

**Warmer – Introducing the poem (10 mins)**

*Listen to and read the opening lines of the poem, 'Exposure'*

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...

Worried by silence, \*sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

*\* a soldier whose job is to guard something*

*Work in pairs to discuss the questions.*

1. Who do you think is narrating this poem?
2. Where do you think they are? What is happening around them?
3. How are they feeling? How do you know?

**Task 1 – The life and work of Wilfred Owen (15 mins)**

*Look at the picture of Wilfred Owen and discuss the questions.*

1. How old do you think he is?
2. What is his job?
3. When do you think this photo was taken?

*Read a short biography of the poet Wilfred Owen.*

Wilfred Owen was born on 18 March 1893, in Oswestry on the Welsh borders, and was brought up in Birkenhead and Shrewsbury. He is widely recognised as one of the greatest voices of the First World War. At the time of his death he was virtually unknown - only four of his poems were published during his lifetime - but he had always been determined to be a poet, and had experimented with verse from an early age. In 1913-1915, whilst teaching at Bordeaux and Bagnères-de-Bigorre in France, he worked on the rhyming patterns which became characteristic of his poetry; but it was not until the summer of 1917 that he found his true voice.

In 1915 Owen enlisted in the British Army. His first experiences of active service at Serre and St. Quentin in January-April 1917 led to shell shock and his return to Britain. Whilst he was undergoing treatment at the Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, he met one of his literary heroes, Siegfried Sassoon, who provided him with guidance, and encouragement to bring his war experiences into his poetry.

When Owen returned to the Western Front, after more than a year away, he took part in the breaking of the Hindenburg Line at Joncourt (October 1918) for which he was awarded the Military Cross in recognition of his courage and leadership. He was killed on 4 November 1918 during the battle to cross the Sambre-Oise canal at Ors.

Virtually all the poems for which he is now remembered were written in a creative burst between August 1917 and September 1918. His self-appointed task was to speak for the men in his care, to show the 'Pity of War', which he also expressed in vivid letters home. His bleak realism, his energy and indignation, his compassion and his great technical skill, are evident in many well-known poems, and phrases or lines from his work ("Each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds" ... "The Old Lie: Dulce et decorum est ...") are frequently quoted.

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Now work in pairs to answer the questions.

1. How old was Wilfred Owen when he died?
2. When did Owen find his 'true' poetic voice?
3. What happened to Owen in 1917?
4. When and why was Owen awarded the Military Cross?
5. Through his poetry, Owen said that he wanted to show the 'Pity of War'. What do you think this means?
6. Name three characteristics of Owen's poetry.

### Glossary

Western Front	<i>a line of fortified trenches, stretching from the North Sea to the Swiss frontier with France, separating the German army from the Allies</i>
Military Cross	<i>a medal given to British army officers for brave actions, created in 1914</i>
enlisted	<i>joined the armed forces</i>
shell shock	<i>a mental illness that can affect soldiers who have been in battle for a long time</i>
rhyming patterns	<i>a repetition of similar sounds in two or more words</i>
bleak	<i>barren, offering little hope</i>
realism	<i>a style of art that seeks to represent real life, rather than an idealised or romantic interpretation of it</i>
indignation	<i>anger aroused by something seen to be unfair, unworthy or wrong</i>

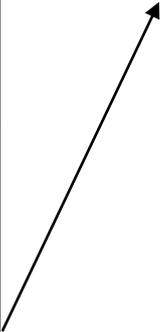
### Task 2 – Analysing the first verse of the poem (10 mins)

Look again at the first verse of the poem.

- 1 Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...
- 2 Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...
- 3 Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...
- 4 Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous.
- 5 But nothing happens.

Work in pairs to match the language feature and quotation or example from the poem, to the effect on the reader.

Language feature	Example / Quotation	What effect does it have on the reader? How does it make you feel?
<p><b>1. Use of the senses</b>  <i>What can you see, feel and hear?</i>  <i>What colours are used?</i></p>	<p>“drooping flares” and  “merciless iced east winds”</p>	<p><b>a)</b> The wind is given human characteristics, emphasising the cruelty of nature and suffering of the soldiers.</p>
<p><b>2. Verbs</b>  <i>Are there any new, unusual or interesting verbs?</i></p>	<p>“...winds that <b>knife</b> us”</p>	<p><b>b)</b> The silence and stillness of the soldiers, presented against the treacherous weather conditions builds a sense of tension and foreboding.</p>
<p><b>3. Adjectives</b>  <i>Are there any new, unusual or interesting adjectives?</i></p>	<p>“<b>merciless</b> iced east winds”</p>	<p><b>c)</b> A vivid and brutal action / visual image that shocks the reader.</p>
<p><b>4. References to death</b>  <i>What language is used to convey the idea of death?</i>  <i>Are there any images that stand out?</i></p>	<p>The image of the wind as a murderous enemy. The silent, whispering sentries.</p>	<p><b>d)</b> Repetition of the ‘s’ sound (‘sibilance’) creates a sense of being ‘hushed’.</p>
<p><b>5. Any other features</b>  <i>Is there anything else that you find interesting or striking, e.g. use of rhyme or repetition? Do you notice any other themes e.g. nature, religion in the poem?</i></p>	<p>“worried by <b>silence</b>, <b>sentries</b> whisper, <b>curious</b>, <b>nervous</b>”</p>	<p><b>e)</b> The reader can almost feel the intensity of the wind, drawing them into the scene and inviting them to empathise with the soldiers.</p>



