

PBS Lesson Series

ELA, Grade 7, Lesson 12

Teacher Packet

There are many words and phrases that show the movement, parts, and sound of a train in this poem. In the first stanza, the phrase “feed itself at tanks” shows right away the author is talking about a machine that needs oil or gas to keep going. The phrase, “lap the miles” shows the speed of the train and the phrase, “step/Around a pile of mountains” shows how the train can travel easily through mountains. The lines, “In horrid, hooting stanza” create the sound of the train’s whistle. The next line, “Then chase itself down hill” helps the reader picture the train speeding down the hill. When the author uses the words, “valleys, mountains, shanties, quarry, and hill,” this helps the reader picture the train traveling for many miles, through many different types of landscapes.

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks,
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

I like to see it lap the miles,
And lick the valleys up,
And stop to feed itself at tanks,
And then, prodigious, step

Around a pile of mountains,
And, supercilious, peer
In shanties by the sides of roads;
And then a quarry pare

To fit its sides, and crawl between,
Complaining all the while
In horrid, hooting stanza;
Then chase itself down hill

And neigh like Boanerges;
Then, punctual as a star,
Stop-docile and omnipotent-
At its own stable door.

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Stop-docile and omnipotent-
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Why does the author compare the train to a horse
rather than just describing it more literally?