# I Am a Cat (Chapters I–II)

**Natsume Sōseki** · *1905–06 · Kan-ichi Ando translation (1906, revised by the author)*

A cat with no name, born in a damp place and found by a student, is taken in by a Tokyo schoolteacher, Mr. Sneaze. From the household he watches the master and the visitors who come to talk, and judges them with a dry humor. The hosted text is Ando's English version of only the first two chapters. Sōseki's comic novel is a satire of the new Meiji educated class by a narrator who sees the weaknesses of men.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

## What do human beings look like to a creature who sees them every day and has no reason to flatter them?

The cat is a sharp, vain, and funny observer. He sees that the master is a poor teacher who pretends to be a scholar, that the aesthetician Meitei tells tall tales for sport, and that the household runs on bluffs and routine. The satire is gentle, and the cat's own pretensions get their share of it. By the end of the hosted chapters he has not learned a name, and he is content to live and die nameless in the teacher's house.

KEY CHARACTERS

**the cat**
*The narrator, who has no name and a high opinion of himself.*

**the master (Mr. Sneaze)**
*A teacher who pretends to be a scholar.*

**Meitei**
*An aesthetician and friend of the master, a teller of tales.*

**Kangetsu**
*A young scientist who visits.*

**Kurumaya's Black**
*A large neighborhood cat.*

**Miss Mikè**
*The cat's neighbor.*

Grades 9–12
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01
### The Cat and the Student
CHAPTER I, OPENING

*The cat tells us he has no name and no memory of where he was born. The first creature he sees is a student, and he is dropped in the kitchen of a house.*

- The famous first lines set the comic tone.
- The cat's first look at a human face is of a smooth kettle.
- The maid dashes him to the kitchen floor, and so he settles in the house.

02
### The Master
CHAPTER I

*The master is a teacher who shuts himself in his study. His family think him a scholar, and he tries to appear so. The cat sees his habits at close range.*

- He naps over books and draws poorly.
- The cat's neighbor, Miss Mikè, complains of man's ideas of ownership.
- A friend, the aesthetician, teases him into taking up painting.

03
### The Black Cat
CHAPTER I

*Kurumaya's Black, a large and rough cat, boasts of his rat-catching and his courage. The cat finds himself looking up to him and then, after a story about a weasel, seeing his limits.*

- Black's bragging is the cat's first sight of cat vanity.
- The weasel story shows a limit to Black's courage.
- Black later becomes crippled, a quiet end to the boast.

04
### Visitors and Talk
CHAPTER II

*The household receives visitors, including Meitei and Kangetsu. They talk of Balzac's invented name, of a restaurant trick, of concerts, and of poems.*

- Meitei's stories are comic inventions.
- The master's diary is an unflattering portrait.
- Conversations wander among many odd topics.

05
### The Cat Stays
CHAPTER II, ENDING

*The master's habits and the cat's life continue unchanged. The cat will live nameless in the teacher's house.*

- The cat's final lines are a short, wry resolution.
- He does not catch rats, and he still dislikes the maid.
- The story ends without a plot, as a sketch of a life.

Satire | Learning and Pretense | Meiji Japan | The Observer

## What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The book is told by a cat. Notice when the cat's own vanity shows.
2. The hosted text is only two chapters. Notice how the structure is loose and episodic.
3. The humor depends on cultural references to Meiji Japan. Read the translator's notes.
4. Think about what the cat sees that the people do not.

**Summaries** are original to Classics Library. Read the Kan-ichi Ando translation (1906, revised by the author) (Zea Books (University of Nebraska–Lincoln Libraries), I Am a Cat, 2021 (ISBN 978-1-60962-219-0; doi 10.32873/unl.dc.zea.1310), a retyped public-domain edition of the 1906 Hattori Shoten translation; checked against the 1906 scan on Wikimedia Commons (File:I am a Cat (1906).djvu, from HathiTrust)), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/soseki-i-am-a-cat/.