

19th century non-fiction

One incident involving captive wild animals became something of a legend in Victorian England. In 1857, a tiger escaped in the East End of London and prowled down St George's Street, picking up a small boy named John Wade as it went.

The tiger was being delivered to a shop owned by Charles Jamrach who was, at that time, the pre-eminent wild animal dealer in the world.

My Struggle with a Tiger by Charles Jamrach

The Boys' Own Paper Feb. 1879

It is now a good many years ago, when one morning a van-load of wild beasts, which I had bought the previous day from a captain in the London Docks, who brought them from the East Indies, arrived at my repository in Bett Street, St. George's in-the-East. I myself superintended the unloading of the animals, and had given directions to my men to place a den containing a very ferocious full-grown Bengal tiger, with its iron-barred front close against the wall.

They were proceeding to take down a den with leopards, when all of a sudden I heard a crash, and to my horror found the big tiger had pushed out the back part of his den with his hind-quarters, and was walking down the yard into the street, which was then full of people watching the arrival of this curious merchandise. The tiger, in putting his forepaws against the iron bars in front of the den, had exerted his full strength to push with his back against the boards behind, and had thus succeeded in gaining his liberty. As soon as he got into the street, a boy of about nine years of age put out his hand to stroke the beast's back, when the tiger seized him by the shoulder and run down the street with the lad hanging in his jaws. This was done in less time than it takes me to relate; but when I saw the boy being carried off in this manner, and witnessed the panic that had seized hold of the people, without further thought I dashed after the brute, and got hold of him by the loose skin of the back of his neck. I was then of a more vigorous frame than now, and had plenty of pluck and dash in me.

I tried thus to stop his further progress, but he was too strong for me, and dragged me, too, along with him. I then succeeded in putting my leg under his hind legs, tripping him up, so to say, and he fell in consequence on his knees. I now, with all my strength and weight, knelt on him, and releasing the loose skin I had hold of, I pushed my thumbs with all my strength behind his ears, trying to strangulate him thus. All this time the beast held fast to the boy.

My men had been seized with the same panic as the bystanders, but now I discovered one lurking round a corner, so I shouted to him to come with a crowbar; he fetched one, and hit the tiger three tremendous blows over the eyes.

It was only now he released the boy. His jaws opened and his tongue protruded about seven inches. I thought the brute was dead or dying, and let go of him, but no sooner had I done so than he jumped up again. In the same moment I seized the crowbar myself, and gave him, with all the strength I had left, a blow over his head. He seemed to be quite cowed, and, turning tail, went back towards the stables, which fortunately were open. I drove him into the yard, and closed the doors at once.

Looking round for my tiger, I found he had sneaked into a large empty den that stood open at the bottom of the yard. Two of my men, who had jumped on to an elephant's box, now descended, and pushed down the iron-barred sliding-door of the den; and so my tiger was safe again under lock and key.

The boy was taken to the hospital, but with the exception of a fright and a scratch, was very little hurt. I lost no time in making inquiry about him, and finding where his father was, I offered him £50 as some compensation for the alarm he had sustained. [...] I was fortunate, however, to find a purchaser for my tiger a few days after the accident; for Mr. Edmonds, proprietor of Wombwell's Menagerie, having read the report in the papers, came up to town post haste, and paid me £300 for the tiger. He exhibited him as the tiger that swallowed the child, and by all accounts made a small fortune with him.

Source: www.mernick.org.uk/thhol/jamrach.htm

18th century poem

The Tyger William Blake

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

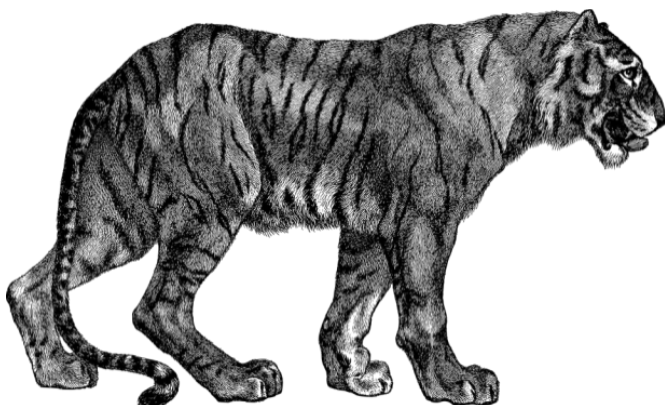
In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, & what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? & what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night:
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?



