

Chapter 3: Macavity: The Mystery Cat

Working with the Poem

Question 1: Read the first stanza and think.

- (i) Is Macavity a cat really?
- (ii) If not, who can Macavity be?

Answer:

- (i) No, Macavity is not a cat really.
- (ii) Macavity is just a fictional character created by the poet whose actions resemble those of a crook's.

Question 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.

Answer:

- (i) A master criminal is one who can defy the law.
- (ii) The Scotland Yard is baffled because whenever they reach the scene of crime, they cannot find Macavity.
- (iii) Nobody can catch Macavity at the scene of crime because Macavity moves much faster than them.

Question 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?

Answer: In the light of the above comment, Macavity is breaking the law of gravity.

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

Answer: Macavity is a ginger cat who is very tall and thin with sunken eyes and brow deeply lined with thought. While its head is highly domed, its coat is dusty and whiskers are uncombed. It sways its head from side-to-side and it is always wide awake even when one thinks that it is half-asleep.

Question 5: Say 'False' or 'True' 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.

Answer:

- (i) True
- (ii) False - Macavity's power of levitation would make a fakir stare in disbelief.
- (iii) True
- (iv) False - Macavity is not well-dressed as its coat is dusty out of neglect. Its eyes are sunken, and not bright.
- (v) True

Question 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?

Answer: Yes, it seems like the poet is fond of cats. He calls Macavity a 'fiend' and a 'monster' because he might have wanted to portray an evil side. He might have used a cat in order to create a negative character who is a criminal and escapes easily from police. The quick movements of a cat and its mysterious eyes might have influenced him to create this evil character in the form of a cat.

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

Answer: Yes, the poet has used exaggerations such as the cat's defiance of gravity and it being called a 'monster of depravity' and a 'fiend' in order to enhance the mystery surrounding the cat. Since the cat is shown to be super fast as nobody from the Scotland Yard to the flying squad can catch it on the scene of crime, these exaggerations have been used by Eliot to lay stress on this monstrous as well as surprising and mysterious nature of Macavity.

Examples:

- (i) 'He's the bafflement of Scotland Yard, the Flying Squad's despair'.
- (ii) 'He breaks the law of gravity'.
- (iii) 'His powers of levitation would make a fakir stare.'
- (iv) 'He's a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity.'

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