

Winter Swans

Here is an 'immersed' version of Owen Sheers' poem. It can be used as a starting point before approaching the original version. It can also be used as part of revision, asking students to try to reconstruct the original by deleting non-Sheers words and inserting the line breaks. As well as all the words inserted, one word has been omitted from the original poem. For more information on 'immersed poems' see Techniques.

When we set out the clouds had given their all. There had been two days of rain and then a break in which we walked. The waterlogged earth seemed as if it was gulping for breath at our feet as we skirted the lake. We walked, silent and apart, until the swans came and we were distracted by them. They stopped us with a show of tipping in unison, as if they were rolling weights down their bodies to their heads.

Their clear reflections made it look as though they had halved themselves in the dark water. They floated like icebergs of white feather and paused before returning again like boats righting themselves in rough weather.

'They mate for life' you said as they left. They were pure white as porcelain as they moved over the stilling water.

I didn't reply but as we moved on through the afternoon light, slowly stepping in the lake's shingle and sand, I noticed our hands had somehow swum the distance between us and were now folded, one over the other – just like a pair of wings settling after flight.