


# Wilfred Owen: Investigating *Dulce et Decorum Est*

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### Investigating *Dulce et Decorum Est*

- ❖ Owen called this 'a gas poem'. Explore how Owen describes the gas attack in the poem.
  - How does he use it to further his argument against war?
- ❖ Read Jessie Pope's poem *The Call* which you can find at: <http://www.crossref-it.info/textguide/Poetry-of-Wilfred-Owen/36/2582>. What in this poem do you think would have particularly angered Owen?
  - Are you able to see the influence of the Latin phrase 'Dulce et Decorum Est' in *The Call*?

### Investigating language and tone in *Dulce et Decorum Est*

- ❖ Verbs tell us about the action in a poem. List all the verbs which Owen uses in this poem and explore their impact on you the reader.
- ❖ Nouns depict objects. Make a list of the common nouns Owen uses and see if you can pick out any patterns.

### Investigating structure and versification in *Dulce et Decorum Est*

Iambic pentameter is the rhythm of normal speech. Tap out the rhythm of each line with your fingers so that you can physically check the regular / irregular beats.

- Now read out the poem with a friend with one of you reading the regular lines and the other reading the irregular lines.
- How does this varied pace re-create the horror of the gas attack?
- ❖ Make a note of how Owen uses structure to move us through the poem.

### Investigating imagery and symbolism in *Dulce et Decorum Est*

Owen compares the men to beggars and hags and perhaps animals. How do these images contribute to a sense of the pity of war?

- ❖ Compare the imagery Owen uses in *Dulce et Decorum Est* with the imagery and symbolism in *Anthem for Doomed Youth*.
  - How far do you agree that this makes them very different sorts of poems?
- ❖ Compare the imagery and symbolism Owen uses in *Dulce et Decorum Est* with the imagery and symbolism of *Disabled*.
  - How far do you agree that this makes them very similar sorts of poems?

### Investigating themes in *Dulce et Decorum Est*

The last word of the poem is 'mori', meaning 'to die'. It is in Latin and the only direct mention of death. Yet this poem describes one of the most terrible experiences of war. What do you think is added to the poem by this lack of direct reference to death?

- ❖ Owen gives a very detailed picture of suffering. How do you respond to the criticism that it is too explicit?
- ❖ How far do you agree that this is Owen's angriest poem?
  - Does Owen's anger detract in any way from the impact of the poem?