



William Blake, *The Tyger*

In this poem, William Blake describes the terrific beauty of the tiger that still speaks of the greatness of its maker. The tiger is the nemesis of the lamb and represents evil, violence and cruelty.

The poem is composed of six stanzas. Each stanza is formed of four lines. The structure is circular because it ends with a stanza similar to the first one. This implies that the questions asked in the first stanza will never be answered. The only difference between the first and the last stanza is the use of two different verbs: *could* and *dare*. *Could* implies that making such a powerful creature is a question of strength, while *dare* refers to the challenge of making such a terrifying creature.



Tyger! Tyger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,¹
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame² thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps³ or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare⁴ he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize⁵ the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist⁶ the sinews⁷ of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread⁸ hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer?⁹ what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil?¹⁰ what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears,¹¹
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?

GLOSSARY

1 dark chaos before the Creation – 2 build up – 3 abysses – 4 had the courage – 5 take hold of – 6 contort – 7 tendons – 8 terrible – 9 instrument to beat metal – 10 block to work metal on – 11 long weapons

ACTIVITIES

- 1 List the adjectives that characterize the tiger and those that characterize the maker.
Tiger:
Maker:
As you can see the poet insists on just two: what do these adjectives suggest?
- 2 In the fifth stanza the lamb is mentioned, suggesting a connection between the two poems and the two animals as symbols of good and evil. Do you think that good and evil are necessary and were created by the same hand? What does the existence of both good and evil imply for man?