19th century fiction

In this extract, Marshall King has been locked in an enclosure during the night, with a dangerous puma, by his cousin who wants him dead. He has taken refuge on top of a cage inside the enclosure.

***The Brazilian Cat* by Arthur Conan Doyle 1898**

With a sleek ripple of its long, black back it rose, stretched itself, and then rearing itself on its hind legs, with one forepaw against the wall, it raised the other, and drew its claws across the wire meshes beneath me. One sharp, white hook tore through my trousers—for I may mention that I was still in evening dress—and dug a furrow in my knee. It was not meant as an attack, but rather as an experiment, for upon my giving a sharp cry of pain he dropped down again, and springing lightly into the room, he began walking swiftly round it, looking up every now and again in my direction. For my part I shuffled backwards until I lay with my back against the wall, screwing myself into the smallest space possible. The farther I got the more difficult it was for him to attack me.

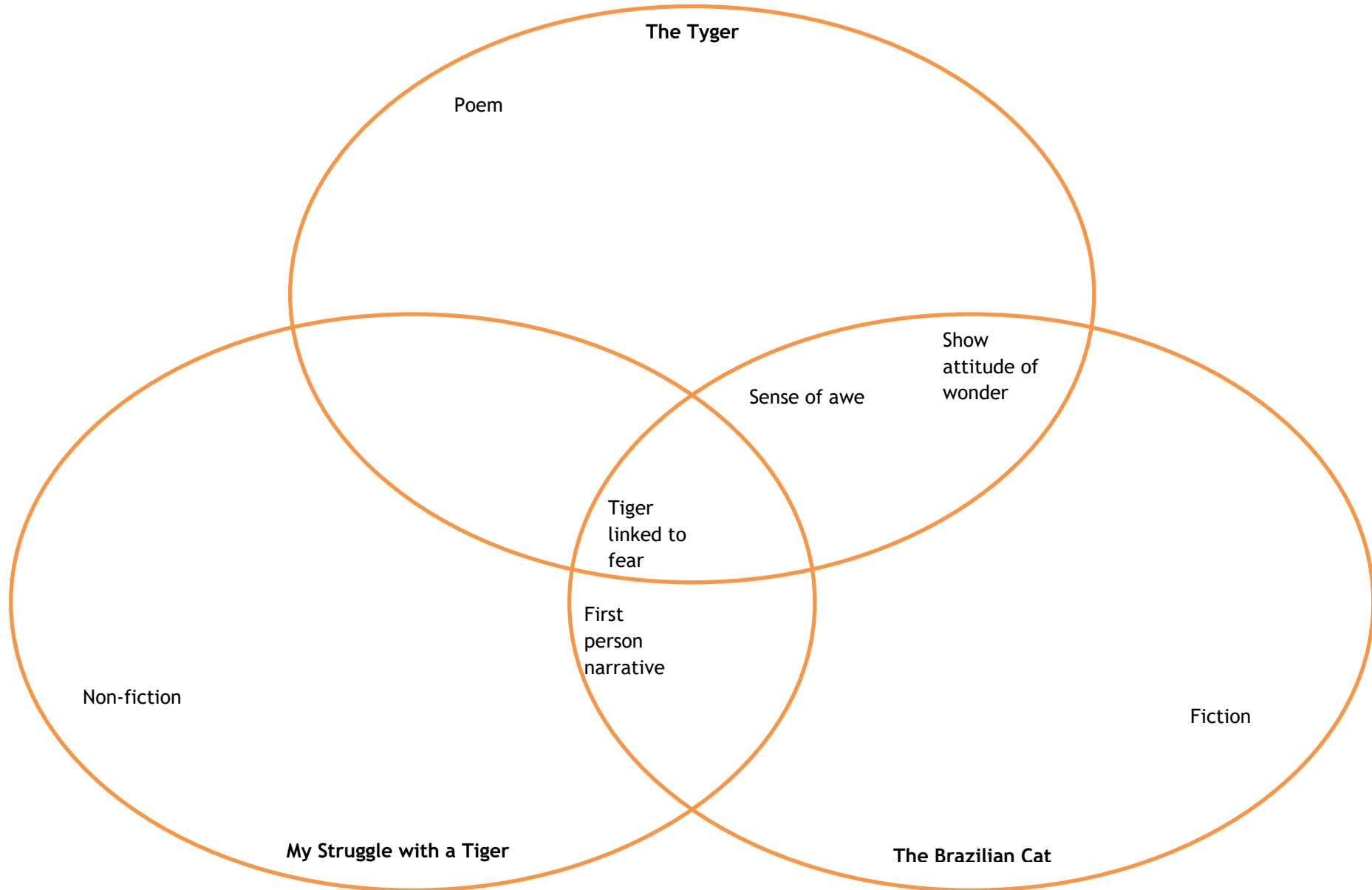
He seemed more excited now that he had begun to move about, and he ran swiftly and noiselessly round and round the den, passing continually underneath the iron couch upon which I lay. It was wonderful to see so great a bulk passing like a shadow, with hardly the softest thudding of velvety pads. The candle was burning low—so low that I could hardly see the creature. And then, with a last flare and splutter it went out altogether. I was alone with the cat in the dark!

