

Exposure

Key Learning:

Understand Owen's use of imagery to convey his opinion about war.



Soldiers are exposed to the horrors and reality of war - this is not what they signed up for.

Exposure

Physical exposure to the elements. The living conditions meant that many soldiers died as a result of illness rather than as a result of dying a hero's death in battle for their country.

Owen's message is about the reality and futility of war.

Personification of the wind - it is an enemy that attacks them.

Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that
knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

Low, drooping flares confuse our memories of the
salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,
But nothing happens.

Waiting for something to happen.

Physical weakness due to the conditions

This is the reality of the situation - not in the middle of battle, but sitting, waiting, open to the elements. This is what kills most of them, not fighting.

Sibilance used to reflect whispering - suggests their anxious wait for something to happen.

Simile to compare wire's movement to the way it moves when a person falls into it - links physical enemy with natural one.

Personification of wind - as though the wind is the enemy trying to break through the defences of the barbed wire.

Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,
Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.
Northward, incessantly, the flickering gunnery rumbles,
Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.
What are we doing here?

Question reflects their feelings - war is pointless as they are not doing anything.

Simile to reflect idea that the war is happening but it is far away - seems unreal to them.

Metaphor - links natural world to their man-made defence - suggests nature is just as harsh as warfare is to these men.

Words and colour here all associate with despair and hopelessness - this is what they feel.

List here emphasises their reality of war - it is dull and drawn out; forever waiting for something to happen.

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...
We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army
Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,
But nothing happens.

Repetition reflects the futility - they are waiting for the 'actual' fight with a physical enemy but in reality are becoming weak, fighting nature.

Personifies the dawn as the leader/general in an army - she 'gathers' her 'troops' to attack them.

Metaphor - the poor weather the enemy - it continues and they grow weaker in the fight against it. Cannot beat nature.

Alliteration used to
emphasise sudden sound
breaking their waiting - has
the battle begun again?

Sudden successive flights of bullets **streak** the
silence.

Less deadly than the air that shudders black with
snow,

With sidelong **f**lowing **f**lakes that **f**lock, pause, and
renew,

We watch them wandering up and down the wind's
nonchalance

But nothing happens.

Personification of snowflakes -
nothing they can do but watch
them - they can't
fight/control/capture this
enemy.

Compares
weapons to
weather -
weather is
more deadly
- bullets may
miss but the
can't escape
the weather.

Alliteration -
emphasises the snow
is relentless - unlike
the fighting which
does stop at times.

Hiding
from the
enemy
(in this
case,
the
weather)

Pale flakes with **fingering stealth** come feeling for our faces -
We **cringe in holes**, back on forgotten dreams, and **stare, snow-**
dazed,
Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.
Is it that we are dying?

They can no longer
see the enemy -
literally as the
snow is too heavy
but also because it
is unclear who the
'real' enemy is
anymore.

Personification of snow/cold - it is
seeking them out - no escape.

Death seems probable - from
exposure to the cold, not from the
fighting/bullets.

Metaphor - this is what they have become. They are thinking about life back home.

Can't grasp it - can't actually go home.

Fire at home is precious - the warmth is something they are missing now.

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed
With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;
For hours the innocent mice rejoice: The house is theirs;
Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed, -
We turn back to our dying.

Back to their reality - death is inevitable.

Repetition of closed shows the hopelessness of their situation. They can't escape it and will probably never return home.

They fear that if they don't fight or if they lose the war, then our land will no longer be free - this is what they were told. It is what keeps them there.

Since *we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;*
Nor *ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.*
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loathe, we lie out here; therefore
were born,
For love of God seems dying.

They are losing faith in God due to their suffering. God's creation is attacking them - this causes them to question their belief in him.

Dead bodies will be found frozen to the ground - this is the effect of nature on the dead.

The soldiers who must bury the dead - shaking from cold/fear/emotion.

Tonight, His frost will fasten on this mud and us,
Shrivelling many hands, puckering foreheads crisp.
The burying party, picks and shovels in the shaking grasp,
Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,
But nothing happens.

War is futile - these deaths happen but nothing changes - they just recruit more soldiers to die in the same way.

Metaphor - the eyes of the dead have frozen OR the eyes of those who must bury them - they have to be numb to the emotion of the situation.