## Glossary

to empathise with	<i>to understand and imaginatively enter into another person's feelings and experiences</i>
sibilance	<i>repetition of the 's' sound</i>
verse	<i>a group of lines that form a unit in a poem</i>
convey	<i>to communicate an idea, impression or feeling to someone</i>

### Task 3 – Jigsaw reading activity (20 mins)

Your teacher will give you a section of the poem 'Exposure'. Work in pairs to discuss your section of the poem and fill in the table below. Find examples of language features and make notes on the effect they have on the reader. You can use the examples in **Task 2 – Analysing the first verse of the poem** to help you. Look up any new words in a dictionary or use the glossary .

Language feature	Example / Quotation	What effect does it have on the reader? How does it make you feel?
<p><b>Use of the senses</b>  <i>What can you see, feel and hear?            What colours are used?</i></p>		
<p><b>Verbs</b>  <i>Are there any new, unusual or interesting verbs?</i></p>		
<p><b>Adjectives</b>  <i>Are there any new, unusual or interesting adjectives?</i></p>		
<p><b>References to death</b>  <i>What language is used to convey the idea of death?            Are there any images that stand out?</i></p>		
<p><b>Any other features</b>  <i>Is there anything else that you find interesting or striking, e.g. use of rhyme or repetition? Do you notice any other themes?</i></p>		

#### **Task 4 – Sharing ideas (25 mins)**

1. *Join up with another pair looking at the same section of the poem. Share your ideas as a group. Discuss examples of the language features you found particularly effective.*
2. *Now join up with a pair who were looking at a different section of the poem. Take it in turns to describe what is happening in your extract. Share at least one example of a language feature, and say what effect it has on the reader. Discuss:*
  - *What are the main differences between extracts A and B?*
  - *How does the language change?*
3. *Share your ideas as a whole class.*

#### **Task 5 – The end of the poem (20 mins)**

*Listen to and read the last lines of the poem.*

36 To-night, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,  
37 Shrivelling many hands and puckering foreheads crisp.  
38 The burying-party, picks and shovels in their shaking grasp,  
39 Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,  
40 But nothing happens.

*Work in pairs to discuss the questions.*

1. Who is the narrator talking about when he writes “His frost”?
2. What are the soldiers doing? How do you know?
3. Do you think this is a good ending? Why, or why not?

### **Cooler – Reflect (10 mins)**

*Read and reflect on the following questions:*

1. As an officer in the army, Wilfred Owen wrote poetry on the subject of war to speak for the men in his care, and to show the 'Pity of War'. Do you think that the poem is effective in doing this?
2. Which words, phrases or images did you find most interesting, moving or disturbing? Are there any words or phrases that you find confusing?
3. What experiences or subjects do you think are important? Do you think poetry is a good way to convey an experience to others?

### **Extension – Keep the home fires burning (10 mins)**

*Listen to Ivor Novello's song, 'Keep The Home Fires Burning', written in 1914. Discuss the differences between the mood of the song and the mood of the poem.*

### **Extension / Homework – Reflect (25 mins)**

*Read the other section of the poem and make notes on the language features. Now read or listen to the poem all the way through.*

*Write down any new words you've learned and try writing some sentences using them.*

## **Exposure by Wilfred Owen**

### **I.**

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east  
winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is  
silent...

Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the  
salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious,  
nervous,

But nothing happens.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on  
the wire.

Like twitching agonies of men among its  
brambles.

Northward incessantly, the flickering gunnery  
rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...

We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and  
clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy  
army

Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks  
of gray,

But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the  
silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black  
with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause  
and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the  
wind's nonchalance,

But nothing happens.

### **II.**

Pale flakes with lingering stealth come feeling  
for our faces -

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams,  
and stare, snow-dazed,

Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-  
dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the  
blackbird fusses.

Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the  
sunk fires glozed

With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle  
there;

For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house  
is theirs;

Shutters and doors all closed: on us the doors  
are closed -

We turn back to our dying.

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires  
burn;

Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or  
fruit.

For God's invincible spring our love is made  
afraid;

Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore  
were born,

For love of God seems dying.

To-night, His frost will fasten on this mud and  
us,

Shrivelling many hands and puckering  
foreheads crisp.

The burying-party, picks and shovels in their  
shaking grasp,

Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are  
ice,

But nothing happens.