**The Beast of Bodmin Moor Fiction 1A**

Nicole Panteli is a journalist for a weekly local newspaper. They send her to the large, remote and

wild area of countryside where she lived as a child, to find out more about the so-called big cat which

is preying on local sheep.

Nicole was lost. It was easy to lose one’s way on the moor, especially on a November afternoon when

the light was thickening and the landscape stretched the same unvariegated grey in all directions. She

drove along a narrow, empty road, looking for a road sign or any building which might contain an

inhabitant to give her directions. A fleeting, shadowy movement by the roadside reminded her of the

tales of the Beast of Bodmin Moor which had fascinated her as a child. She remembered being told

that a vicious predator had killed large numbers of sheep, but that a government investigation had not

found evidence to prove that there was a foreign big cat in the area, and had concluded that native

wild animals were the culprits. Originally excited when she heard that a leopard skull had been found

in the river, she was disappointed when the local museum was convinced that it was part of a

leopard-skin rug put there as a hoax.

However, the sightings and attacks continued over the next 20 years after she left the moor, and now

she was returning to find out why the local farmers were still convinced that the injuries to their

livestock proved that the killer was a type of cat. She already knew that they refused to believe it was

a native animal because its appearance was not consistent with it being a pony, wild boar or large

dog. Officials from the nearby zoo had recently identified pawprints left in mud on the moor as the

tracks of a puma, and a 20-second video had just been released which seemed to show big cats

roaming nearby.

As she rounded the next bend, thinking about these things, she saw a startlingly large, black feline

cross the road with an unhurried, sinuous, fluid movement. Its thick, sinewy shoulders suggested

massive strength and speed, like that of engine pistons. As it passed, it turned to stare at her and its

great, yellow, black-slitted orbs were caught in the headlights. She noticed its pricked, tufted ears and

its short, coarse, raven-black coat before it turned, raising and waving its curved snake of a tail as if

making a victory salute. The spectral vision dissolved into the bushes, leaving her with a thumping

heart and the feeling that she had witnessed a supernatural manifestation.

A little further along she took a turning with a handwritten sign pointing to ‘Gables Farm’. She had to

leave the car and cross a rickety, rotting footbridge over a rushing stream. Another battered sign,

nailed to a tree, bore the ominous words, ambiguously addressed: ‘Wild Big Cats – Keep Out’.

A shiny, weather-beaten man with tremendous whiskers and a crusty hat the colour of an overcooked

pie appeared at the farm gate, carrying a rifle. When she explained she was lost and had just

had an unnerving experience, he took her into his kitchen and sat her down at a stained oak table

while he made tea and talked about the beast.

‘You always know when it’s about. Rabbits and foxes disappear and birds stop singing. If the ministry

people knew anything about country life they’d know it couldn’t be a dog. If it’s a dog there’s noise,

and wool and mess everywhere. But a cat goes in to the kill quickly, eats its fill, and slinks off.’ The

farmer told her that the beast owed him a thousand pounds for dead livestock, and that other farmers

had sold their flocks after losing so many sheep. His neighbour had captured the beast on video,

along with the tell-tale signs of four long scratch marks on the mauled sheep, and had also found

hairs which she’d sent off for analysis, but had received no result.

The farmer continued: ‘The only reason to suppress the result would be to avoid panic. Another

neighbour got hold of a recording of a puma mating call, and we recognised the scream we hear at

night. Everyone round here believes in the beast, even though we’re sceptical about most things and

haven’t got time to waste concocting fantasies.’ His parting shot as Nicole thanked him and left was to

say, ‘We don’t want the beast shot, but we do want it acknowledged and kept under control so it

doesn’t continue to destroy our livelihoods.’

**Questions**

A1 – List 5 things that suggest the beast is real?

A2 – How does the narrator show Nicole is sceptical about the sightings?

Write about the language used

A3 – What impression are you given about the area?

A4 – How does the writer build tension and drama in the article?
A5 – “Local people are scaremongering about the Beast” How far would you agree or disagree with this statement?