

Memory and the Past

Read through the following poems:

'Whoever She Was',

'I Remember Me'

'In Your Mind'.

1. What are the poems about? Share your ideas. Think beyond, 'It's about a woman ...' type summaries to the underlying 'message' of the poem.
2. Discuss how Duffy suggests that our memories can be inaccurate (or play tricks on us) and the past is not 'fixed' but dependent on our point of view.
3. Discuss the imagery she uses in these poems and if you notice any common ideas or themes.
4. What is the effect of the following lines?

'flickering figure' ('Whoever She Was')

'My maiden name / sounds wrong' ('Whoever She Was')

'Your own gapes back / at you on someone else' ('I Remember Me')

'snapping fiction into fact' ('I Remember Me')

'Their faces are photographs / on the wrong side of your eyes' ('In Your Mind')

'Then suddenly you are lost but not lost' ('In Your Mind')

5. Who do you think the voice is in each of these poems? What is their gender? What difference does it make if we read them as a female or male voice?
6. How do our own experiences affect the way we read these poems? Think about your age, your relationships with others, your gender, your education etc.
7. How does the structure of each poem affect our understanding of the speaker and what they say?
8. Do you think Duffy wants us to like, dislike, believe, disbelieve, sympathise or otherwise with each speaker? Provide evidence for your decision.