as many of these words as you can, write a short paragraph describing a creature of your choice. It could be a real or imagined creature.

IE words		EI words	
Achievement		Deceitful	
Besiege		Receipt	
Fierce		Foreign	
Grieve		Protein	
Mischievous		Vein	
Pier		Weird	
Piece		Eight	
Shriek		Weight	
Shield		Beige	
Siege		Caffeine	
Field		Ceiling	
Believe		Height	

OW & OU WORDS		AW & AU WORDS	
FROWN		AWFUL	
CLOWN		DRAWER	
FLOWER		YAWN	
POWDER		BRAWL	
POWERLESS		GNAW	
BOWEL		AUGUST	
ABOUT		AUTUMN	
GROUND		CAUTION	
HOUSE		LAUNDRY	
MOUNTAIN		AUTHOR	
SCROUNGE		APPLAUSE	
POUND		TAUGHT	

Practice exam questions

Source 1: Jamrach's Menagerie by Carol Birch (2011)

1. Read again the first part of the source from lines 1–3.

List four things the cats do in this part of the text. [4 marks]

1.

2.

3.

4.

2. Look in detail at this extract from lines 5–15 of the source:

The sun himself came down and walked on earth.

Just as the birds of Bermondsey were small and brown, and those of my new home were large and rainbow-hued, so it seemed the cats of Ratcliffe Highway must be an altogether superior breed to our scrawny south-of-the-river mogs. This cat was the size of a small horse, solid, massively chested, rippling powerfully about the shoulders. He was gold, and the pattern painted so carefully all over him, so utterly perfect, was the blackest black in the world. His paws were the size of footstools, his chest snow white.

I'd seen him somewhere, his picture in a poster in London Street, over the river. He was jumping through a ring of fire and his mouth was open. A mythical beast.

How does the writer use language here to describe the tiger?

You could include the writer's choice of:

- words and phrases
- language features and techniques
- sentence forms.

3. You now need to think about the whole of the source.

[8 marks]

How has the writer structured the text to interest you as a reader?

You could write about:

- what the writer focuses your attention on at the beginning • how the writer changes this focus as the source develops
- any other structural features which interest you.

4. Focus this part of your answer on the last part of the source, from lines 23–35.

A student said: ‘The writer makes the tiger sound gentle and tame. It doesn’t sound very dangerous.’

To what extent do you agree?

• [20 marks]

In your response, you could:

- consider your own impressions of the tiger
- evaluate how the writer makes the tiger sound gentle and tame
- support your response with reference to the text.