

Grade VIII - English

Lesson 3. Macavity: The Mystery Cat

Poetry

Soul of the Poem

The poem is a description of a villainous character, Macavity, a criminal who is so skilled in committing crime, that no one can ever find him. For whenever they reach the crime scene, he's not there.

Macavity is called the 'mystery cat' and the 'hidden paw' because he is a great criminal. He's defied many laws and has baffled the Scotland Yard and the Flying Squad.

The poet believes that there is no one like Macavity, for there is no rule open could think of that he has not broken. He has managed to challenges even the laws of nature, as he can float in the air without any support. One may look for him in the basement or in the sky, but one thing that is for sure is that he would never be found.

Macavity is also called the ginger cat. He is very tall and thin. It is not very difficult to recognise him, as he has very sunken eyes. His eyebrows are deeply lined because of constant plotting and strategising. He could also be recognised by sheer self-neglect. His coat is dusty and his whiskers are uncombed. He would move his head from side to side like a snake. And when you think he's sleeping, he's merely pretending. He is actually alert all the time.

There is just no one like Macavity. He is actually a devil inhabiting a cat's body. One may meet him here or there, but on the crime scene, he would never be there.

Stanzawise Explanation of The Poem

Stanza 1

Macavity's a Mystery cat: he's called the Hidden Paw For he's the master criminal who can defy

The Law.

He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard,

The flying Squard's despair:

For when they reach the scene of

Crime-Macavity's not there!

Reference :

The above lines have been taken from the poem, 'Macavity: The Mystery Cat', composed by the 20th century modernist poet, TS Eliot.

Context :

The poet highlights how Macavity is responsible for the bewilderment faced by the police.

Explanation :

Macavity is called a mystery cat. It is believed that he has a 'hidden paw' or a hidden foot which helps him in escaping the crime scene in no time. He is called a master criminal who has baffled the police, Scotland Yard and the Flying Squad. No matter when the police reaches the crime scene, Macavity has already fled.

Stanza 2

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like Macavity,
He's broken every human law,
He breaks the law of gravity.
His powers of levitation would make a fakir
Stare,
And when you reach the scene of
Crime- Macavity's not there!
You may seek him in the basement
You may look up in the air,
But I tell you once and once again,
Macavity's not there!

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

The poet highlights the characteristics of Macavity.

Explanation :

The poet describes how there's no one like Macavity. He has broken each and every law. He has even broken the natural laws, like the law of gravity. It means that it was believed that

he could float in the air without any support. Seeing him escape the crime scene, anybody would stare. Anyone could look for him in the sky or in the depths of the Earth, but Macavity cannot be found.

Stanza 3

Macavity's a ginger cat, he's very tall and thin;

You would know him if you saw him,

For his eyes are sunken in.

His brow is deeply lined with thought, his head

Is highly domed;

His coat is dusty from neglect, his whiskers are

Uncombed. He sways his head from side to side,

With movements like a snake;

And when you think he's half asleep he's always

Wide awake.

Reference :

Same as above

Context :

In these lines, the poet describes the appearance of Macavity.

Explanation :

In these lines, Macavity is called a ginger cat. He is unique in the way he looks and the way he does everything. He is tall and thin. He has sunken eyes. His eyebrows are deeply lined because of constant thinking, plotting and strategising. His head is highly domed. He doesn't take much care of his appearance and therefore his coat is always dusty and whiskers are uncombed. His head moves from side to side like the movements of a snake. Anybody could recognise him if they keep in mind these characteristics. Yet, he goes untraced the crime scene. This is so because he is also very clever and alert. When people think he is sleeping, he is merely pretending.

Stanza 4

Macavity, Macavity, there's no one like
Macavity, For he's a fiend in feline shape, a
Monster of depravity.
You may meet him in a by street, you may
see him in the square-
But when a crime's discovered then
Macavity's not-there!

Reference :

Same as above

Concept :

The poet in these lines sums up how it is just impossible to catch hold of Macavity.

Explanation :

The poet calls macavity unique. He is a devil in the form of a cat. He is morally corrupt and the monster of corruption. One may find him in a by-street, near the square, here or there, but on the crime scene, he's never there. No one can ever catch hold of Macavity.

NCERT Corner

Working with the poem

1. Read the first stanza and think.

(i) Is Macavity a cat really?

In the poem, Macavity is a cat.

(ii) If not, who can Macavity be?

If not just a cat, Macavity is a master criminal.

2. Complete the following sentences.

(i) A master criminal is one who.....

(ii) The Scotland Yard is baffled because.....

(iii)because Macavity moves much faster than them.

(i) Never gets caught

(ii) No matter what they do, they are unable to get hold of Macavity.

(iii) The Flying Squad is unable to find Macavity

3. "A cat, I am sure, could walk on a cloud without coming through". (Jules Verne)

Which law is Macavity breaking in the light of the comment above?

