

KS3

World War I poetry

TEACHING PACK

- Eight lessons with classroom resources, focusing on key poems and context
- Differentiated tasks to build KS3 students' reading, writing and oracy skills
- Summative assessment task with answers

Contents

Overview for teachers	3
Lesson overview	4
Featured poets	10
Lesson 1: The start of World War I	11
Lesson 2: Propaganda and recruitment	17
Lesson 3: The call-up	22
Lesson 4: At the front	27
Lesson 5: The horror of war	34
Lesson 6: Camaraderie	39
Lesson 7: Soldiers of the Empire	46
Lesson 8: On the home front	53
Assessment	60
Answers	62



Overview for Teachers

This World War I teaching pack focuses on the key elements of war poetry, while building KS3 students' core reading, writing, oracy and analytical skills, and well as their understanding of poetic language, form and structure. It includes a range of tasks to build students' unseen poetry analysis skills and crucially their confidence with poems, through discussion and collaborative reading tasks.

You'll find some of the most celebrated war poems to share with students, as well as others representing a diversity of voices and alternative views of the war. The pack also includes extracts from letters and soldiers' diaries, as well as photographs and propaganda posters to develop students' understanding of the context of the war.

This pack is aimed at year 7-9 students, and includes a range of differentiated activities, with stretch and challenge extension activities as well as more supportive, scaffolded resources.

It works like a complete scheme of work for a term, and includes eight lessons, with starter activities followed by a series of five or six lesson activities, with embedded formative assessment tasks, learning checks and low-stakes quizzes. There are also extension and homework suggestions for each lesson. The pack culminates in a summative assessment task.

Suggested answers for all relevant activities are included for self or peer marking in class or to support the teacher with marking.

The pack is student-facing for classroom use, but you will find a set of teaching ideas and suggestions on pages 6-9.

About the writer

We would like to extend our huge thanks to Teachit contributor Jill Carter for writing this teaching pack.

Jill is a former Leader of English and Advanced Skills teacher who now works freelance as an educational author, blogger and online tutor. She has written a wide range of secondary English textbooks and digital resources, and has nearly 30 years' experience as a teacher of English.

Lesson overview

Lesson	Theme	Learning objective or outcomes	Poem/s	Skills focus
1	The start of World War I	To understand the context of World War I.	'The Armed Liner' by Henry Smalley Sarson 'The Troop Ship' by Isaac Rosenberg	Research skills Summarising and dual-coding skills Oracy/discussion skills Writing skills (diary)
2	Propaganda and recruitment	To understand the role of propaganda in recruiting soldiers in the war. To identify and comment on the effect of persuasive devices. To identify and explore the effect of rhyme.	'Who's for the Game?' by Jessie Pope	Performance skills Writing skills (analytical paragraph) Unseen poetry analysis
3	The call-up	To identify a range of poetic features and compare two poems.	'Recruiting' by E.A. Mackintosh	Comparative analytical skills Reading comprehension skills Writing skills (persuasive)
4	At the front	To understand the brutality of war.	'Futility' by Wilfred Owen	Discussion and oracy skills Reading comprehension and analysis Writing skills (poetry and explanatory writing)

5	The horror of war	To understand and explore the effect of language and structural techniques in poetry. To apply your knowledge to a World War I poem.	'Anthem for Doomed Youth' by Wilfred Owen	Poetry analysis Research skills Vocabulary skills
6	Camaraderie	To understand the context of life on the front line. To analyse the tone and message of a poem. To identify and comment on the effects of a range of poetic devices and features.	'First Time In' by Ivor Gurney 'To Sister E.W.' by Henry Smalley Sarson	Reading skills (skimming and scanning) Analytical skills
7	Soldiers of the Empire	To understand the contribution to the war of soldiers from other countries. To develop students' confidence with decoding challenging new vocabulary.	'The Gift of India' by Sarojini Naidu	Persuasive language analysis Vocabulary and decoding skills Discussion skills and oracy Research skills
8	On the home front	To explore the context and impact of the war at home and on women's lives. To identify and comment on structure and poetic features, including symbolism. To compare how different poets present ideas and feelings.	'August 1914' by May Wedderburn Cannan 'Spring in War-Time' by Sara Teasdale	Performance reading skills Reading comprehension skills Comparative analysis skills Discussion skills Writing skills (letters)
	Assessment	To compare the ways in which different poets present their ideas and feelings about war. OR To explain how a poet presents ideas and feelings about war. To develop students' analytical writing skills.	'The Owl' by Edward Thomas 'In Flanders Fields' by John McCrae	Comparative analysis skills Exam skills Unseen poetry analysis Reading comprehension skills

