

By the end of studying the poem **Exposure** I need to know:

Meaning: Soldiers in the trenches of WW1 are awake at night, afraid of an enemy attack. However, nature seems to be their main enemy- it is freezing cold, windy and snowing. The men imagine returning home, but the doors there are closed to them. They believe that sacrificing themselves in the war is the only way of keeping their loved ones at home safe. They return to thinking about their deaths in the icy, bleak trenches.

Ideas: Owen is showing the incompetence of those in power whose failure to protect the men sufficiently from the weather leads them to die of hypothermia. The poem reflects the emotions and of the soldier's as they fear that they are being forgotten back home.

Vocabulary	<p>Salient- a section of trenches that reached into enemy territory Sentries- soldiers watching for danger Poignant- painfully sad Melancholy- incredible sadness Nonchalance- casual lack of concern Glazed- a combination of 'glowing' and 'glazed' Loath- unwilling Puckering- contracting into wrinkles or folds</p>	Reading:
Context	<p>Trench Warfare: 1914-1918. The initial belief in 1914 was that the war would 'be over by Christmas'. As such, when the trenches were dug they were dug shallow and considerations were not made in terms of preparing the trenches for harsh winter conditions. Winter 1917 was the coldest winter in living memory; numerous soldiers died from hypothermia. This was something that Owen himself witnessed; he saw friends and comrades freeze to death. Owen and his fellow soldiers were forced to lie outside in freezing conditions for two days. He wrote: "We were marooned in a frozen desert. There was not a sign of life on the horizon and a thousand signs of death... The marvel is we did not all die of cold."</p> <p>Propaganda: Propaganda was largely targeted at young men and reinforced the ideology that it was noble to fight for your country; this was a notion that those left at home also believed in. The common perception (as highlighted by Raleigh in Journey's End) was that the war would be constantly fighting and that the soldiers, if they die, would die a heroic death. The government as well publicly gave the impression that they cared for and respected the soldiers they fought. However, all of this turned out to be false. Owen, who fought in the war, is attempting to expose the realities behind the propaganda. As a result of his own experiences and anger towards the British government his poetry is often quite bitter; this bitterness is equally reflected in the poem.</p> <p>Hypothermia- Exposure is a term used to describe hypothermia. Reports from survivors in the war detailed how soldiers, in their final hours, became lucid and hallucinated. This mental degradation is reflected in the poem.</p> <p>Traditional vs Contemporary- This poem is the one that sits between the contemporary and traditional poems; therefore there are elements of both. Owen has abandoned rhythm and meter, something which is traditional yet has maintained regular stanza lengths and pararhyme. The style of this poem helps to bridge the gap between the traditional and contemporary poems.</p> <p>Extra Reading: Futility- Wilfred Owen Dulce et Decorum est- Wilfred Owen Anthem for Doomed Youth- Wilfred Owen The General- Siegfried Sassoon</p>	

<p>Themes</p>	<p>Reality of conflict:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> bleak imagery is used to convey the men's pain- for example, the description of the frost as "puckering foreheads crisp" compels the reader to imagine their flesh freezing. Comparing the noise of the wind to the "twitching agonies" of men" creates a vivid picture of wounded soldiers. The reality of war leaves no room for patriotism or heroism- the men "cringe in holes" like frightened animals. Rhetorical questions ("what we are doing here?") Emphasise the pointlessness of the suffering. The hopeless tone of the poem suggest that the men may believe they have little chance of surviving. They seem to have accepted that they will never seen their families or homes again. <p>Nature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nature is personified as the deadly enemy of the soldiers in the trenches- it has "merciless iced east winds that knife" them, and snowflakes that "come feeling" for their faces with "fingering stealth". The men do not expect to die from German gunfire, but from exposure to the elements. There is no progression in the poem, which mirrors the relentless of nature. The repeated stanza ending "but nothing happens", echoes the monotonous snow and rain that fall on the men. <p>Loss and suffering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The first line of the poem highlights the soldier's suffering instantly. The phrase "our brains ache, and the merciless iced east winds that knife us" show that their pain is both psychological and physical. They sense that they "are dying", but they are powerless and unable to change anything. The soldiers as "what are we doing here?", wondering whether they are suffering for nothing. This exposes the futility of war and even makes them doubt their beliefs ("love of God seems dying"). <p>War:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Owen once declared of all his writing that: 'My theme is war and the pity of war'. In this poem he looks at a particular aspect of how death claimed the lives of so many soldiers. The quote "we only know war lasts" shows the soldiers seem to have little idea of where they are, what they are fighting for and for how long it will be. There is only one certainty and it is that war is something that persists. <p>Weather:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the freezing conditions are being dangerous as the enemy. The soldiers are fighting two battles at once and at one point, bullets are less deadly than the cold. The phrase 'Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army/ Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey' suggests the weather is likened to an army that gathers and assaults the soldiers in the trenches. <p>Despair:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> one of the casualties of war is the men's loss of faith in what they are doing and why they are there. Death is seen as inevitable. 'For love of God seems dying' The soldiers have lost their religious faith. This implies that they are not looking forward to any sort of after-life once death has occurred and it makes their situation even more distressing. <p>Suffering- There are reminders of the real, physical pain that the soldiers experience, as well as their exhaustion and fatigue. Even thinking about home is painful for the men as they are not welcome there.</p> <p>Boredom- There is a sense of frustration at their situation- they are "worried", "watching" ad waiting, but "nothing happens" and the men are left to contemplate their own deaths.</p> <p>Hopelessness- The soldiers are helpless against the power of nature and there is nothing they can do to change their situation. The poem offers little hope of a future for the men.</p>
<p>Deeper understanding</p>	<p>The effects of hypothermia- Throughout the poem, Owen explores te gradual mental deterioration of a soldier suffering from hypothermia. The poem opens with subtle clues to the soldiers' impending death: the 'low drooping flares confuse [their] memory of the salient', the constant ellipsis in the opening stanza. Their mental degradation becomes more evident throughout the poem due to the increasing incoherency of the persona. By stanza five, he is 'daz[ing] sun-dozed into grassier ditches' reflecting that they are hallucinating or imagining warmth. This reinforces the sense of powerlessness: the only thing they have the power to do is to imagine they are somewhere warmer. Their 'ghosts drag home glimpsing the sunken fires'- they imagine going home; however, the fire itself is symbolic of them- sunken because it is going out [a common image used across literature, even Journey's End with Osborne's pipe]. The fire is described as 'glozed with crusted dark-red jewels'; a jewel is precious, symbolising how precious life is. These hallucinations reveal the soldiers' awareness of their deaths- something that they accept by the end of stanza six 'we turn back to our dying'- again highlighting how</p>

