

Extract from The Prelude 'Skating' William Wordsworth



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 heeded 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 exulting, 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 chace

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.

As a way of getting to know the poem and demonstrating that it is a very easy poem to understand, you could provide a version with the line endings removed and the 'd past tense replaced with ed. Or students could do that for themselves if you provide a version for use with a word processor. Here is my version.

And in the frosty season, when the sun was set, and visible for many a mile the cottage windows through the twilight blazed, I heeded 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 tolled six; I wheeled about, proud and exulting, like an untired horse, that cares not for his home.

All shod with steel, we hissed along the polished ice, in games confederate, imitative of the chace 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.

A further stage involves some editing. Here are the first few sentences with the word order changed and some other minor edits to punctuation.

In the frosty season, when the sun was set, the cottage windows blazed through the twilight, and were visible for many a mile. I did not heed their summons. It was a happy time for all of us. To me, it was a time of rapture. Clear and loud, the village clock tolled six; I wheeled about, proud and exulting, like an untired horse that cares not for his home.

It now makes pretty clear reading. Again, a word processor makes the task easier when students have a go at editing the rest of the poem.

You now have a 'modern' version that, in fact, uses the same vocabulary as the original. Students can be asked to pick out phrases that are interesting or still unclear, such as 'in games confederate', though these should now be few. Rather than telling them to look for imagery or alliteration, just see what they come up with. Though extract does not use the word 'skating', that is the title usually given to it. Can students think of other possible titles?