Lesson 4: At the front



For many men, fighting in the war meant being sent to the trenches in France where a new kind of warfare had developed.

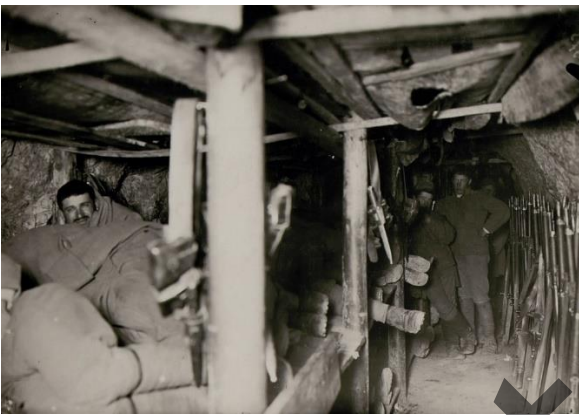
Starter activity 1: Discussion

Look closely at the following images of World War I soldiers from a range of countries and discuss them with a partner.

What do you notice about the conditions and the environment in which the soldiers lived and fought? Note down three things, to share with the class, which you think would have made warfare difficult:

1.
2.
3.





Activity 1: Reading and language analysis

The conditions of the war were horrifying. Read the following extract from a letter that one famous war poet, Wilfred Owen, wrote to his mother in January 1917.

'I can see no excuse for deceiving you about these last four days. I have suffered seventh hell. – I have not been at the front. – I have been in front of it. – I held an advanced post, that is, a "dug-out" in the middle of No Man's Land. We had a march of three miles over shelled road, then nearly three along a flooded trench. After that we came to where the trenches had been blown flat out and had to go over the top. It was of course dark, too dark, and the ground was not mud, not sloppy mud, but an octopus of sucking clay, three, four, and five feet deep, relieved only by craters full of water ...'

What were some of the hardships he had to endure?

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What do you notice about the language of this letter? Which elements of language suggest the writer is a poet?

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Activity 2: Quick comprehension

Many soldiers did not die in the fighting but died because of the conditions they lived in. The cold was a particularly important factor in many deaths.

On the next page, read an elegy (a poem about death) by Wilfred Owen, one of the most famous World War I poets. As an officer in the army, he had direct experience of being in the trenches. The poem is about a soldier who died in the night from the cold. You can also hear it being read here: youtu.be/CM_OK2VFIE8.

a. What time of day is it in the poem?

d. What job might the soldier have done back home? Which phrase makes you think this?

b. What words or lines suggest that the soldier is dead?

'Futility'

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields half-sown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds—
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

Wilfred Owen

c. Why does the speaker of the poem suggest that they 'Move him into the sun'?

e. What does the poet say about the sun ('it') at the start of the second stanza?

Glossary

futility – pointlessness, uselessness

toil – work extremely hard

rouse – wake someone

fatuous – pointless or silly

f. Rewrite each stanza in your own words.

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Compare your answers in pairs. Be prepared to feed back to the class.

