

Adjectives in context

Extract from 'The Brazilian Cat' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, published 1898

In this extract, Marshall King has been locked in an enclosure during the night with a dangerous puma (large wild cat) by his cousin, Everard, who wants him dead. He has managed to seek refuge on top of a cage.

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,
 5 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
 10 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-
 15 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.

refuge place of safety

undulating wavy

sinuous having many curves or bends

palpitating beating rapidly

Activity 1 Understanding the text

a) What time of day is it, according to the second paragraph?

.....

b) How has the arrival of morning affected the puma?

.....

c) Where in the room does the puma pace up and down?

.....

d) What does the narrator believe the puma intends to do?

.....

e) What noise does the puma make?

.....

f) Circle the word that is the correct meaning of the word 'grace' in this context.

elegance

prayer

delay

Activity 2 Exploring the writer's technique

a) What does the adjective 'savage' in the phrase 'savage eyes' imply about the puma?

.....

.....

b) Why does the writer use the comparative adjectives 'more dangerous and aggressive' to describe the puma's mood that morning?

.....

.....

c) The writer uses the adjectives 'continual' and 'deep, threatening' to describe the puma's growling. How do each of these adjectives help to convey the sound of the puma?

.....

.....

.....

d) i. Rewrite the following clause removing the adjectives:
'the vivid, palpitating scarlet of the glistening tongue which hung from the jet-black muzzle'

.....

ii. What is the effect of the clause without the adjectives?

.....

.....

Activity 3 Try it yourself

On a separate piece of paper, write a description of an exotic animal you have seen at a zoo, on holiday or in the media. Think carefully about the adjectives you use. You could use some of the adjectives you have learned from this text.