



Answers in Dutch



Throughout the handout:

Answers in English

Poetry

World War I (1914-1918)

Rupert Brooke
John McCrae
Siegfried Sassoon
E.E. Cummings
Jessie Jope
Wilfred Owen



Left: Recruitment poster for the First World War.

The picture is credited with encouraging millions of men to sign up to fight in the trenches, many of them never to return.

But new research has found that no such poster was actually produced during the war and that the image was never used for official recruitment purposes. In fact, it only became popular and widely-used after the conflict had ended.

The First World War, which began in 1914, was the inspiration for a great deal of poetry, much of it written by new young poets fighting at the front. Many of these men were to be among the 3/4 of a million British soldiers who died on the battlefields of France and Belgium during the four years of war.

The poetry of this period dramatically reflects the change of attitude towards the war, as hopes of an early victory vanished in the mud and bloodshed of trench warfare.

The horrific reality of trench warfare soon became clear to soldiers at the front. The optimism and idealism of 1914 reflected in **Rupert Brooke's** poems turned to bitter disillusionment as the war dragged on and casualties mounted. This mood intensified after the terrible death toll in the four-month Battle of the Somme in 1916, when

60,000 British soldiers were killed or wounded on the first day alone. The new, bitter mood was reflected most powerfully by the poets **Siegfried Sassoon** and **Wilfred Owen**.



Barbed wire



Trenches



Gas



Gas (why these dogs?)



Poetry of the Great War

For England, the nineteenth century ended in 1914. Even though Queen Victoria herself had died in 1901, it is really World War One that separates the Victorian Age from our own.

Of course, such general statements about history can only be made much later. At the time the situation presented a very different aspect. When the German armies invaded Belgium and France, war was officially declared, and once more Britain felt it had a noble cause to fight. Recruitment campaigns appealed to the old sentiments of honour and patriotism, and many thousands of young men enlisted. Cheered as heroes and filled with ideals of glory, they left England to serve their King and country in France.

What they found there was vastly different from anything they could ever have imagined. Within a month the German offensive had come to a halt, and what had started as a Blitzkrieg soon became a completely static war, with two armies separated only by a thin strip of no-man's land endlessly blasting away at each other. The front consisted of a forty thousand kilometre labyrinth of trenches, stretching from the English Channel to the Alps. Millions of soldiers were exposed to rain, mud, bitter cold and the orders of generals who refused to understand that their nineteenth century ideas about military tactics and strategy were no use in a war that was different from all previous ones. They still believed that massive attacks on the enemy would secure victory in the end. And so the war became an senseless series of attacks and counter-attacks. Official reports only mention numbers in what must have been tragedies:

September 20: Menin Road – British loss 22,000 men; gain 800 yards;

September 25: Polygon Wood – British loss 17,000 men; gain 1,000 yards;

October 12: Passchendaele – British loss 13,000 men in three hours; gain 100 yards.

The total number of victims of the Battle of Verdun is estimated at 600,000, that of the Somme at one million.

Assignment 1

Use the internet to find out what were the real causes for the outbreak of World War I.

Assignment 1



In Dutch



In English



Rupert Brooke (1887 – 1915)

The five sonnets by Rupert Brooke entitled 1914, written during the early months of the First World War, caught the imagination of the British public and Brooke's fellow poets. The poems reflected the tremendous mood of idealism and patriotism that gripped the nation at the start of the war. Most families had at least one member who had gone to fight in France and Belgium and Brooke's poems were widely read and enjoyed.

Brooke came from a privileged family background and he was educated at public school and Cambridge where he became known as a nature poet. He joined the army as an officer when the war broke out in 1914, and fought in Belgium. He was then sent to the Mediterranean where he became ill and died in 1915. On his death the handsome young poet became a national symbol of heroism and self-sacrifice of the war.

The great reputation that Brooke enjoyed at the time of his death declined as the real horror of the war began to be realized.

1914: The Soldier

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.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away*,
A pulse* in the eternal mind, no less
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

hidden

wander

left behind

polsslag



Assignment 2

Give at least 4 phrases from the text in which England is glorified.



Explain that the possible death of an English soldier is regarded by Brooke in terms of heroic nationalism, or if you wish: imperialism. Use words and phrases from the text.





In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae (1872 - 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.

papavers, klaprozen

leeuweriken

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.



Born November 30, 1872
[Guelph](#), Ontario, Canada

Died January 28, 1918 (aged 45)
[Boulogne-sur-Mer](#), France

Occupation Poet, physician, au-
thor, [Lieutenant Colonel](#) of
the [Canadian Expeditionary
Force](#)

Assignment 3

1. Who is the speaker of this poem and to whom is the poem addressed?
2. What message is the speaker giving?
3. What does the poet mean when he writes, "If ye break faith with us who die/ We shall not sleep, though Poppies grow/ In Flanders field"?
4. Look up what "poppies" meant in WW I.



In Dutch



In English

Use the backside of this paper if you haven't got space enough.



Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

Siegfried Sassoon was lucky enough to survive the war, even though he fought it initially with such enthusiasm that he was nicknamed Mad Jack. When he was wounded and returned to England to convalesce, he began his protest against what he saw as a senseless murder of the young. The military authorities successfully silenced him by claiming that he was shell-shocked, and sent him off to a military hospital in Scotland.

Does It Matter?

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

> eat their tea-cakes

Does it matter? - losing you 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 in the pit? > pit = here: the trenches
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad;
For they know that you've fought for your country,
And no one will worry a bit.

Assignment 4

Comment on the ironic sarcasm in this poem.
Which part is most striking to you?

