

## AGONY OF DEFEAT

Diver

High steps along the board:

Toes pointed, body straight, arms raised,

Springs into space,

Folds his body, clasps his knees,

Spins and twists,

Arches,

Reaches for the water — THWACK!

Flat on his back!

Gymnast

Swings her body:

Arms, trunk, legs, syzygial,

Curls around beam,

Catapults forward,

Spins,

Reaches for the bar — SPLAT!

On all fours on the mat!

Runner

Crouches:

Feet press against the blocks,

Backside rises,

Muscles stretch taut, scream for release,

Gun explodes,

Legs thrust backward, neck strains forward — OOOOF!

Face down on the track!



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## Teacher's Notes

### Key elements

Each stanza ends in an unexpected failure by the athlete. The added impact of the failure is due to the build up of a strong image of action which carries with it a sense of anticipation.

### Exploring the poem

- Read each stanza with the final two lines concealed. Anticipate the conclusion, then reveal the final lines and the athlete's failure. Discuss the impact of this.
- How do the initial lines make you feel? How do the final lines make you feel?
- Discuss photographs or film of athletes' 'agony of defeat'. How did the athlete respond? How did you feel at the time? Why do such images sometimes distress us and at other times make us laugh?
- Discuss the meaning of 'climax' and 'anticlimax' in literature. Where is the climax and anticlimax in each stanza?

### Applying it to writing

- Write a paragraph of an exciting or suspenseful event. Build the reader's sense of anticipation. Then finish in an unexpected or anticlimactic way. Topics could include:

*Spooking my dad.*

*Noises in the night.*

*Hey, watch my great trick!*

- Choose a piece of writing — your own or something from a book. Rewrite the ending so as to create an anticlimax