A Photograph

Shirley Toulson

The cardboard shows me how it was
When the two girl cousins went paddling,
Each one holding one of my mother's hands,
And she the big girl — some twelve years or so.
All three stood still to smile through their hair
At the uncle with the camera. A sweet face,
My mother's, that was before I was born.
And the sea, which appears to have changed less,
Washed their terribly transient feet.

Some twenty — thirty — years later
She'd laugh at the snapshot. "See Betty
And Dolly," she'd say, "and look how they
Dressed us for the beach." The sea holiday
Was her past, mine is her laughter. Both wry
With the laboured ease of loss.

Now she's been dead nearly as many years
As that girl lived. And of this circumstance
There is nothing to say at all.
Its silence silences.

Infer the meanings of the following words from the context.

paddling **transient**

Now look up the dictionary to see if your inference is right.

© NCERT not to be republished

Think it out

1. What does the word 'cardboard' denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?
2. What has the camera captured?
3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?
4. The poet's mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?
5. What is the meaning of the line "Both wry with the laboured ease of loss."
6. What does "this circumstance" refer to?
7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?

Notes

Poems are included to heighten students' sensitivity to literary writing and to appreciate rhythm and sound patterns in language. Follow these steps:

- Read the poem aloud once without the students looking at the poem. Ask them a few general questions.
- Re-read the poem with the students looking at the poem. Ask a few more questions to check comprehension.
- Ask students to read the poem silently and answer the questions given, first orally and then in writing.

- The poem 'A Photograph' is placed after 'The Portrait of a Lady' because of the thematic relation between the two.
- The questions seek to examine factual and inferential comprehension, establish empathy and draw attention to the structure of the poem and choice of words.

© NCERT not to be republished