

# Fog

—Carl Sandburg



## About the Poet

Carl August Sandburg was born on 6 January, 1878 in Galesburg, Illinois, United States. He was an American poet, writer, and editor. He won three Pulitzer Prizes: two for his poetry and one for his biography of Abraham Lincoln. Sandburg was widely regarded as a major figure in contemporary literature. He died on 22 July, 1967 in North Carolina, United States.

## THEME

The theme that Sandburg is trying to convey to his readers is nature's uncaring attitude towards mankind. It is obvious from the poem that the fog and people exist within the same space, but it's also clear that the fog (nature) has a sort of aloof attitude at the intrusion of mankind in its space. A cat is a perfect animal to further illustrate that since cats tend to be fiercely independent and quite aloof towards just about everything. Thematically, the poet is showing his reader that people are a part of nature, but nature isn't about to bend to the will and desires of people. It is uncaring and will do what it pleases.

## Summary

Fog is a poem that ascribes significance to small occurrences in nature. Through the poem, he wishes to highlight the immense beauty of the nature. He tells that the fog comes silently and slowly. To prove his point, the poet makes a comparison of the arrival and departure of fog with that of a cat.

The poet says that the fog comes silently and slowly like a cat. When it comes, it does not disturb us. It sits silently as a cat does. It goes on falling and looking silently over the harbour and the city. Then just as suddenly as it arrived, it moves on.

## Explanation of the Poem

1. The fog comes  
on little cat feet.

**Exp-** In the above lines, the poet says that fog comes just like a cat. Here, the poet compares the fog with the characteristics of a cat. Just like a cat comes slowly on its little feet, fog also comes silently.

2. It sits looking  
over harbour and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.

**Exp-** In the given lines, the poet says that just like a cat, fog comes and sits over the harbour and city, covering everything. Then, it slowly moves without making any noise, like a cat, and moves on to pounce upon some other place.

## POETIC DEVICES

### Rhyme scheme

The poet does not follow any identifiable rhyme scheme in this poem.

### Metaphor

This poetic device is used throughout the entire length of the poem to compare the fog with a cat.

### Transferred epithet

This poetic device is used when an emotion is attributed to a non-living thing. In this poem, the poet uses the device of transferred epithet in the 3rd line of the 2nd stanza when he writes the phrase “silent haunches”. It is not literally that the cat’s haunches are silent, for they don’t even have the ability to speak, but that the way in which the cat sits on its haunches does not make any sound.

### Personification

The poet has personified fog by using phrases like: “Comes on little cat feet”; “Sits looking over harbour”.

### Analogy

It is the comparison between two things on the basis of structure for the purpose of clarification. The poet has used the analogy to show us a connection between fog and cat.

### Imagery

The poet has given us the visual description of the fog in the entire poem.

## ANSWERS TO NCERT QUESTIONS

### THINKING ABOUT THE POEM

- What does Sandburg think the fog is like?
  - How does the fog come?
  - What does ‘it’ in the third line refer to?
  - Does the poet actually say that the fog is like a cat? Find three things that tell us that the fog is like a cat.

- Ans.**
- Sandburg thinks that the fog is like a little cat sitting on her haunches.
  - The fog comes silently and slowly.
  - In the third line, ‘it’ refers to the cat and the fog as well.
  - The poet does not say it. But he refers to it through a metaphor. The three things are: (a) The fog comes. (b) It sits looking over harbour and city on silent haunches. (c) It then moves on.

- You know that a metaphor compares two things by transferring a feature of one thing to the other (See Unit 1).

- Find metaphors for the following words and complete the table below. Also try to say how they are alike. The first is done for you.

Storm	tiger	pounces over the fields, growl
Train		

Fire		
School		
Home		

- (ii) Think about a storm. Try to visualise the force of the storm, hear the sound of the storm, feel the power of the storm and the sudden calm that happens afterwards. Write a poem about the storm comparing it with an animal.

Ans. (i)

Storm	tiger	pounces over the fields, growl
Train	snake	moves on its rail, hisses
Fire	dragon	gobbles up, roars
School	temple of learning	teaches, instructs, ringing bells
Home	cave	safety, comfort

(ii) Students do it yourself.

