

Mametz Wood

- by Owen Sheers -

Activities

A

Students will begin to select at a simple level drawing conclusions which will be built upon later. There will be some discussion of the highlighted words and phrases and others that they have chosen. There should be perhaps a consideration of the impartiality of death in conflict which takes the young of every nation. (Some students might however mention the 'singing' even at this stage) However, he does not really highlight the fact that the dead men are mostly Welshmen even though Owen Sheers is Welsh and there is a sculpture at the site of the battle which reflects this. {There are numerous photographs of the memorial which might be shown. The symbolism should be evident}

B

There will be strong opinions here. Some words and phrases are highlighted. Students might make a case for others. The impact of the words should be noted. The fragility of nature might be noted.

C

Students should identify the conjunction at the beginning as if this is a continuing story. They might focus on the use of "sentinel" and perhaps start to discuss the idea of the conscious protection of the dead by the natural world. Man has killed man and the earth takes him back. They should get the sub text of 'sentinel' and 'reminders'. Students will be directed to the simile and all that it implies about revelation and closure. Students should discuss structure and the use of enjambment here and throughout the poem. What does the device achieve? They should be directed to the final simile in this section and the effect it gives. The earth is always conscious of what it has to do.

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D

Students might be guided to the physical reality of death and how Sheers suggests this. There is no romanticism here. e.g. "dance-macabre". There are facts like 'twenty men'. Humans are vulnerable and, like nature, fragile. Students should be guided to this conclusion. Students should be encouraged to look at a selection of war poetry and discuss.

E

The rhythm of the stanza inevitably leads us to the horrific last phrase. The students should read aloud again. There is the sense of immediacy juxtaposed with a reference to a long ago burial. Discussion of other 'unearthings' of battle might ensue. Does this make the ugly beautiful?

F

Personal and critical views will be sought. Students should be aware that it is a poem of contrasts. (Past and present. Youth and age. Fragility and strength. Life and death) Examples will be chosen and discussed. "In the midst of life we are in death" etc. Will a poem last longer than a sculpture and if so why? The impact of the poem and its context will be addressed. Finally, how successfully does the poet convey what Sheers wants us to realise and what is our reaction? The responses might be analytical and/or emotional.