

***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
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.*

Wilfred Owen

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Learning Objective: The goal of the exemplar is to give students practice in reading and writing habits that they have been working with throughout the curriculum, in this case using poetry. It was designed originally for use in a middle / high school Social Studies curriculum, where teaching students to go beneath a surface understanding of historical events, and to make connections among historical events, is at a premium. Although this exemplar was designed to be used within a Social Studies curriculum, it is appropriate for use in an ELA class as well.

By reading and re-reading the poem, closely combining paired and full classroom discussion about it, and writing about it, students come to an appreciation of the need to (a) re-read, paraphrase, and discuss ideas, (b) achieve an accurate basic understanding level of a text, (c) achieve an accurate interpretive understanding of a text, and (d) build a coherent piece of writing that both constructs and communicates solid understanding of text.

Rationale: It is critical that students grapple with rich text in the content areas. It is particularly important that students recognize that it is key that they understand what an author is actually saying in the text before they proceed to analysis of that text. The steps in this exemplar, from basic understanding to analytical/inferential understanding, are intended to help build this habit of mind in students.

The text in this exemplar is short. It is also designed to be used in a classroom that will have a large range of reading levels – typical of public middle and high schools. For these reasons, the students do not read the text independently before the teacher reads it aloud; rather, the first reading is a supported one. The purpose here is to include *all* students successfully on the initial read, strong and struggling readers alike. By middle school (and certainly by high school) struggling students are easily discouraged, so it is important to “hook them into success” from the very beginning.

However, throughout the steps of the sequence, students have ample opportunity to read independently and successfully.

Reading Task: Students will first read the text in a supported context, with the teacher reading aloud while they read/follow silently. They will work closely with text-dependent questions to build both basic understanding and then analytic / inferential understanding of the text. After that, using a Focusing Question provided by the teacher, students capture their analytical understanding in notes, before they write a short essay that relies heavily on text-based evidence, and explaining that evidence. This writing allows students to capture their understanding in a coherent whole.

Discussion Task: Throughout this exemplar, students are discussing: in pairs, in small groups, in full class discussions. There are two purposes of the “turn and talk” in pairs – first, to make sure all students are actually focusing and talking about the text (“speaking their thinking”); and second, to make sure students actually own the ideas they are working with. Students cannot write what they could not have spoken, and often what they actually did speak; if we want them to write coherently and thoughtfully about the text, they need frequent opportunity to speak those ideas.

The full class discussion allows the teacher to guide students to deeper thinking than they might have reached on their own.

Writing Task: The writing task is a short argument piece, responding to a Focusing Question, showing analytical understanding. This writing is NOT used as an assessment – rather, it is an essential part of the instruction, helping students both to crystallize their understanding of the text and to write clearly and coherently – this time, and next time.

Common Core Standards Addressed in This Instructional Sequence:

RL.8.1, RL.8.2, RL.8.3, RL.8.4, RL.8.6, RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.2, RH.6-8.6, RH.6-8.10

W.8.1a, W.8.1b, W.8.1c, W.8.1d, W.8.1e, W.8.4, W.8.5, W.8.6

SL.8.1

L.8.1

When Poets Speak, Every Word Counts

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It has sometimes been said that poetry lies somewhere between prose and music. That being true, it's really important to read poetry aloud.

First, listen to the poem being read aloud. Just as you do when you hear a new piece of music, try to listen for the overall sense of the poem.

Now, listen to it being read aloud again, but this time read it in your head at the same time.

Finally, take turns with a partner reading the poem aloud. Each of you should read the whole poem – don't alternate by stanzas.

Now, by yourself, read the poem silently. Leave any tracks on the text that will help you to slow down, read carefully, and make meaning. You might:

- *note a particular word or phrase*
- *paraphrase a bit*
- *raise a question*
- *make a connection to some other text or bit of information*

