


# Wilfred Owen: Investigating *Mental Cases*

 refers to links on [www.crossref-it.info](http://www.crossref-it.info)

## Wilfred Owen: Investigating *Mental Cases*

### Cases

#### Investigating *Mental Cases*

- ❖ The horror Owen describes in *Mental Cases*, the 'wading sloughs of flesh' l.13 echoes the corpses and waist-high slush he describes in *The Sentry*. Both poems dwell on the eyes of the tormented. Note down the references to eyes in both poems.
  - Re-read *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Notice Owen's reference to the eyes of the victim of the gas attack.
- ❖ Why are the references to eyes so powerful and effective in *Mental Cases*, *The Sentry* and *Dulce et Decorum Est*?
- ❖ Owen is using this grim poem to show the horrendous aftermath of war, which he regards as hellish. In the early part of the twentieth century, mental breakdown gained less sympathy than physical injury. What differences do you notice in Owen's presentation of the men in the poem *Mental Cases* compared with his description of the man in *Disabled*?
- ❖ Compare the way in which Owen creates his image of hell in *Mental Cases* with the image of hell he gives us in *Strange Meeting*.

#### Investigating language and tone in *Mental Cases*

- ❖ *Disabled* and *Mental Cases* can be seen as two sides of the same coin, the first dealing with the physically disabled, the second with those whose reason has been shot away. How does Owen capture our pity in both poems?
  - Which is the harshest reality?
  - What do you think Owen felt about the two different states of injury?

#### Investigating structure and versification in *Mental Cases*

- ❖ In *Mental Cases* Owen seems to either jettison rhyme altogether or use almost pure predictable rhymes to make his point. How does this use of rhyme add to the pity of the poetry?
- ❖ Remind yourself of *Exposure* in which Owen uses carefully constructed half rhymes. Which poem is the more effective and why?

#### Investigating imagery and symbolism in *Mental Cases*

- ❖ Owen's use of the pathetic fallacy in *Mental Cases* is echoed in *Spring Offensive* and *Futility*. Make a note of how Owen uses the pathetic fallacy in each of the poems.
  - How effective is this poetic device in creating the poetry which comes, in Owen's view, through the pity?
- ❖ Which of *Mental Cases*, *Spring Offensive* and *Futility* do you find most moving?
  - Can you explain why?

#### Investigating themes in *Mental Cases*

- ❖ Owen admits a share in the guilt which is such an important theme in *Mental Cases*. Why does Owen feel guilty about these particular men?
- ❖ Compare the theme of guilt in *Mental Cases* with Owen's feelings for the soldier in *The Sentry*.
- ❖ Compare the theme of guilt in *Mental Cases* with Owen's feelings for the soldier in *S.I.W.*
- ❖ In what way is the theme of *Mental Cases* significantly different to that of *Disabled*?