Links to other poems:

The Charge of the Light Brigade - onomatopoeic verbs like "thunder'd" and "shattered" imitate the chaotic, deafening noise of the battle. By replicating the powerful, threatening noise of the battlefield. This contrasts with the sibilant 'sudden successive flights...' which does reflect speed of the battle but also imply the weather is deadlier. There's a difference in tone and description here- Owen is writing from experience so is far more vivid in his descriptions and bitter in his anger; whereas Tennyson is writing a piece of propaganda without experiencing it himself.

The Man He Killed- Hardy, unlike Owen, didn't fight in the Boer War. This is reflected in the tone and universality of the poem- he is writing from distance and so doesn't have the bitterness of Owen.

the only power they have is to decide to die. Stanza 7 is the most incoherent, reflecting the final moments before death and the persona's rejection of God- he says how their 'love is made afraid' by 'God's invincible spring' and how 'love of God seems dying': the soldiers feels abandoned by God and therefore abandon God themselves. The final stanza, written in proleptic declaratives further reinforces the certainty of the soldiers deaths- making their awareness of their deaths even more poignant. The pararhyme throughout the poem also reinforces the soldiers' inability to form structured thought, yet the attempts to maintain some order is evident through the regular stanzas. The persona is clearly wanting to maintain a grip on himself and his mind but is failing to do so.

Futility of war- Owen's refrain, 'but nothing happens', coupled with 'what are we doing here?' highlight the futility of war and suggests that the pointlessness of them being there. This is further reinforced through the description of how the 'flickering gunnery rumbles' at Ypres 'like the dull rumour of some other war', which highlights how the soldiers are not actually fighting in a war. This idea of the futility of war is also constructed through Owen highlighting how the weather is far more dangerous than the war itself. The poem opens with the description of how the 'merciless iced east winds knife [them]- showing how the wind is what is killing the soldiers rather than the war itself. East being relevant for potentially two reasons: 1. An eastern Siberian wind will be a bitterly cold one; 2. Germany is east, comparing the wind to the 'real' enemy. The juxtaposition of the shortness of battle against the continuous weather reinforces this. Owen only has one line of fighting: 'sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.' - the sibilance reinforcing the speed with which battle both begins and ends, as well as the end stop signifying that battle is over [similar to how in 'Journey's End' all of the characters are waiting]. He then compares this with 'less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow' to create the, rather surprising, idea that the weather is more dangerous than the war. Owen includes a semantic field of militaristic language to depict the weather to reinforce this idea: 'Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey'- there's a sense here that they are at war with the weather. However, unlike soldiers, the weather cannot be defeated- something Owen himself alludes to when he describes the 'invincible spring', the persona is aware that they cannot defeat the weather. All of this combines, with the eventual deaths of the soldiers, to highlight the real futility of war; something reinforced through the structure- despite the length of the poem the eight stanzas do not go 'anywhere' as such creating the idea that there is this endless cycle- something alluded to by the 'burying party [with] picks and shovels in their shaking grasp'- there's the real suggestion here that the burying party may be the next to die.