Activity 3: Pick and mix challenge

On the next page are seven questions about the poem which are different in terms of their level of challenge. Choose one question from each challenge category (green ■ , blue ● , pink ▲) to answer in pairs. You will answer three questions in total:

<p>a. What is the tone of this poem? Which word <input type="checkbox"/> would you choose to describe its tone:</p> <p>sorrowful woeful melancholy sad mournful puzzled angry</p> <p>Explain your choice, using the following sentence starter: <i>The tone of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Futility' is ...</i></p>	<p>b. The soldier is unnamed and referred to as <input type="radio"/> 'him'. Why do you think Owen chooses to use this pronoun rather than giving him a name or even referring to him as 'the soldier'?</p>	<p>c. Does the speaker really believe the sun might <input type="checkbox"/> revive the soldier? Why else might he order that the soldier be moved into the sun?</p> <p>Support: Think about the soldier's earlier life and about how the speaker seems to feel about the soldier and his death.</p>
<p>d. The sun is personified. Select three quotations <input type="radio"/> which show this:</p> <p>What effect does this have?</p>	<p>e. In the second stanza, the poem moves away <input type="radio"/> from the soldier to a wider question. What is the poet asking in this stanza? How does the poet feel about war and death?</p> <p>Support: Consider the title of the poem.</p>	<p>f. Owen uses an unusual form of rhyme in this poem known as half-rhyme or pararhyme. These are words which <i>almost</i> rhyme. Find two examples of half-rhymes from the ends of the lines.</p>
<p>g. How might the half-rhymes be interpreted? <input type="radio"/> Select one interpretation from the list below and explain your choice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Because the poet feels sad and defeated, he uses half-rhymes to mirror his attitude to war. The half-rhymes reflect the speaker's dark and dispirited thoughts. The speaker does not see war as neat and clear - it is confusing and bewildering. 	<p>h. How does the poet feel about war and death? <input type="radio"/></p>	<p>i. The poet contrasts cold with warmth in the poem. Find relevant quotations. What is the effect of this symbolism?</p>

Activity 4: Prose into poetry

Here is an extract from a World War I diary, *Diary of a Dead Officer*, written by A.G. West and published after his death.

Wednesday September 20th, 1916

'... A whistle would be heard, nearer and nearer, ceasing for a mere fraction of a second when the shell was falling and about to explode. When was it coming?

Men cowed and trembled. It exploded and a cloud of black reek went up – in the communication trench again. You went down it; two men were buried, perhaps more ... The trench was a mere undulation of newly turned earth, underneath it lay two men or more. You dug furiously. No sign. Perhaps you were standing on a couple of men now ... A boot, a steel helmet – and you dig and scratch and uncover a grey, dirty face, pitifully drab and ugly, the eyes closed ...'

'... I shall always remember sitting at the head of this little narrow trench, smoking a cigarette and trying to soothe the men simply by being quiet. Five or six little funk-holes dug into the side of the trench served to take the body of a man in a very huddled and uncomfortable position, with no room to move, simply to cower into the little hole. There they sit like animals for market, like hens in cages, one facing one way, one another. One simply looks at his hands clasped on his knees, dully and lifelessly, shivering a little as a shell draws near ...'

Extract from *Diary of a Dead Officer*: www.bl.uk/collection-items/diary-of-a-dead-officer

Using this extract, choose some of A.G. West's most powerful or affecting words to write a stanza or a poem about these men's experiences of the war. It doesn't need to rhyme or have a regular structure.

You could begin like this:

Like hens in cages, they huddled.

Working with a partner, compare your poems with the diary. Which do you think has more impact and why?

Activity 5: Persuasive writing or speech

Do you think 'Futility' is a good choice of poem for Remembrance Day? You could consider the fact that remembrance means to keep something in mind. Explain your ideas.

Support: You could begin your short speech or persuasive writing like this:

In my opinion, 'Futility' is an excellent / inappropriate choice of poem for Remembrance Day because ...

Challenge: include ideas about the wider questions related to peace that this poem provokes. You could use the phrases 'On one level this poem is about ... but on another level it encourages us to consider ...'

