

# EVAPORATIONS

## EXPLORING WATER AND POETRY

The theme for National Poetry Day 2013 is 'Water, water everywhere'. Poet Alice Oswald and artist Chana Dubinski have worked together to create *Evaporations*, a new film-poem, commissioned by the Poetry Society, which explores water's different states. You can view the film-poem at <http://www.poetrysociety.org.uk/content/commissions/npdwaterpoem>, and read the text of Alice's poem on page 4.

Using *Evaporations* as our inspiration we have created a series of activities to explore water in its different forms and use it as a stimulus for writing. There are separate lesson ideas for foundation stage, KS1, KS2, KS3 and KS4.



Above: from the film *Evaporations* by Alice Oswald and Chana Dubinski

### FOUNDATION STAGE TO KEY STAGE 2

State	Resources	Activity	Writing activity
Dew	Pipette Water Plant/Flowers Magnifying Glass	Drip water onto the leaves or flowers – observe with the magnifying glass.	Describe the appearance of the leaf through the water droplet.
Rain	Watering Can Umbrella	Students take turns to have water poured on the umbrella from the watering can.  Compare using the sprinkling attachment on the watering can with the normal spout.	Write down the sounds they hear as the "rain" hits the umbrella.  Describe the difference in sound between the "rain" showering and pouring.
Mist	Mirrors	Create mist on the mirror by breathing on it.	Write words and messages on the misted mirror to try and describe it.

Name .....

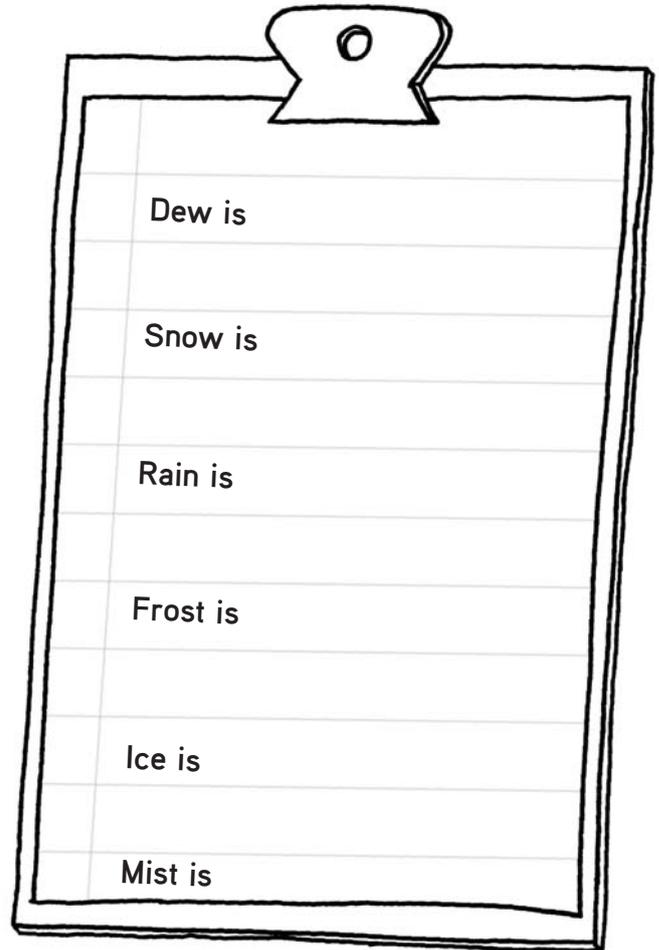
**Writing**

**KEY STAGE 1:**

You can create a poem using all of the states of water like Alice Oswald does in *Evaporations* (see page 4).

Use your descriptions from the activities above, and also your memories of ice, frost and snow, to complete the lines on the clipboard.

These three states of water are all frozen, but how are they different?



**Writing**

**KEY STAGE TWO:**



Using the first lines of the stanzas of Alice's poem (page 4) as the first lines of your poems, describe the different states of water and respond to Alice's words. You can use one or all of Alice's lines in your poem:

*What I admire is Dew...*

*To be Snow!...*

*Rain...*

*Of frost...*

*Yes Yes there is Ice but I notice...*

*First it was mist...*

\* Remember, if these lines end up in your final poem, you will need to credit the original author.

## KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

### Imagining water

In describing water, Alice Oswald avoids using similes – each state of water is a character in its own right. Explore with the class the different personalities of each state of water.

- What does it mean to have ‘the strength of dew’?
- How is snow ‘almost actual’?
- If rain ‘smashes’, what does this suggest about its character?
- How does Alice capture the impermanent nature of frost?
- The speaker doesn’t seem very interested in ice – but he/she is interested in ice melting. Does ice have a contradictory personality? Are ice and melt the same character?
- What might mist be ‘uncontrollably whispering’?

Discuss with the class the difference between reading the text and watching the film-poem. Do different images stand out? Is there a change in atmosphere?

### Encountering water

Alice’s poem is in two parts: the first vividly describes water in different forms, and the second describes an encounter between water and a group of people who are unused to being immersed in water. The water in the poem isn’t the same as in a shower or bath – it is much more mysterious.

With the class, discuss why Alice has written the poem in such distinct halves. How do they fit together? Can they imagine what is happening in the speaker’s mind and life, in the gap between the two halves?

Look at the second half, and pick out the language which makes the water seem unfamiliar. How does the shop-workers’ attitude towards water change?

### Writing

Students can write their own poems exploring the states of water, and imagining an intriguing encounter. For the first half, get the students to pick three states of water and describe their personalities in a poem. Students could use the Key Stage 1 and 2 activities as a basic start; they can also reference the class discussion above, building on the characterisations given by Alice Oswald. Encourage them to avoid using the word ‘like’, as Alice does.

For the second half of the poem, get the class to make a list together of professions which are not typically involved with large bodies of water e.g. bus driver, baker, office worker. Then get each student to choose a profession and write about them being immersed in a natural body of water: lake, sea, river. Encourage your students to consider the following things, to get a sense of their characters going on a journey:

- How do the characters feel about the water to begin with?
- What aspects of water make them uncomfortable?
- How do they come to enjoy the experience of water?

# EVAPORATIONS

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What I admire is Dew  
To have the strength of Dew  
To pass apparitional through a place  
Without trace or title

To be Snow!  
To be almost actual!  
Oh pristine example  
Of claiming a place on the earth  
Only to cancel

Rain  
Rain  
Smashed against stone

I love leaf and un-leaf  
Of frost and un-fern  
All these incisions  
And indecisions of the Dawn

Yes Yes there is Ice but I notice  
The Water doesn't like it so orderly  
What Water admires  
Is the slapstick rush of things melting

I have taken my bedding to the fields

First it was Mist  
Uncontrollably whispering  
Then it was Dew  
Disclosing the cold in my mind

Saying simply that it  
Comes from nothing  
And will return to nothing

Then it was...

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In their lunch hour  
I saw the shop-workers get into water  
They put their watches on the stones and slithered  
frightened

Into the tight-fitting river  
And shook out cuffs of splash  
And swam wide strokes towards the trees

And after a while swam back  
With rigid cormorant smiles  
Shocked I suppose from taking on  
Something impossible to think through  
Something old and obsessive like the centre of a rose  
And for that reason they quickly turned

And struggled out again and retrieved their watches  
Stooped on the grass-line hurrying now  
They began to laugh and from their meaty backs  
A million crackling things  
Burst into flight which was either water  
Or the hour itself ascending

**ALICE OSWALD**

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