Assignment 4

If necessary, write on a separate piece of paper.

They (1916) shows Sassoon's effective use of irony by employing two speaking voices. One of these is that of the establishment, which draws on standard Christian values; the other is the much more realistic voice of the soldiers themselves.

'They'

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back
'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
'In a just cause: they lead the last attack
'On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought
'New right to breed an honourable race,
'They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;
'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find
'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.
' And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'

Assignment 5

1. In what way are the starting-points of the Bishop and the boys similar?
2. In what way are they different?
3. Explain the title of the poem.

Assignment 5 (also use the backside)



E.E. Cummings (1894-1962)

My sweet old etcetera

my sweet old etcetera
aunt lucy during the recent

war could and what
is more did tell you just
what everybody was fighting

for,
my sister

isabel created hundreds
(and
hundreds) of socks not to
mention shirts fleaproof earmuffs

etcetera wrists etcetera, my

mother hoped that

i would die etcetera
bravely of course my father used
to become hoarse talking about how it was
a privilege and if only he
could meanwhile my

self etcetera lay quietly
in the deep mud et

cetera
(dreaming,
et
cetera, of
Your smile
eyes knees and of your Etcetera)

Edward Estlin Cummings' poem "my sweet old etcetera" is told from the perspective of a man who fought in the [First World War](#). The man is talking about the two cents given by members of his family on what the war should mean to everyone, and from his [perspective](#), it looks like the war and all attached perspectives were fairly meaningless.

The way [Cummings](#) achieved a tone of disinterest, in this poem, was by use of the word etcetera. Etcetera is a word commonly used to indicate that a list continues along the vein which the "etcetera" refers to, and it continues in such a way as to be clichéd out of the import of stating the referenced quality.

Blah, blah, blah. Blah blah.

Assignment 6

1. Read the poem again and now try and punctuate the text.
2. Think of words you could fill in for each 'etcetera'.

Assignment 6



Jessie Jope (1868-1941)

War Girls

'There's the girl who clips your ticket for the train,
And the girl who speeds the lift from floor to floor,
There's the girl who does a milk-round in the rain,
And the girl who calls for orders at your door.
Strong, sensible, and fit,
They're out to show their grit,
And tackle jobs with energy and knack.
No longer caged and penned up,
They're going to keep their end up
'Til the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

There's the motor girl who drives a heavy van,
There's the butcher girl who brings your joint of meat,
There's the girl who calls 'All fares please!' like a man,
And the girl who whistles taxi's up the street.
Beneath each uniform
Beats a heart that's soft and warm,
Though of canny mother-wit they show no lack;
But a solemn statement this is,
They've no time for love and kisses
Till the khaki soldier boys come marching back.

Jessie Pope's war poetry was originally published in the 'Daily Mail' - a fairly right-wing newspaper - and was used for recruitment purposes. She was widely published and produced 3 volumes of poetry - "Jessie Pope's War Poems" (1915) "More War Poems" (1915) and "Simple Rhymes for Stirring Times" (1916)

Wilfred Owen originally dedicated 'Dulce et Decorum Est' to her, but later changed it to a 'certain Poetess'

However she was primarily a light humorist and was described as the "foremost woman humorist" of her day. She also supported the Suffragette movement.

Assignment 7

1. Mention a number of jobs for girls /women at war time.
2. Why is this over when 'khaki ... boys' return?

Assignment 7

Assignment 8

Try and find info on women's labour during WW I. Tell about it here below and/or provide reference links.



Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

Dulce et Decorum Est

BY [WILFRED OWEN](#)

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring 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.*

Go to the next page for words and background information.

Assignment 9

Who is 'you' in line 17? What does the poet think of him/her?

Assignment 9



Dulce et decorum est

knock-kneed	knikkende knieën	lime	kalk
hag	heks	dim	vaag
sludge	slik	pane	glas van masker
haunting	achtervolgend	thick green light	kleur van gas
flares	granaten	plunge	zich storten
trudge	sjokken	smother	smoren
limp	mank	writhe	zich draaien
blood-shod	met bloeddoorlopen	jolt	stoot
lame	lam	gargle	gorgelen
hoot	getuit	froth	schuim
gas-shell	gifgasgranaat	cud	bij dieren: voedsel in de voormaag
ecstasy of fumbling	opgewonden tastend, pakken	vile	gemeen
clumsy	onhandig	incurable	ongeneeslijk
stumble	struikelen	zest	ijver
flounder	spartelen	ardent	brandend

WILFRED OWEN

1893—1918

The greatest of the war poets and the writer who most poignantly expressed the tragedy of the First World War was the young poet Wilfred Owen.

Owen served as an infantry officer and was awarded the Military Cross for bravery under fire. He was greatly influenced by the poetry of Siegfried Sassoon who encouraged him and became his friend and mentor. Like Sassoon, Owen describes the horror and futility of the war but, although sometimes bitter, his poems move the reader more by their pathos. As Owen wrote in the preface to his poems: "My subject is War and the pity of War. The Poetry is in the Pity. All a Poet can do today is to warn."

In Owen's poems there are no "enemies", only victims of war; the young sentry blinded by a shell, the exhausted soldier who is killed by a bullet as he lies sleeping, the legless soldier in a wheelchair who sees how the women turn their eyes away from him. Owen himself tragically exemplified this waste of young lives when he was killed on November 1, 1918, just seven days before the war ended, at the age of twenty-five.



Assignment 10

What is, in each poem, the poet's attitude towards World War I?
Use general info and refer to phrases and words in the poems themselves.



Assignment 10 (continued)