3. Does this poem have a rhyme scheme? Poetry that does not have an obvious rhythm or rhyme is called 'free verse'.

Ans. The poem does not have a rhyme scheme. It has a free verse.

## ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

### Extract-based Questions

(5 Marks each)

Read the following extract carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1. The fog comes  
On little cat feet.  
It sits looking  
Over harbour and city  
On silent haunches  
And then moves on

(CBSE Question Bank)

- (a) Choose the option with qualities of the cat that Carl Sandburg applies to the fog. (1)

- (1) Cats are independent animals, they don't follow rules, they slip and slide in and out of our lives as they please.
- (2) Cats are distrustful of stranger and can be jealous and moody.
- (3) Cats are stealthy, moving in slow motion at times and they appear to be moving in a mysterious fashion.
- (4) Cats often communicate with a combination of a distinctive sound and body language.
- (5) Cats like to move on their own pace and before you know it, they've disappeared.

(i) Only (1)

(ii) (2), (3) and (4)

(iii) (1), (3) and (5)

(iv) Only (4)



- (b) State whether the following statement is TRUE or FALSE. (1)

The intention of the poet in the given extract is to criticise the atrocities of human being against nature in a clever and amusing way.

- (c) Stealth is an important aspect of fog. What are the two instances from the poem 'Fog' that suggest the same? (2)

- (d) The poem is an extended metaphor, the poet seeing the fog as a cat that comes on tiny, silent feet, as cats do when they are stalking. (1)

Pick the most suitable example that supports the statement.

- (i) Only a cat can move so visibly, almost perceptibly, and in sheer arrogance.
- (ii) Only a cat can impersonate like fog and move so gracefully like it.
- (iii) Only a cat can move in such a way, almost imperceptibly, and in complete silence.
- (iv) Only a cat can create such an image in the minds of the readers.

Ans. (a) (iii) 1, 3 and 5

(b) True

(c) The cat does not make a sound while it moves and the same does the fog. The way the fog sits is very much like a cat sitting on its haunches, looking here and there over the city and the same does the fog enveloping the city.

(d) (ii) Only a cat can impersonate like fog and move so gracefully like it.

### Short Answer Questions

(40–50 words: 3 Marks each)

1. The poet actually says that the fog is like a cat. With reference to the poem, 'Fog' explain this statement.

Ans. The fog is compared to a cat. He says a cat does not make a sound when it walks, so is the fog. But its presence is apparent. Its 'silence' is very much like that of a cat moving on its little feet. The way the fog sits is very much like a cat sitting on its haunches, looking here and there.

2. How does the poet make the fog like a living creature?

Ans. The poet makes fog a living creature by comparing it to a cat. He says that the movement and mannerisms of the fog, is similar to that of a cat. The silence, and light footedness of the cat is replicated in the arrival and departure of the fog. The way the fog settles down, is also very similar to the way a cat settles down on its haunches.

3. Why does the poet use the phrase "silent haunches"? Substantiate your answer with reference to the poem 'Fog'. (CBSE Question Bank)

Ans. The poet wants to emphasise the silent nature of the fog. The way a fog sits is very much like a cat sitting on its haunches. This is as if the fog remains a silent spectator of the happenings in the city.

4. Would you describe the role of the fog as active or passive? Support your answer with reference to the poem 'Fog'. (Competency-based Question) (CBSE Question Bank)

Ans. Yes, I would describe the role of the fog as passive in the poem. Firstly, the fog appears slowly and silently from nowhere. It is just watching and looking at the city and harbour. It remains a silent spectator. Then it slowly and silently disappears.

5. **Comment, in detail, on the significance of the closing phrase of the poem – ‘moves on’.** (CBSE Question Bank)

**Ans.** At the end of the poem, the closing phrase ‘moves on’ is very significant because it describes the departure of the fog which very silently and unpredictably, similar to the departure of the cat, vanishes without being noticed by anyone.

6. **Stealth is an important aspect of fog. State any two instances from the poem ‘Fog’ that suggest the same.** (CBSE Question Bank)

**Ans.** The fog comes to the city stealthily just like a cat. Before moving on, it sits looking over the harbour and the city before disappearing. The atmosphere all around is filled with silence and mystery.

