

# World War I Poetry Assignment

## In Flanders Fields

John McCrae, died 1918

NOTES

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.

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.

## Questions

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. Describe ways in which we keep faith with the dead in everyday life.

**Dulce Et Decorum Est**  
Wilfred Owen, died 1918

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 disappointed shells that dropped 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 floundering 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. \*

\* It is sweet and proper to die for your country

**Questions**

1. What is the tone of poem? What words create this tone?
2. List the similes and metaphors in this poem.
3. Why does he describe the death of a soldier in such vivid detail?

4. What effect do you think he hoped to achieve by repeating the Latin quotation: “Dulce et decorum est” at the end of the poem?

**Directions:** What are main ideas the poets are expressing in the following poems.

### **The Soldier**

Rupert Brooke, died 1915

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.

5.

### **[All armies are the same . . .]**

Ernest Hemingway

All armies are the same  
Publicity is fame  
Artillery makes the same old noise  
Valor is an attribute of boys  
Old soldiers all have tired eyes  
All soldiers hear the same old lies  
Dead bodies always have drawn flies

6.

## **Assignment**

**Directions:** Do option A or B (only do one!). Based upon all of information and images you have seen this week regarding World War I either:

- A. Write one (24 lines min.) or two (12 lines min. each) poems about life during the war as a soldier. You may select a general subject or focus in on the many different topics we've discuss this week, including the hope, despair, justness of the war, trenches, being wounded, death, poison gas, artillery, machine guns, etc.
- B. Write a letter home. You are a soldier: French, British, German, or Austrian. Describe the conditions you are facing, the feelings you have, and the experiences of serving on the front during the war.