Stop and Discuss

1. What event is the poet describing in the first stanza? Whom is he describing?

2. What event is the poet describing in the second stanza?

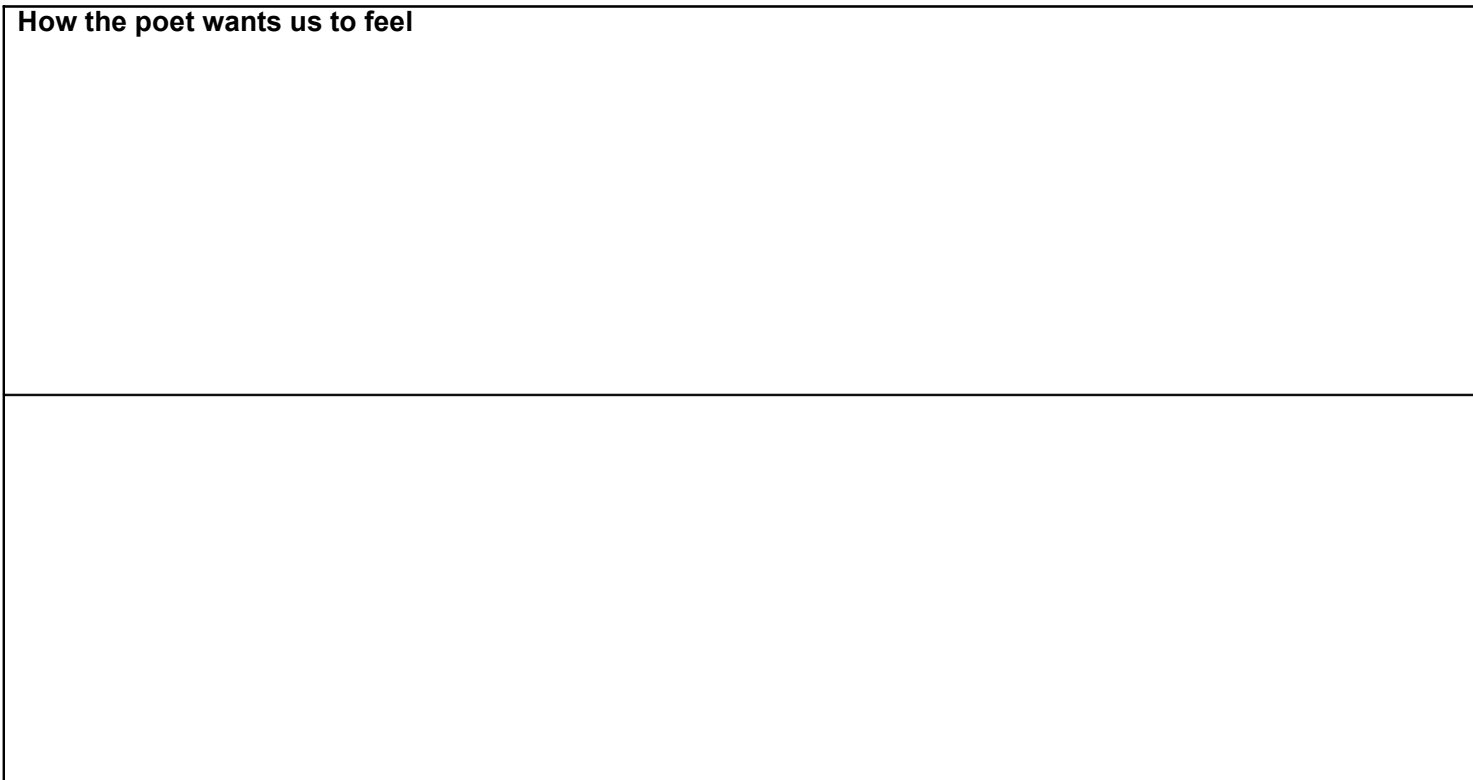
Look at the phrase “dim through the misty panes and thick green light”. What do you think the poet is referring to here?

In the boxes below, draw as carefully and with as much detail as you can the events that are occurring in the first two stanzas of the poem (NOT the third stanza yet!)



So, how does the poet want us readers to feel about the events he is describing in these first two stanzas?

How the poet wants us to feel



Now, we're ready for the third and final stanza of the poem.

1) Re-read the third stanza aloud. Where does the first sentence of the stanza end?

2) What scene is the poet describing in the first eight lines of this stanza?

3) Whom is the poet describing when he uses the words “innocent” and “children”?

Why do you think he chooses these words?

4) The final words of the poem, “Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” are Latin for “It is a sweet and proper thing to die for one’s country.”

Now that you know this, try paraphrasing the last stanza of the poem.

Go back now and draw the third stanza of the poem, so it is complete.

5) Notice that the poet speaks to the reader here as “you” for the first time. How many times does he use the word “you”?

Why do you think the poet has switched from description (in the first two stanzas) to direct address (in the third stanza)?

6) Finally, look again at the title of the poem. The poet is using *irony* here – this is an *ironic* title. What do you think “irony” might mean?

Why does it make sense to call the use of this phrase “dulce et decorum est pro patria mori” *ironic*?

Time to Write!

Here’s the Focusing Question:

Why do you think the poet ends the poem with the lines “the old Lie....dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”?

Now that you know the poem so well, try with your partner to come up with a thoughtful answer to this question.

Remember, your answer to this question will be your **thesis / focus statement** for your piece of writing.

Think about the evidence from the text that you will use to support / develop your thesis. Then draft your essay.

Remember, a good essay will:

- *give a short introduction that names the title and author, and gives a brief summary of what the poem is about*
- *clearly state a thesis / focus that answers the question*
- *give specific evidence from the text, and explains that evidence thoughtfully*
- *conclude by reminding the reader of the thesis, and reflects in some broader way*

Student Notes “Dulce et Decorum Est”

Focusing Question: *Why do you think the poet ends the poem with the lines “the old lie....dulce et decorum est pro patria mori”?*

Focus Statement / thesis:

Context / evidence from text