I stretched myself out, therefore, and lay silently, almost breathlessly, hoping that the beast might forget my presence if I did nothing to remind him. I reckoned that it must already be two o'clock. At four it would be full dawn. I had not more than two hours to wait for daylight.

How slowly those dreadful two hours went by! Once I heard a low, rasping sound, which I took to be the creature licking its own fur. Several times those greenish eyes gleamed at me through the darkness, but never in a fixed stare, and my hopes grew stronger that my presence had been forgotten or ignored. At last the least faint glimmer of light came through the windows—I first dimly saw them as two grey squares upon the black wall, then grey turned to white, and I could see my terrible companion once more. And he, alas, could see me!

It was evident to me at once that he was in a much more dangerous and aggressive mood than when I had seen him last. The cold of the morning had irritated him, and he was hungry as well. With a continual growl he paced swiftly up and down the side of the room which was farthest from my refuge, his whiskers bristling angrily, and his tail switching and lashing. As he turned at the corners his savage eyes always looked upwards at me with a dreadful menace. I knew then that he meant to kill me. Yet I found myself even at that moment admiring the sinuous grace of the devilish thing, its long, undulating, rippling movements, the gloss of its beautiful flanks, the vivid, palpitating scarlet of the glistening tongue which hung from the jet-black muzzle. And all the time that deep, threatening growl was rising and rising in an unbroken crescendo. I knew that the crisis was at hand.

After reading the three texts, use the Venn diagram to make notes on their similarities and differences. Some examples have been added for you.



Analysis

My Struggle with a Tiger by Charles Jamrach

1. How does the writer use language and structure to make his account of events realistic for the reader?
2. How does the writer's viewpoint of the tiger reflect the context of the text?
3. Use this account of a real life event as the basis for a narrative of your own. Retell the story from the perspective of the little boy. Aim to write about 300 words.

Comparing viewpoints

4. Compare the writers' perspectives in *The Brazilian Cat* by Arthur Conan Doyle 1898 and *The Tyger* by William Blake.

In your response you could include:

- the writer's attitude towards the tiger
- some evidence to show the writer's point of view and ideas
- the methods used to show their perspective.

Evaluation

5. Decide which of the three texts, in your view, presents the tiger most effectively and vividly. Explain your choice.

In your response you could include:

- the mood and tone of the text, e.g. dark, fearful, frightening, mysterious, questioning
- narrative viewpoint and effect, e.g. first person creates a sense of empathy
- use of language, e.g. imagery, repetition, alliteration, onomatopoeia
- structural techniques, e.g. repetition, contrast, focal shifts, ending.

Writing skills (creative/imaginative)

6. Make a list of some of the techniques used by the writers of these texts. Include some of these techniques in a piece of your own writing titled:

'An encounter with a frightening animal'.

Your response could be real or imagined.



Teaching notes - Tiger texts

This resource offers three texts, all presenting tigers and human relationships with these animals:

- a 19th century non-fiction extract
- a literary heritage poem from the 18th century
- an extract from a 19th century short story.

Other ideas

- You could also use an extract from the 2011 novel *Jamrach's Menagerie* by Carol Birch (which has a section based on the real life account in the non-fiction extract) or an extract from *The Life of Pi* by Yann Martel. Both novels have memorable descriptions of tigers.
- Students could source modern non-fiction texts on tigers and compare how the writers' values and viewpoint have changed (for example, there is now more focus on animal welfare and conservation.)
- Students could research and compare tigers in children's fiction, for example A A Milne's loveable Tigger and Kipling's Shere Khan.
- It would be interesting to look at how tigers are viewed by different cultures.
- Students could also explore the wider symbolism of tigers in literature and consider what they represent (for example, strength, courage, wild beauty, exoticism, wildness, energy, power).