

Strip the poem down
'The Manhunt' by Simon Armitage

The structure of the poem has been stripped out so that all that remains is the words. Read the words carefully then mark on the text to show where you would put:

- line breaks
- stanza breaks
- capital letters
- full stops
- commas.

after the first phase after passionate nights and intimate days only then would he let me trace the frozen river which ran through his face only then would he let me explore the blown hinge of his lower jaw and handle and hold the damaged porcelain collar-bone and mind and attend the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade and finger and thumb the parachute silk of his punctured lung only then could I bind the struts and climb the rungs of his broken ribs and feel the hurt of his grazed heart skirting along only then could I picture the scan the foetus of metal beneath his chest where the bullet had finally come to rest then I widened the search traced the scarring back to its source to a sweating unexploded mine buried deep in his mind around which every nerve in his body had tightened and closed then and only then did I come close

When you have finished, compare your ideas with a partner.

- What are the similarities and differences between your versions?
- Do these similarities and differences affect your reading of the poem?
- Can you explain the choices you've made?

Now compare your ideas with the original.

- What similarities and differences do you see?
- What do the choices the poet made emphasise?
- Do you see any patterns in the text? What is their effect?

The structure of the poem has been stripped out so that all that remains is the words. Read the words carefully then mark on the text to show where you would put:

- line breaks (there are 26 lines)
- stanza breaks (there are 13 stanzas).

After the first phase, after passionate nights and intimate days, only then would he let me trace the frozen river which ran through his face, only then would he let me explore the blown hinge of his lower jaw, and handle and hold the damaged, porcelain collar-bone, and mind and attend the fractured rudder of shoulder-blade, and finger and thumb the parachute silk of his punctured lung. Only then could I bind the struts and climb the rungs of his broken ribs, and feel the hurt of his grazed heart. Skirting along, only then could I picture the scan, the foetus of metal beneath his chest where the bullet had finally come to rest. Then I widened the search, traced the scarring back to its source to a sweating, unexploded mine buried deep in his mind, around which every nerve in his body had tightened and closed. Then, and only then, did I come close.

When you have finished, compare your ideas with the original. What similarities and differences do you see?

- Which phrases are repeated in the poem?
- Where do they occur?
- What effect does the repetition have?
- Mark on the text the point where the tone of the poem changes.
- Does anything else change at this point?
- Why do you think this happens?