



Key Stage 3

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1 Explorations in creative reading and writing

Year 9 Pack 2

Insert

The Source that follows is:

Source A: 21st Century prose-fiction

It is an extract from the short story *Propping Up the Line* by Ian Beck, published in 2014.

It tells the story of Alfred, a young British soldier in the trenches of France during World War One.

**Please turn the page over
to see the Source**

Source A

Alfred, a young British soldier finds himself alone in the trenches of France during World War One...

1 Alfred felt something move. It came out of the mud in the dark behind his back where he sat cold and drowsily slumped against the trench wall. Something small and warmly alive pushed itself between the wooden slats and his battledress jacket. It touched for an instant the small exposed area of his pale dirty skin just where his jacket and vest were folded and rucked up together. He could feel something struggling and pushing to get past him. He shot up in revulsion – he knew just what it was: a filthy...

‘Rat!’ he shouted to no one in particular.

8 He saw it there, pushing through and twisting its head, saw the wet greasy fur and its mean red eyes. He kicked at it and missed. The rat scuttled out from the tiny gap between the slat supports and ran across the mud. Normally Alfred would have let it go. Rats were, after all, commonplace but something, whether pent-up anger... hate... loss... pain... boredom, whichever it was made him give chase after it.

The creature appeared sluggish, as if it were weighed down with overeating. It had most likely been feeding on what was caught, left behind, in the lines and coils of barbed wire which stretched for miles beyond the trench. The terrible sad debris of dead soldiers. The remains that were left behind after a 6am push.

17 Before it was light, after the heavy artillery bombardments and the whistles and the bright spray of the flares and the shouting and the Very lights¹, the men streamed over, filtered through the narrow gaps in the wire. Whole portions of them however were miraculously left behind – bits of men hooked up and hanging there for all to see, like the display in an awful butcher’s shop window; or if there were enough shreds and rags of uniform still attached to the limbs, then it was more like the washing on the line flapping on a Monday morning at home.

Alfred had grown almost used to such sights.

25 Almost used to seeing the remains of men he had sometimes known and shared fag time and mugs of tea with.

Almost used to them being suddenly torn apart and scattered around here and there or falling like rain into the mud.

Almost used to them being thrown up in the air along with the astonishingly loud shellbursts.

Used to seeing the remains chucked around among the living like so much discarded offal. 30 Used to seeing legs, hands, heads and sometimes faces stare up at him blankly from the grey mud. Used to seeing his pals’ insides suddenly all spilled out from between their buttons, or poking through the rips and gaps in their uniforms. Used to seeing their innards fully exposed in the cold light of the outside where they didn’t belong at all. Where they were never meant to be seen. He knew it was wrong to be even remotely used to such sights, or to any of it, even 35 for a second, let alone for ever.....

The rat zigzagged through the mud down the service trench, passed a wooden sign. It hesitated at the base of a trench ladder, and Alfred finally smashed it down into the mud. He felt its tiny backbone crack under his boot and he had a moment of fleeting sympathy for it; just another dirty dead thing, another of God's creatures that had given up the ghost in the mud like
40 so many others, and no one there to grieve its loss but him. He twisted his boot on the rat, pushing its bloated little body further into the mire.

Very lights¹ – brilliant white flares used at night to show the approaching enemy

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Source A – *Propping up the Line* by Ian Beck taken from *Stories of World War One* © Orchard Books, 2014

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