### Long Answer Question

(100–120 words: 6 Marks each)

1. **What metaphor has the poet used in the poem ‘Fog’? Do you think it is appropriate?**

**Ans.** In the poem ‘Fog’, Carl Sandburg has metaphorically compared the fog to a cat. The first strange thing about the metaphor is the comparison of a phenomenon with a living animal. Perhaps, the poet wants to emphasise the silent nature and mysterious ways of the fog, so he has compared the fog to a cat. A cat does not make a sound when it walks. So also is the fog, but its presence is apparent. Its ‘silence’ is very much like that of a cat moving on its little feet. Then, the fog stays in its place looking over the harbour and city which creates a hazy atmosphere all around. The way it sits is very much like a cat sitting on its haunches, looking here and there before it makes a move. This is as if the fog remains a silent spectator of the happenings in the city. Whatever the purpose may be, both the fog as well as a cat make their impression and make their presence felt. The comparison of the fog to a cat seems very appropriate because, reading the poem, one feels that truly, the fog approaches stealthily, just like a cat.

2. **Do you agree with the poet’s comparison of fog to a cat or do you feel some other image would have done justice to the poem?**

(Competency-based Question) (CBSE Question Bank)

**Ans.** Yes, I do agree with the poet’s comparison of fog to a cat. The poet has presented nature in its raw and natural state. The fog comes as if from nowhere. It comes suddenly and silently like a cat. The fog’s power is overwhelming. It engulfs everything – the city and the harbour – in its all-embracing fold. Its silent power is felt everywhere. The fog stays but not for so long. Then following the law of change, it disappears. No one knows where. The comparison of the fog to a cat seems very appropriate because truly the fog approaches stealthily just like a cat.

3. **The poet beautifully compares the fog to a cat. Choose any two animals from ‘How to Tell Wild Animals’ that do not have qualities that can be drawn out to be compared with a fog.** (CBSE Question Bank)

**Ans.** The two animals from the poem ‘How to Tell Wild Animals’ that might not have any qualities to be compared with the fog would be Asian Lion and Leopard. The Asian Lion when approaches, roars so strongly that a person can die out of fear. Leopard, on the other hand, walks casually in the jungle, and will suddenly leap and keep jumping on a person. These qualities do not match with the characteristics of a fog. The fog comes and goes silently. It never stays at one place for a long time. It engulfs everything in its all-embracing fold.

## QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

### Extract-based Questions

Read the following extract carefully and answer the questions that follow.

1.                   The fog comes  
                      on little cat feet.  
                      It sits looking  
                      over harbour and city  
                      on silent haunches  
                      and then moves on.

- (a) Does the poet actually say that the fog is like a cat? Find any two things that tell us that the fog is like a cat. (2)
- (b) The words that describe the movement of cat can be stealthily, sneakily, surreptitiously, quietly, covertly and voluntarily. (True/False) (1)
- (c) The poem doesn't have any apt message but serves as an inspiration to observe: (1)
- (i) silently the atrocities animals face.
- (ii) gently the insolent attitude of the cat.
- (iii) keenly and appreciate the many wonders of nature.
- (iv) willingly the wrath of nature.
- (d) *'Fog occurrence impacts a wide variety of human activities worldwide.'* Which one of the following doesn't correspond to the fact? (1)
- (i) Reduced visibility in fog quickly impacts our ability to drive.
- (ii) Fog causes the cold to penetrate through the layers of warm clothing, adding to your distress.
- (iii) Fog adversely impacts breathing.
- (iv) Stubble burning is one of the reasons of fog.

### Short Answer Questions

(40–50 words)

1. What does 'it sits looking over harbour' convey?
2. Do you think the poet has lent grace to the fog? How can you say so?
3. Explain the imagery in the poem 'Fog'.
4. What does 'on little cat feet' mean in the poem?

### Long Answer Questions

(100–120 words)

1. Think of any other animal that can best replace the cat in the poem, 'Fog'. Write a few lines that would tell us about the resemblance of fog with that animal.
2. What moral does the poet want to give us through this poem?

