

## The Prelude by William Wordsworth

### **The one about ice skating on a winter's evening**

The poem describes the sheer thrill and exultation of children as they skate in the gathering darkness of a frosty day. Wordsworth uses imagery of sound, sight and the natural world to bring alive the vivid and joyous experience. The poem has a nostalgic feel and Wordsworth looks back at the innocence and happiness of his childhood.

Key quotes:

- The poem opens with imagery to do with winter, such as “frosty”, and suggests the premature end of a wintery day. Images of warmth, such as “blaz’d” and “the sun” are contrasted with this
- The use of verbs such as “wheel’d”, “hiss’d” and “flew”, such rapid movement, while the noun “rapture” suggests the intense enjoyment of the boys skating on the lake
- The natural world is represented in the poem, with “woodland pleasure”, and “leafless trees”, while the humans are also portrayed as animals. The skaters are all “shod with steel” like “untir’d” horses, chasing the “hunted hare”
- There is imagery to do with sounds, the pack is “bellowing”, the icy crags “tinkled like iron”, there is an “alien sound/Of melancholy
- Final words – “in the west/The orange sky of evening died away”, which suggests the vivid image of a sunset as we return to the warm glow of the evening

Context:

- William Wordsworth was one of the first and most influential of the Romantic era.
- The Prelude is nostalgic in its thoughts about his childhood and the intense feelings of delight he experienced when he was walked or, as a child, played in the countryside.

Structure

- The poem begins with the end of the day and the warm light of the setting sun reflecting in the cottage windows
- In the middle of the poem, the young Wordsworth ignores his mother’s calls to come in for his tea and instead delights at skating with the other boys from the village. They are playing tag and chasing each other across the ice and this reminds Wordsworth of a pack of hounds hunting a fox
- The end of the poem reflects the end of the day as the sun sets and the stars appear

Possible Themes and Links:

- The natural world – *Death of a Naturalist, To Autumn*

The poem is filled with imagery to do with winter, and the end of the year as well as the end of the day.

Excerpt from **The Prelude**

Rural setting

And in the frosty season when the sun

Was set, and visible for many a mile

The cottage windows through the twilight blaz'd,

I heed not the summons—happy time

It was, indeed, for all of us; to me

It was a time of rapture: clear and loud

The village clock toll'd six; I wheel'd about,

Proud and exalting, like an untir'd horse,

That cares not for his home—All shod with steel,

We hiss'd along the polish'd ice, in games

Confederate, imitative of the chase

And woodland pleasures, the resounding horn,

The Pack loud bellowing, and the hunted hare.

So through the darkness and the cold we flew,

And not a voice was idle; with the din,

Meanwhile, the precipices rang aloud,

The leafless trees, and every icy crag,

Tinkled like iron, while the distant hills

Into the tumult sent an alien sound

Of melancholy, not unnoticed, while the stars,

Eastward, were sparkling clear, and in the west

The orange sky of evening died away.

There are images of warmth, which contrasts with the winter scene and the images of darkness. The verb "blaz'd" suggests fire and comfort.

There is a sense of communal or shared happiness, between the boys and in the larger community.

The use of the noun rapture suggests a joyous ecstasy.

The poet uses verbs to do with movement and sound.

Wordsworth summons up the idea of the hunt as the boys chase each other across the ice – this is vivid because of its reliance on imagery to do with the senses.

The scene is filled with energy and excitement.

The natural world is drawn as hard and frozen, but it has its own voice. The verbs "rang" and "tinkled" suggests the countryside is alive, almost

More wintery images make us imagine how cold the evening is.

The idea of "melancholy" introduces us to a sense of sadness and an insight into Wordsworth's nostalgia at these happier days of innocence which are now long

The final image is of reminds us of the dying sunshine, the day is ending and so is the year, and so did his childhood and he became an adult.