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► Homework or extension

Using the diary and letter extracts from this lesson as your starting point, imagine you are a young soldier on the front, far from home and loved ones. Write your own letter home.

You could continue Wilfred Owen's letter from where it ends, or, if you prefer, imagine A.G. West's diary entry is a letter home and continue it in letter form.

Activity 4: Exploring informal language

'Who's for the Game?'	'Recruiting'
contractions like 'who'll'	contractions like 'can't' and 'don't'
'sit tight'	'Lads'
'toe the line'	'the Hun'
'give his country a hand'	'damned well know'
'won't be a picnic'	'poor devils'
'up to her neck in a fight'	'blasted'

The poets use this kind of language because their poems are aimed at ordinary people who might join up or might know men who could join up. The informal language creates a conversational style that everyday men and women would be able to relate to and this would help to convey the message of the poems more effectively.

Lesson 4

Starter activity 1: Discussion

Students might have noticed some of the following points which would have made warfare difficult:

- There is a huge amount of mud, and it looks wet and cold, which would be difficult to fight in and might affect the soldiers' health.
- There is debris and barbed wire everywhere, which would be dangerous and difficult to move around in.
- Soldiers might get lost or disorientated as there are no visual landmarks and everywhere looks the same.
- There are no roads, so moving food, equipment and weapons would be difficult.
- There are no buildings, so no shelter or places to rest. It looks like an awful place to have to live.
- The places where soldiers are sleeping look unsafe, particularly if there are bombs dropping.
- The soldiers' uniforms look unsuited to extreme weather etc.

Activity 1: Reading and language analysis

Owen had to endure long and difficult marches. The road was 'shelled' and the trench was 'flooded'. He had then had to 'go over the top' in the dark onto very dangerous ground – the land was made up of 'sucking clay' and 'craters full of water'.

The writer uses techniques in his writing which suggest that he is a poet. He uses the powerful metaphor 'seventh hell' to sum up his experience. Owen includes repetition – 'dark, too dark' and 'not mud, not sloppy mud' – to reinforce the point he is making about the conditions. He also uses the metaphor 'an octopus of sucking clay'. This creates an image of the mud wrapping itself around the men's legs and pulling them under.

Activity 2: Quick comprehension

- It is morning in the poem.
- 'Always it woke him ... Until this morning' and 'Are limbs ... are sides ... too hard to stir?'
- It is possible that the speaker wants him to be moved into the light and the warmth because he has died in the cold and the dark. Perhaps the speaker almost hopes it will revive the soldier.
- The soldier might have been a farmer: 'whispering of fields half-sown.'
- The speaker says that the sun brings the seeds to life.
- Stanza 1: Let's move him into the sun which always woke him until now – if anything can help him the sun will know. Stanza 2: The sun brings everything to life but this precious body can't be revived. Why did the sun bother to bring the planet to life if this is the result?

Activity 3: Pick and mix challenge

- The tone of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Futility' is mournful because the poet feels sad that the soldier has died and he can't fully accept the waste of such a young life.
- Owen uses 'him' instead of naming the soldier because so many men died in this way; the soldier is representative of many soldiers. He may avoid the word soldier because he wants to present the young man as a person rather than a soldier.
- The speaker may make this order because he wants the soldier to be outside in the sun and fresh air as he would have been when he was a young farmer.
- 'Gently its touch'; 'the kind, old sun'; 'sunbeams toil'. The effect of the personification is that the sun seems alive and like a kindly friend.
- The poet is asking what the point of life is if people are just going to wage war and die.
- 'sun/sown'; 'once/France'; 'seeds/sides'; 'star/stir'.
- Suggested answer: I would choose the last interpretation because war is often messy and unclear and the soldier's death from the cold has left the speaker/poet feeling sad and bewildered.
- The poet feels that war is pointless and leads to unnecessary deaths.
- 'sun' and 'snow', 'cold star', 'still warm'. The effect of this symbolism is that warmth represents life and hope but the cold represents death and absence of life.