

Name: _____ Class: _____

Wilderness

By Carl Sandburg
1918

Carl Sandburg (1878-1967) was an American poet, writer, and editor who received three Pulitzer Prizes. This poem describes the speaker's connection to the wilderness. As you read, take notes on the characteristics of each animal.

- [1] There is a wolf in me... fangs pointed for tearing gashes... a red tongue for raw meat... and the hot lapping of blood — I keep this wolf because the wilderness gave it to me and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fox in me... a silver-gray fox... I sniff and guess... I pick things out of the wind and air... I nose in the dark night and take sleepers and eat them and hide the feathers... I circle and loop and double-cross.



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There is a hog in me... a snout and a belly... a machinery for eating and grunting... a machinery for sleeping satisfied in the sun — I got this too from the wilderness and the wilderness will not let it go.

There is a fish in me... I know I came from saltblue water-gates... I scurried with shoals¹ of herring... I blew waterspouts with porpoises... before land was... before the water went down... before Noah... before the first chapter of Genesis.

- [5] There is a baboon in me... clambering-clawed... dog-faced... yawping² a galoot's³ hunger... hairy under the armpits... here are the hawk-eyed hankering⁴ men... here are the blond and blue-eyed women... here they hide curled asleep waiting... ready to snarl and kill... ready to sing and give milk... waiting — I keep the baboon because the wilderness says so.

There is an eagle in me and a mockingbird... and the eagle flies among the Rocky Mountains of my dreams and fights among the Sierra crags⁵ of what I want... and the mockingbird warbles⁶ in the early forenoon before the dew is gone, warbles in the underbrush of my Chattanooga⁷ of hope, gushes over the blue Ozark foothills of my wishes — And I got the eagle and the mockingbird from the wilderness.

1. a large number of fish swimming together
2. to let out a harsh cry
3. a clumsy person
4. feeling a strong desire to have or do something
5. a steep or rugged cliff or rock face
6. to sing softly
7. This may refer to rocky land.

O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie,⁸ inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red-valve heart — and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart: it is a father and mother and lover: it came from God-Knows-Where: it is going to God-Knows-Where — For I am the keeper of the zoo: I say yes and no: I sing and kill and work: I am a pal of the world: I came from the wilderness.

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8. **Menagerie** (*noun*) a varied collection of animals, people, or objects (especially for display)

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the theme of the text?
 - A. Humans have more in common with animals than other humans.
 - B. Humans have an inescapable wildness that is a basic part of them.
 - C. Humans' worst qualities are hidden from the view of others.
 - D. Humans will always be drawn back to the wilderness.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "There is a wolf in me... fangs pointed for tearing gashes... a red tongue for raw meat... and the hot / lapping of blood" (Stanza 1)
 - B. "There is a hog in me... a snout and a belly... a machinery for eating and grunting... a machinery for / sleeping satisfied in the sun" (Stanza 3)
 - C. "they hide curled asleep waiting... ready to snarl and kill... ready to sing and give milk... waiting — I keep / the baboon because the wilderness says so." (Stanza 5)
 - D. "O, I got a zoo, I got a menagerie, inside my ribs, under my bony head, under my red-valve heart — / and I got something else: it is a man-child heart, a woman-child heart:" (Stanza 7)

3. PART A: Re-read stanza 5. How does this stanza contribute to the characterization of the speaker?
 - A. It emphasizes the demanding, aggressive quality of the speaker's wildness.
 - B. It draws attention to how the speaker feels at odds with his wildness.
 - C. It reflects the carefree nature of the speaker's wildness.
 - D. It highlights the controlled strength present in the speaker's wildness.

4. PART B: Which detail from stanza 5 best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. "hairy under the armpits..."
 - B. "here are the blond and blue-eyed women..."
 - C. "ready to snarl and kill..."
 - D. "ready to sing and give milk... waiting"

5. How does the structure of the poem contribute to its meaning?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Do you think that humans carry aspects of the wilderness inside of them? If so, in what ways?
2. In the context of the text, what makes you who you are? Does the speaker consider his identity more influenced by the traits of man or nature? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.