

Arctic Ox

Level: Grades 3-12

Sometimes the most difficult thing about writing is figuring out what to write about. The poet Marianne Moore loved taking walks around the city and visiting the zoo to find interesting things to inspire her poetry. But she also loved to read. She read poems, as you might expect, but she also loved magazine articles. “The Arctic Ox” was inspired by an article written about the unusual animal which was published in a magazine called the Atlantic Monthly. When the author of the article found out that his article inspired Marianne Moore to write a poem, he sent her this little figurine of an arctic ox that was made by an Alaskan artist. She treasured it and displayed it on a shelf above her fireplace.



In this excerpt from her Arctic Ox poem, she calls the animals **qivies** which is sort of a nickname she came up with based on the word Qiviuq. Qiviuq is the name of the Arctic Ox’s downy fur.

Camels are snobbish
and sheep, unintelligent;
water buffaloes, neurasthenic—
even murderous.

Reindeer seem over-serious,
whereas these scarce *qivies*,
with golden fleece and winning ways,
outstripping every fur-bearer—
there in Vermont quiet—
could demand Bold Ruler’s diet:

Mountain Valley water,
dandelions, carrots, oats—
encouraged as well by bed
made fresh three times a day—
to roll and revel in the hay.
Insatiable for willow
leaves alone, our goatlike
qivi-curvi-capricornus
sheds down ideal for a nest.
Song-birds find *qiviut* best.
Suppose you had a bag
of it; you could spin a pound
into a twenty-four-or-five-
mile thread—one, forty-ply—
that will not shrink in any dye.

If you feel inspired to write a poem, try using an article as inspiration. Find an article that fascinates you. It can be something you found online or in a magazine. Use the subject of the article as the subject of a poem.

We'd love to see your poems if you'd like to share! Email them to eparker@rosenbach.org

Would you like to know more about the Arctic? Check out this article:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/m/musk-ox/>