

VOCABULARY

The following vocabulary words can be found in the video *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, as well as the poem of the same name. Fill in the number of each term next to its closest definition. Next to each definition, you will find a context of the word from the poem.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. cremate | 6. heed |
| 2. parka | 7. mushing |
| 3. loathed | 8. moil |
| 4. trice | 9. brawn |

___ strongly disliked; "In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load...how I _____ that thing."

___ to work hard, especially during times of great difficulty; "There are strange things done in the midnight sun, by the men who _____ for gold."

___ to burn a dead body until it is reduced to ashes; "So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll _____ my last remains."

___ the act of traveling across snow on a sled pulled by dogs; "On a Christmas Day we were _____ our way over the Dawson trail."

___ great strength; "You may tax your _____ and brains, but you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate these last remains."

___ a brief space of time; "It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a _____ it was called the Alice May."

___ a coat worn in cold, snowy conditions; "Talk of your cold! through the _____ 's fold it stabbed like a driven nail."

___ to listen to and take seriously; "A pal's last need is a thing to _____, so I swore I would not fail."

THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE

by Robert W. Service

Below is the full text of the poem, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. Read the poem carefully, then answer the questions that follow.

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee,
where the cotton blooms and blows
Why he left his home in the South to roam
'round the Pole, God only knows.
He was always cold but the land of gold
seemed to hold him like a spell;
Though he'd often say in his homely way
that he'd sooner live in Hell.

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way
over the Dawson trail.
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold
it stabbed like a driven nail.
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze
till sometimes we couldn't see,
It wasn't much fun, but the only one
to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight
in our robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead
were dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and "Cap", says he,
"I'll cash in this trip, I guess;
And if I do, I'm asking that you
won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no;
then he says with a sort of moan,
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold
till I'm chilled clean through to the bone
Yet 'taint being dead—it's my awful dread
of the icy grave that pains;
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair,
you'll cremate my last remains.

A pal's last need is a thing to heed,
so I swore I would not fail;
And we started on at the streak of dawn
but God! he looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day
of his home in Tennessee;
And before nightfall a corpse was all
that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death,
and I hurried, horror-driven
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid,
because of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say,
"You may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you
to cremate these last remains".

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid,
and the trail has its own stern code,
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb
in my heart how I cursed that load!
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight,
while the huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows—
Oh God, how I loathed the thing!

And every day that quiet clay
seemed to heavy and heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent
and the grub was getting low.
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad,
but I swore I would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing,
and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge,
and a derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice
it was called the Alice May,
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit,
and I looked at my frozen chum;
Then "Here", said I, with a sudden cry,
"is my cre-ma-tor-eum"!

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor
and I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around,
and I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared
such a blaze you seldom see,
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal,
and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like
to hear him sizzle so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled,
and the wind began to blow,
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled
down my cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak
went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow
I wrestled with grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about
ere again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said,
"I'll just take a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked".
Then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm,
in the heart of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile,
and he said, "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear
you'll let in the cold and storm—
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee,
it's the first time I've been warm".

*There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.*

Name _____ Date _____

“The Cremation of Sam McGee”
Poetry Analysis

Directions: Answer the questions using the poem. (Use the hints in parentheses to assist with the correct answer)

1. Who is the author?

2. Who is the speaker?

3. What is the format?

- a. stanza(s):
- b. Lines per stanza:
- c. Rhyme scheme(s):

4. What type of poem is this?

5. What is the setting of the poem?

6. Where was Sam McGee from?

7. What was Sam in search of?

8. What did Sam despise the most?

9. What lines support the extreme cold?

10. Why did the speaker risk a lot to cremate Sam?

11. Where was Sam cremated?

Name _____ Date _____

“The Cremation of Sam McGee”
Poetry Analysis

12. “And the dogs were fed, and the stars o’erhead, were dancing heel and toe” is an example of which sound device?

13. The speaker regretted at times that he committed to cremating Sam. What lines support this? (you may put the number of the lines or write the lines)

14. “...the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell” What two types of figurative language is this an example of?

15. What line supports the notion that Sam was hallucinating with fever?

16. “And he wore a smile, you could see a mile” What is this an example of? (two types of figurative language and one example of sound device)

17. “The Northern Lights have seen queer sights” is an example of which type of figurative language?

18. What is “And the stars came out, and they danced about..” an example of?

19. What are the various names that the speaker called Sam or used to refer to him?

20. What was the name of the derelict?

21. What line supports that the speaker was going against the rules to carry Sam and cremate him?

22. What is symbolic about the “cremation” in relation to Sam?

**The Cremation of Sam McGee:
REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Where was Sam McGee's hometown?
2. Why was Sam traveling in the frigid Arctic?
3. Sam made a last request to his traveling companion, Cap. What was the request?
4. How did Cap feel about this promise later?
5. What happened to Cap's sled dogs? How did this make things worse for Cap?
6. Why was Cap unable to cremate Sam's remains in the wilderness?
7. Where did Cap finally cremate Sam's remains?
8. Hours after placing Sam's body in the boiler, Cap got up the courage to look inside. What did he see in the boiler?

FIGURES OF SPEECH

Simile is a figure of speech which compares two things by using the words "like" or "as."

Example: The wind cut like a knife through the dark night .

Personification is a figure of speech which gives an object human qualities.

Example: The wind seemed to breathe in a deep sigh.

Hyperbole is a figure of speech which uses exaggeration to create an image.

Example: I tried to explain it a million times.

Below are passages from the poem, *The Cremation of Sam McGee*. For each passage, identify the figure of speech being used: metaphor, simile, personification or hyperbole.

1. "Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail."

3. "And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,"

4. "And he wore a smile you could see a mile,"

5. "He always seemed cold but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;"

6. "The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,"

7. "It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the bone,"

8. "In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load!"

THE CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE, Part 2

1. What is the main theme of the poem? In other words, what message is the poet trying to share with his audience?
2. Find at least three examples of good detail which help to build the setting of the poem.
3. What does the following passage mean to you, "In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load!"
4. In your own words, explain the meaning of what happens at the end of the poem.
5. What happens to the dogs in the program? In your opinion, is this different than what happens in the poem? Why?
6. What details, not found in the poem, were added to the program to help us relate to Sam's character?

