

# The Hare

- by Gillian Clarke -

## Activities

### A

The activity is suggested as a way to introduce learners to the poem's content and to consider how and why it is structured as it is. Some may not need the prompts.

The different times in the poem may highlight that most of it is a memory of one night (up to the last five stanzas) with the ending an observation about the lasting impact of her friend on the poet after her death. Some focus on the time from the 'calends' to the full moon at the end may also help to focus on the importance of the image of the moon to the poem as a whole.

The sentences and particularly the stanzas which end with a full stop might offer learners a way into the poem's structure. Some discussion of how many, or perhaps more importantly how few, stanzas follow the structure of sentences may highlight different sections of the poem.

### B

Some explanation of who Frances Horovitz was may be helpful to introduce the poem as both a specific memory *of* her and as a poem *in* memory of her.

Ideas in each stanza about how the closeness between the women is shown may be explored. These may include:

Stanza 1: Both women seem to react to the cry of the baby. The baby is not identified as belonging to one or other woman - what might be the significance of this?

Stanza 2: The women make time for each other late at night and talk about things they have in common. What sort of things do they talk about and what does this reveal about their relationship?

Stanza 3: The silence between them is calm, not awkward, and there is an awareness of what each is thinking without the need to speak. How does the focus on their children add to this intimacy?

Stanza 4: The intimacy of a shared joke is depicted, a connection that is ongoing rather than just this one conversation.

The pronouns used may elicit some useful observations about how the private, intimate world of the two women is created by the use of 'I', 'we', 'you', 'mine' and 'our'. Apart from 'his' to refer to the baby, no other pronouns are used.

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The image of the moon may involve some unpicking. The connection between the physical cycles of women and the moon may be helpful to explain as the image creates the particularly female intimacy between the women. The historical link between madness and the moon may be elicited from 'sisterly lunacy', with some discussion of how this private joke reflects the relationship between them. Ideas about the powerfulness of the women together, their combined effect on the world or perhaps the poignancy of the image to hint at her friend's imminent death may be considered.

## C

A comparison of the poem as the poet wrote it with the text arranged in sentences should begin to open a discussion about form and how effects are created. Some understanding of the lilting rhythm and cadence of these stanzas may be elicited by learners reading each version of the text aloud to hear how the reader's inflection changes. The effect of end-stopping 'Too late' and 'Different' should elicit some ideas about the added poignancy of the first and perhaps the striking contrast between the otherwise similar women in the second.

Other aspects of form, such as where and why stanzas begin and end, may be discussed.

## D

The mood here is calm but perhaps with a hint of underlying tension. Some discussion might elicit different emphases and views about which is more prevalent. The underlining activity should be used to encourage learners to look for evidence in the detail of poems to support their views.

The blue highlighted words and phrases may be looked at more closely: the length of time the women stand quietly and companionably might be noticed, or the way they blend in with the night scene. The beauty of the image of the river as a 'breath of shining sound' may be considered. The image of the sleeping/eating cows and what they represent and the sensual pleasure of the smell of 'blossom' may be discussed.

Discussion of the yellow highlighted words and phrases may help to probe the subtext here. What does the second reference in the poem to a baby's cry suggest? The juxtaposition of the beautiful image of the river with the 'shadow black' cows should be explored. What do the 'thorny crowns' of the blackthorn trees recall?

The two images - the river's 'breath of shining sound' and the 'thorny crowns' should be explored. Some discussion of how and why they are used may be productive here, particularly the use of the evocative 'thorny crowns'.

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## E

The activity should prompt learners to read closely and identify how the horror of the killing of the hare is shown. The adjectives selected and their impact may be discussed, particularly 'guilty' as this word begins to show the impact of the events on the women. The use of 'cry' and 'crying' recall the earlier crying of the hare which was mistaken for a baby.

What do the words '...in the jaws of a bad dream' suggest? The overwhelming empathy for those in pain and suffering shown in the dream may foreshadow the death of the poet's friend.

The 'unspoken' things between the women help to evoke their growing horror, first at the crying of the hare, then at the hold the dream has on them. This is particularly striking because of the close intimacy between them depicted earlier in the poem.

## F

The image of the moon is important to the poem as a whole, as a symbol, perhaps, of female power and of the passing of time. Comparison with its earlier use may elicit some discussion of how the personification of the moon here is very different from the powerful image before. 'Heavy', 'sorrowful' and 'broken' and the strong personification should be explored. The imagery of the 'seas flower / like cloud over water' and the 'silver rings' of craters could also be discussed. If needed, the highlighted words will focus on personification (yellow) and adjectives (blue).

The link between the menstrual cycle of women and the moon here echoes its earlier appearance as a symbol of womanhood. The dying woman's identification as a mother is very strong too. Learners could consider how the poem would be different if the women in it did not have children.

The impact of the final reference to the dead hare should lead to some discussion about its significance to the poet and the reader. The death of the poet's friend and perhaps the death of her hopes for another child may be considered as part of the image. The contrast between the beauty of many of the natural images in the poem with the last image of the hare may be noticed.