

Teaching notes

Pre-reading activities:

1. Research: Wilfred Owen and experiences of the trenches

Encourage students to learn about the poet's life, using both 'The Wilfred Owen Association' website and the 'BBC Schools' website to complete the research note making sheet.

2. Word web: exploring language

Get students to think about links between key words in the poem by creating a word web. Students need to draw a line between words they think link and either explain their reason or, as a higher order skill, consider the impact of word patterns on the reader.

Reading the poem with stanza still images

Create a more active reading of the poem by dividing the class into eight - one group per stanza - asking each group to create a still image based on their stanza. Then, as you read the poem, get each group in turn to hold their still image for their stanza. There is a good reading of the poem by Kenneth Branagh on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zDnzb06Kfc.

Analysing the poem: questions

Use the question sheet to get groups discussing and considering the language, structure and mood of the poem. Students could then join different groups and share answers for the different questions they have done, before sharing ideas as a whole class.

Visual exploration

To summarise the poem, either in class or for homework, students could create a mood board to visually present the ideas and atmosphere Owen evokes. They should make a collage using a selection of both images and key words. On the back of their mood board they should write one or two sentences as to what they feel the overriding mood is in the poem. This could then be used to create an 'art gallery' at the start of a future lesson, where students display their work and others respond to their peers' work using post-its.

Research: Wilfred Owen and experiences of the trenches

Use the internet to find out about Wilfred Owen and his life. Find the answers to the questions below!

Use the Wilfred Owen Association Website: www.wilfredowen.org.uk/Biography

- 1) Wilfred Owen was born inand died in
- 2) How old was Owen when he joined the British Army?
- 3) Why did Owen return to Britain in 1917?
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- 4) What did Siegfried Sassoon encourage Owen to do?
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.....
- 5) Owen's main aim in his poetry was to
.....
.....

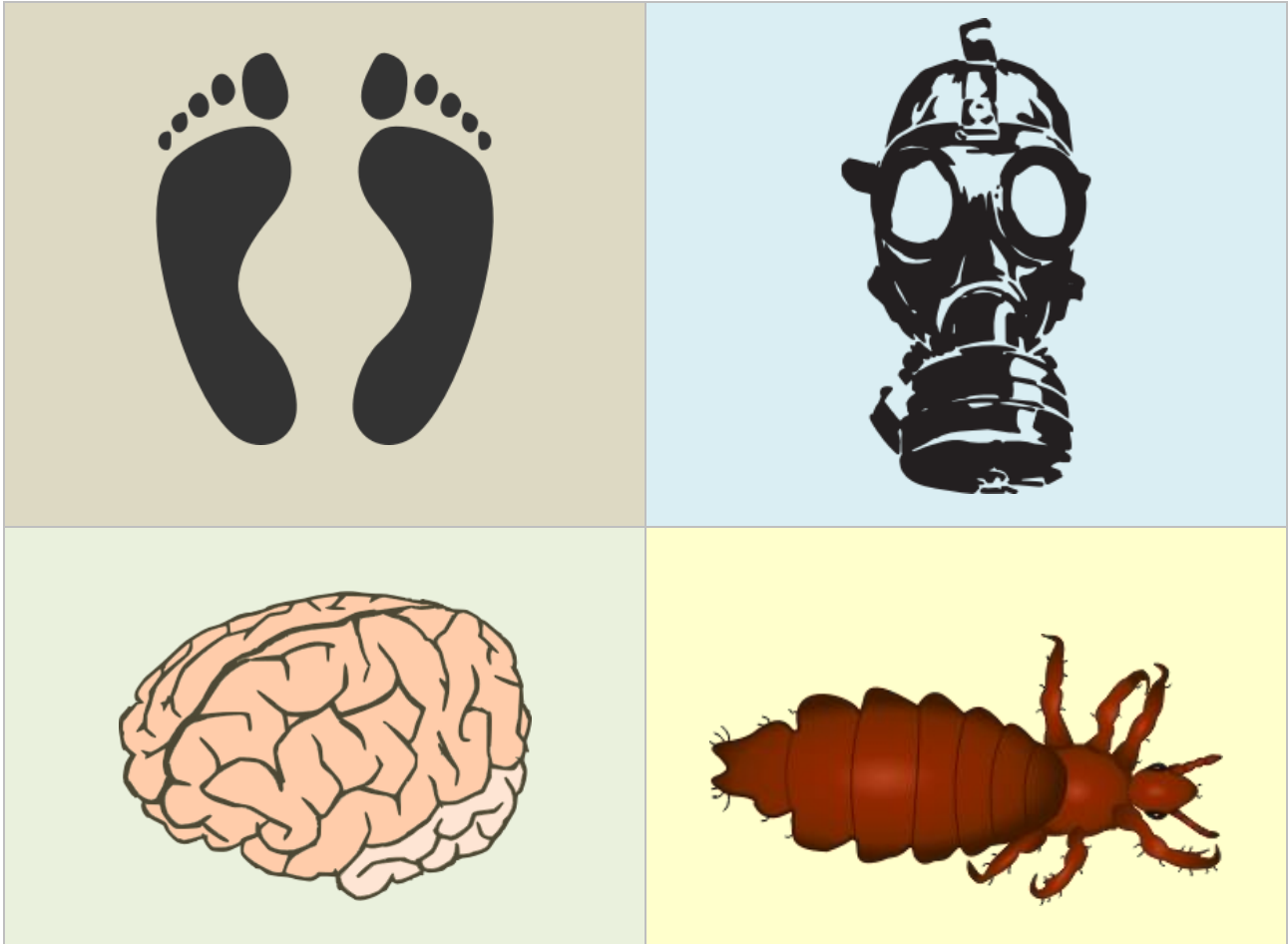
Now, use the following websites to explore what life was like in the trenches

