

Cold Knap Lake

Gillian Clarke

Pre-listening activity

1. Look at the picture. Describe what you see. What do you think has happened? What do you think is happening now? What is going to happen in the near future?



2. Now answer these questions. The answers are in your imagination and might or might not have anything to do with the picture above!

1. What was the little girl doing by herself near the lake?
2. What happened to her?
3. Who rescued her? What did they have to do to save her?
4. What was her parent's reaction when they took her home?
5. What did another little girl who observed this scene think about what she had seen?



3. Vocabulary

There are some words in the poem that might cause problems, because they may be unfamiliar and also because the poetical use has other meanings.

frock	old fashioned word for dress
dread	enormous fear
bleating	crying sound (usually made by a lamb)
thrashed	hit; beaten
willows	trees with long thin leaves that hang into the water (like fingers)
satiny	of satin; smooth and soft
blooms	flowers; grows like a flower
webs	the (webbed) feet of a water bird, like a swan or a duck

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Context

The poem 'Cold Knap Lake' is about a near drowning of a little girl, but it is also about memory. The poet is remembering the scene many years later.

Was I there?
Or is that troubled surface something else
shadowy under the dipped fingers of willows
where satiny mud blooms in cloudiness
after the treading, heavy webs of swans
as their wings beat and whistle on the air?

1. What she is perhaps suggesting here is that she is mistaking what she thinks is a memory with other events or stories she has heard. Swans have often been associated with tragic events on lakes or in rivers. Perhaps the cloudiness in the water caused by the mud is a metaphor for a hazy memory. How many other suggestions of doubt or uncertainty can you see in the fragment above?

2. Now let's examine your memory. Your earliest memory. You'll need to be quiet and probably close your eyes for a moment to do this, but try and think back to your earliest memory – the very first thing you can distinctly remember in your life. It might only have been a fragment, a moment, a second in time (like a photograph) and it might have been when you were still a baby or you might have been older.

When you have caught that memory, think of two, three or four words that will describe it. Write them in the box.



Now write down the age you think you were at the time you remember (it doesn't have to be accurate; an approximation of how old you think you are will be fine)



Now go around the room and try to find someone who has at least one word the same as yours, or has written the same number as you. Tell your story to the other person. You may form groups of two or three, but not four or more.