Tenses- The present tense within the poem adds to a sense of disorientation- we, as a reader, are living the final moments and hearing the inner monologue of a soldier dying. The shift in the final stanza to future tense offers a bleak picture of their deaths but also the resignation of the soldiers knowing that they are dying. This reinforces the sense of powerlessness that the soldiers have: they are powerless to do anything to stop themselves from dying.

The title- The title is significant in several ways. The soldiers are exposed to two enemies; the Germans beyond no-man's-land and the fierce elements which are more lethal than the humans. But Owen is also referring to his wish to make known — to expose — the incompetence of those in power whose failure to protect the men sufficiently from the weather leads them to die of hypothermia. Exposure as well is a term used for hypothermia, which is what the soldiers are dying from.

Extract from 'The Prelude'- the personification of the mountain makes it seem threatening- the phrase "upreared its head" creates a monstrous image. The personified mountain "strode after" the speaker, giving a vivid sense that it means to harm him. Its calm but relentless pursuit increases its terror.

The Destruction of the Sennacherib- natural imagery creates a mood of inevitability. By comparing the destruction of the Assyrian army to "leaves" when "Autumn hath blown", Byron implies it's only natural they fall. Describing the horse's death with imagery associated with the sea creates a violent mood. The image of the 'foam of his gasping' being like the cold "spray" of the "rock-beating surf" reminds the reader of the waves crashing furiously against rocks.

Quotes

"our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us..." Nature is personified as it seems to be attacking the men. "our" suggest it is a shared experience.

"but nothing happens" The short, simple half line emphasises their boredom and tension. The final stanza ends in the same way as the first stanza which suggest that even death does not change anything. The repetition of the phrase contributes to the tedious, monotonous mood as it confirms that there is little hope of the mood changing.

"What are we doing here?" The rhetorical question asks what the point of it all is.

"Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles" The brambles of the barbed wire remind us of the pain caused by nature.

"the flickering gunnery rumbles" the onomatopoeia replicates that sound of distant explosions and the shaking ground. This creates an unsettled mood, highlighting how on edge the soldiers feel.

"shrivelling" and "puckering" the onomatopoeic verbs emphasise the soldier's physical distortion and pain, and "crisp" mimics the harshness of the frost cracking across their face.

"Dawn massing the east her melancholy army" Dawn is personified using the language of battle. Normally dawn brings hope but here it brings death. Dawn is personified as an army general-morning weather becomes 'her melancholy army' which attacks them. This emphasises how it appears the whole world is against the soldiers.

	<p>"Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces" the snowflakes are personified - they are maliciously seeking the men's faces. Even the usually gentle image of "pale" snowflakes is made sinister. They go 'feeling' for men's faces with 'fingering stealth', like they are searching for weaknesses.</p> <p>"sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence" sibilance mimics the whistling sound of bullets flying.</p> <p>"flowing flakes that flock" Alliteration emphasises the relentless of the snow.</p> <p>"shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors and closed, - " the caesurae in this stanza create a division on each line, which reflects how the men are shut out of their homes. This also reflects the soldier's concern that people back home were losing interest in their fate as the war was dragged on.</p> <p>"since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn; nor even suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit" suggests that they believe they are sacrificing themselves for life at home to be preserved.</p> <p>"for the love of God seems dying" this could mean that their love for God is disappearing, or that they feel God's love for them is dying.</p>
<p>Terminology</p>	<p>Ellipsis hint that they are waiting for something to happen, but it never does. It could also reflect the mental degradation of the soldiers, something that develops throughout the poem.</p> <p>Personification - nature is repeatedly personified, making it seem the real enemy in the war.</p> <p>Bleak language - the poem includes lots of bleak imagery to remind the reader of the men's pain, the awful weather and lack of hope for the soldiers.</p> <p>Assonance ("slowly", "ghosts", "home", "glozed" long 'oh' sounds makes the imagined journey more painful and slow), onomatopoeia ("crisp") and carefully chosen verbs ("shrivelling") add to the bleak mood and make the descriptions vivid and distressing.</p> <p>Traditional poetic imagery is subverted to emphasise the grim nature of their experience. "Dawn" brings misery instead of hope, and the snow is "black" and "deathly" rather than white and pure. Even the "fires" of home are "crusted dark-red jewels"- they offer no warmth or comfort.</p> <p>The regular ABBAC rhyme scheme emphasises the soldier's experience of life in the trenches. It is predictable but never quite settled- the final half-line of each stanza is always left unrhymed, which reflects the tension and unease felt by the soldiers. Many of the rhymes are half rhymes (e.g. "knife us" and "nervous"), so there is not a sense of completion. Readers wait for a rhyme that never fully arrives, like the soldiers anxiously wait for something to happen.</p>