

In this poem Owen describes the terrible conditions that the soldiers faced in the Trenches in World War One. Owen focuses on two elements during the poem: the harshness of the weather and the effects of this on the soldiers, and also the daily experiences that would face all the soldiers who experienced trench life. The poem enables the reader to catch an incredibly detailed momentary glimpse of the life that the soldiers would be experiencing at this time. The questions below will help you explore the poem in some depth.

Language

Task one

Consider the type of language that is used in the poem:

- Much of the language focuses on the effects on the soldiers of the 'exposure' to the harsh weather.
- A large proportion of the words focus on actions.

Highlight in different colour pens these different types of language and what they each show / help to express.

Task two

Next analyse the language in more detail. Some of the lines from the poem are included in the chart below. Comment on and analyse these in as much detail as you can, using the example to help you.

From the remaining stanzas, select a line that you think is important, and analyse each of these.

Stanza	What it means	Effects and techniques
1 'Our brains ache'	A description of the physical symptoms that the soldiers are experiencing. Also points past the physical too: the word 'our' is a collective term, highlighting that all soldiers would be affected by this and that this is not just one person's experience.	The use of the word 'brain' signifies that the central body part of the soldiers is affected. The brain controls everything. It shows also that the war not only has a physical effect but also a psychological one. The verb 'ache' suggests that the suffering is ongoing, constant and continuous.

Stanza	What it means	Effects and techniques
2 'Merciless east winds that knife us'		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Tone and mood

Read the poem through again to identify the tone and mood of each stanza. Respond to these questions in a paragraph:

- Does the mood stay the same throughout the poem or does each stanza vary?
- Does the mood get more or less intense as the poem develops?
- Are there any 'lighter' moments in the poem, where the mood lifts slightly?
- Which for you are the most effective lines which create emotion? Why?

Structure

Consider your responses to the following questions, and write a paragraph to explain how Owen has structured the poem. Use quotations to support your ideas.

- What structural features has Owen used throughout the poem? Consider lines, stanzas, enjambment, use of punctuation, regular/irregular structure, layout etc.
- How do these features help to convey the tone and mood of the poem?

Poet's viewpoint

Several themes are explored in the poem. Choose three of the following themes and explain what you think Owen's view is on each of those themes, based on your understanding of the poem.

- futility of war
- death
- faith
- self-sacrifice
- a soldier's experience
- passive suffering
- abandonment
- God

What other themes does he consider in the poem?