

WAR POETRY.

Many soldiers turned to creative writing as a means of coming to terms with their emotions and experiences during World War One. Read through each of these poems and then answer the questions which follow.

A. Does it Matter? by Siegfried Sassoon, an officer who became increasingly angry about the way that the war was conducted.

DOES it matter?—losing your legs?...
For people will always be kind,
And you need not show that you mind
When the others come in after hunting
To gobble their muffins and eggs.

Does it matter?—losing your sight?...
There's such splendid work for the blind;
And people will always be kind,
As you sit on the terrace remembering
And turning your face to the light.

Do they matter?—those dreams from the pit?...
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad;
For they'll know you've fought for your country
And no one will worry a bit.

B. In Flanders Fields by John McCrae, a medical officer killed at the front in 1918.

IN Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

C. The Soldier by Rupert Brooke, who died in Greece of blood poisoning on his way to the front for the first time in 1915.

IF I should die, think only this of me;
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is for ever England. There shall be
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,
A body of England's breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

D. A Working Party (Wilfred Owen)

Three hours ago he stumbled up the trench;
Now he will never walk that road again:
He must be carried back, a jolting lump
Beyond all need of tenderness and care.

He was a young man with a meagre wife
And two small children in a Midland town;
He showed their photographs to all his mates,
And they considered him a decent chap
Who did his work and hadn't much to say,
And always laughed at other people's jokes
Because he hadn't any of his own.

That night when he was busy at his job
Of piling bags along the parapet,
He thought how slow time went, stamping his feet
And blowing on his fingers, pinched with cold.
He thought of getting back by half-past twelve,
And tot of rum to send him warm to sleep
In draughty dug-out frowsty with the fumes
Of coke, and full of snoring weary men.

He pushed another bag along the top,
Craning his body outward; then a flare
Gave one white glimpse of No Man's Land and wire;
And as he dropped his head the instant split
His startled life with lead, and all went out.

E. For the Fallen, by Lawrence Binyon. He was in charge of Oriental Paintings at the British Museum during the Great War.

They went with songs to battle, they were young,
Straight of limb, true of eye, steady and aglow.
They were staunch to the end against odds
uncounted;
They fell with their faces to the foe.

They shall not grow old as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We will remember them.

F. Dulce Et Decorum Est, by Wilfred Owen, an officer killed at the front in 1918.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys! ---
An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And floundering like a man in fire or lime ---
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning. In all my
dreams, before my helpless sight, He plunges at me,
guttering, choking, drowning.
If in some smothering dreams you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,---
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est Pro patria mori.

G. The Song of The Mud, by Mary Borden, who ran a mobile hospital at the Western Front. This poem was written in 1917.

This is the hymn of the mud – the obscene, the filthy,
the putrid,
The vast liquid grave of our armies.
It has drowned our men.
Its monstrous distended belly reeks with the
undigested dead.
Our men have gone into it, sinking slowly
And struggling and slowly disappearing...

TASKS:

Your teacher will allocate the poems between the members of the class. Use the poem you have been allocated to answer these questions:

- What is the best word to describe the tone of this poem?
- How does the poet make you feel this way?
- How reliable is your source as evidence of the war?