

A donkey

His face is what I like.

And his head, much too big for his body- a toy head,

A great, rabbit-eared, pantomime head,

And his friendly rabbit face,

His big, friendly, humorous eyes-which can turn wicked,

Long and devilish, when he lays his ears back.

But mostly he's comical- and that's what I like.

I like the joke he seems

Always just about to tell me. And the laugh,

The rusty, pump-house engine that cranks up laughter 10 From some long-ago, far off,
laughter-less desert-

The dry, hideous guffaw

That makes his great teeth nearly fall out.

Ted Hughes

1. What does the speaker of the poem feel are the two most likeable aspects of the donkey?
2. Describe in as much detail as possible, what the phrases "toy head" and "friendly rabbit face" tell us about the appearance of the donkey.
3. In the first verse of the poem the poet makes it clear that the donkey's face can have two moods.
 - a) What are these moods ?
 - b) How does the donkey achieve them?
4. The poet spends a lot of time in the second verse describing the donkey's "laugh". What comparison is used to describe the creation of the laughter and how does this help us understand what the laughter sounds like?
5. What do you think the reference to the "desert" in line 11 is about? Why is the desert "laughter —less"?
6. Is the donkey's laughter a pleasant sound? Give a clear reason for your answer.
7. If you had to choose an animal to be the subject of a poem which would you choose? Explain **in detail** why your chosen animal would be such a good subject.

Comprehension

In the old days, in the years that have gone before us, the land and the sea felt a great emptiness, a yearning. The mountains were like a stairway to heaven, and the lush green rainforest was a rippling cloak of many colours. The sky was iridescent, swirling with the patterns of wind and clouds; sometimes it reflected the prisms of rainbow or southern aurora. The sea was ever-changing,

5 shimmering and seamless to the sky. This was the well at the bottom of the world and when you 5 looked into it you felt you could see to the end of forever. This is not to say that the land and the sea were without its vivacity. The tuatara, the ancient lizard with its third eye, was standing sentinel here, unblinking in the hot sun, watching and waiting to the east. Within the warm stomach of the rainforests, birds foraged for succulent insects. The forests were

10 loud with the clatter of tree bark, chatter of insects and murmur of fish-laden streams. The sea, too, teemed with fish but they also seemed to be waiting. They swam in brilliant shoals, like rains of glittering dust, throughout the greenstone depths. Sometimes from far off a white shape would be seen flying through the sea but it would only be the serene flight of the stingray with the spike on its tail.

15 Waiting. Waiting for the seeding. Waiting for the gifting. Waiting for the blessing to come. Suddenly, looking up at the surface, the fish began to see the dark bellies of the canoes from the east. The first of the Ancients were coming, journeying from their island kingdom beyond the horizon. Then, after a period, canoes were seen to be returning to the east, making long cracks on the surface sheen. The land and the sea sighed with gladness:

20

We have been found.

The news is being taken back to the place of the Ancients.

Our blessing will come soon.

In that waiting time, earth and sea began to feel the sharp pangs of need, for an end to the yearning. The forests sent sweet perfumes upon the eastern winds. The sea flashed continuously with flying

25 fish leaping high to look beyond the horizon and to be the first to announce the coming; in the shallows the chameleon seahorses pranced at attention. The only reluctant ones were the fairy people who retreated with their silver laughter to caves in glistening waterfalls. The sun rose and set, rose and set. Then one day, at noon, the first sighting was made, on the horizon, a dark shape rising from the greenstone depths of the ocean, awesome, huge, breaching

30 through the surface and hurling itself skyward before falling seaward again. Underwater the muted thunder boomed like a great door opening far away, and both sea and land trembled from the impact of that downward plunging. Suddenly the sea was filled with awesome singing, a song with eternity in it, a song to the land. The dark shape rising, rising again. A whale, gigantic. A sea monster. Just at it burst through the sea, a

35 flying fish leaping high in its ecstasy saw water and air streaming like thunderous foam from that noble beast and knew, ah yes, that the time had come. Then the flying fish saw that astride the head of the whale, as it broke skywards, was a man. He was wondrous to look upon, the whale rider. The water streamed away from him and he opened his mouth to gasp in the cold air. His eyes were shining with splendour. His body dazzled with diamond spray.

- 40 He seemed, with all his strength, to be pulling the whale into the sky. Rising, rising. And the man felt the power of the whale as it propelled itself from the sea. He saw far off the land long sought and now found, and he began to fling small spears seaward and landward on his magnificent journey toward the land.

Read the passage and then answer the following questions as fully as you can.

1. When do you think the passage is set?
2. How would you describe the mood that is established by the opening paragraph?
3. Explain **in your own words** what the description of the canoes “making long cracks on the surface sheen” (line 18 &19) means.
4. a) What do you think the land and sea is waiting for in the first half of the passage?
b) Find two phrases from the whole passage to support your answer.
5. Who do you think the Ancients are? Give a reason for your answer.
6. Reread lines 28-36. Explain in as much detail as you can the things that make the whale so powerful.