Macavity is breaking the law of gravity.

4. Read stanza 3 and then, describe Macavity in two or three sentences of your own.

Macavity is tall and thin. He has sunken eyes and deep eyebrows. He has a dusty coat and his whiskers are never combed. He is always alert, even when people think that he is sleeping.

5. Say 'True' or 'False' for each of the following statements.

(i) Macavity is not an ordinary cat.

(ii) Macavity cannot do what a fakir can easily do.

(iii) Macavity has supernatural powers.

(iv) Macavity is well-dressed, smart and bright.

(v) Macavity is a spy, a trickster and a criminal, all rolled in one.

(i) True	(ii) False	(iii) False	(iv) False	(v) True
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6. Having read the poem, try to guess whether the poet is fond of cats. If so, why does he call Macavity a fiend and monster?

It is possible that the poet is fond of cats. That could be the reason for the poet composing a poem detailing a cat. At the same time, the cat could be the poet's metaphor for talking about people who are morally deprived and criminals. Therefore, he uses the words fiend and monsters. Such people appear commonplace and ordinary, but trick others in no time.

7. Has the poet used exaggeration for special effect? Find a few examples of it and read those lines aloud.

Yes, exaggeration is a very helpful poetic device. The poet has employed this device in the following instances.

(a) He's the bafflement of the Scotland Yard.

(b) His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare.

(c) He's a fiend in a feline shape.

Chapter Practice

Very Short Answer Type Questions

1. What is Macavity called?

Macavity is called a Mystery Cat.

2. Where Macavity could never be found?

Macavity could never be found on the crime scene.

3. What does Macavity do when people think he's half asleep?

When people think Macavity's half asleep, he's actually wide awake.

4. List all the titles used in the poem to describe Macavity.

- (a) Mystery cat (b) A hidden paw (c) A ginger cat
(d) Fiend in a feline shape (e) Monster of depravity

5. Which all laws have been broken by Macavity?

Macavity has broken every human law as well as the law of gravity.

Short Answer Type Questions

1. How can one recognise Macavity?

If there is someone who has sunken eyes and a deeply lined forehead; whose coat is dusty and whiskers uncombed, one should be sure that he is encountering Macavity. In addition to this, Macavity's head always moves from side-to-side like the movement of the snake.

2. What does the poet reveal about Macavity in the final stanza of the poem ?

In the final stanza of the poem, the poet calls Macavity the monster of depravity, which means that he is morally corrupt and degraded. The poet also calls him a devil in the form of a cat. Here and there, it is still easy to find Macavity; but when at the crime scene, never.

Extract Based Questions

Extract 1

Directions (Q.Nos 1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions.

Macavity 's a Mystery cat:he's

Called the Hidden Paw

For he's the master criminal

Who can defy the Law.

He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard,

The Flying Squard despair:

For when they reach the scene of crime-

Macavity's not there.

1. What is Macavity called?

- (a) A mystery cat
- (b) Scotland Yard
- (a) A mystery cat
- (b) A fakir
- (d) The Flying Squad

2. What does he do?

- (a) He defies the law
- (b) He catches the thieves
- (c) He is a private detective
- (d) HE sleeps on the streets
- (a) He defies the law

3. The word bafflement means.....

- (a) Puzzled
- (b) difficult
- (b) Crippled
- (d) disorder
- (a) puzzled

4. Why is the Scotland Yard baffled?

The Scotland Yard is baffled because they do not catch hold of Macavity.

5. What is Scotland Yard?

Scotland Yard is the headquarters of the London police force.

6. Why is Macavity called the master criminal?

Macavity is called the master criminal because of his shrewdness in escaping every crime scene.

Extract 2

Directions (Q. Nos 1-6) Read the extract given below and answer the following questions.

Macavity, Macavity, there's no
One like Macavity,
For he's a fiend in feline shape,
A monster of depravity.

You may meet him in a by-street, you
May see him in the square, But when a crime's
Discovered, then Macavity's not there!

1. Who is the speaker of these lines?

- (a) The poet (b) The fakir (c) Macavity (d) Passers by
(a) The poet

2. Choose a word that could be used as an alternative for cat.

- (a) Fiend (b) Fakir (c) Feline (d) Friend
(c) Feline

3. What title is given to Macavity in the above mentioned lines?

- (a) Mystery cat (b) The hidden paw
(c) Monster of depravity (d) Master criminal
(c) Monster of depravity

4. Why does the poet say that there is no one like Macavity?

The poet says that there is no one like Macavity because Macavity was unique. He did many crimes, but never got caught by anyone.

5. Why is he called the monster of depravity?

He is called the monster of depravity because he was morally hollow and corrupt.

6. Where all does one come across Macavity?

One easily came across Macavity in a by-street or in the square.

Next Generation School