BBC Schools WWI Trenches: www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z8sssbk

- 6) Using the 'Life in the Trenches' section, summarise five things that made front line soldiers' lives difficult:
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BBC Schools WWI Medicine: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/wwI/25403864

7) Identify the illnesses and issues associated with life in the trenches from the images below:



What are your expectations of Wilfred Owen's poetry from your research?

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Word web: exploring language

Create a web exploring links between words from the poem. Draw lines between words you think link together and, along the line, write down your reasoning.

Extra challenge: develop your ideas by writing down how you think the links might make readers feel (not the reason for making links).

knife	memory	nothing
mad		flickering
stormy		attacks
silence		dreams
ghosts		fires
love	afraid	frost

Analysing the poem: questions

Working in groups, choose a range of questions using the key provided. Base your choices on the areas you feel confident with, but also select some to challenge you as a group.

Make sure you answer questions for a range of stanzas.

Language

Which words in stanza one link to feelings? What does this tell you about war?

What is personified in stanza one and how does it make readers respond?

In stanza three, why is the colour ‘gray’ such an effective word to describe the soldiers, and their experiences?

What alliterative phrases can you find in stanza four? What effect does this have?

What is the effect of the repetition of ‘closed’ in stanza six?

What is the speaker potentially losing faith in during stanza seven?

Identify words which link to the effect of the cold throughout the poem. What does this add to the poem and the reader’s experience?

Structure

What is the effect of the ellipsis (...) in stanzas one and two?

What is the effect of ending stanzas (two and five) with questions? What does it make readers do?

Why do so many stanzas repeat the last line ‘But nothing happens’ (creating a refrain)? Why do you think the opening and closing stanzas have this line?

Atmosphere and mood

Which words in stanza two show that the soldiers feel jumpy?

How does the atmosphere in the trenches affect the soldiers? Choose two quotes from stanza five and explain your ideas.

How would you describe the mood in the final stanza? How does the speaker feel and how do readers respond to this?

Comparison

Which other ‘Power and conflict’ poems have a depressing or sad mood, such as that created in stanza three?

Which other poems use evocative verbs to help present the theme of conflict?

Which other poems would provide an interesting contrast when exploring the theme of conflict?