

# Wilfred Owen: Investigating *The Last Laugh*

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### Laugh

#### Investigating *The Last Laugh*

- ❖ In *The Last Laugh* Owen creates, in a very short space, three very different individual soldiers. From Owen's descriptions of their deaths what sort of man does he suggest each is?
  - How do the responses of the guns and shells add to our understanding of the characters?
- ❖ Owen's choice of poem title says a lot about his feelings about war. What do you think is added to the poem by its new title?
- ❖ How would the title 'Last Words' have toned down the anti-war message which Owen wished to communicate?

#### Investigating language and tone in *The Last Laugh*

- ❖ Owen wrote to his mother about this poem that it has 'had rather a harrowing effect on you. I have shown it to no one else as it is not chastened yet. It baffles my critical spirit.' What is particularly 'harrowing' about *The Last Laugh*?
  - What might Owen have meant by it is not 'chastened' in terms of the language he uses?
  - What do you suppose 'baffled' Owen's 'critical spirit' in the poem?

#### Investigating structure and versification in *The Last Laugh*

- ❖ The formulaic nature used by Owen in each verse makes *The Last Laugh* an uncomplicated and accessible poem. How does the simplicity of the structure add to the power and the pity of the poem?
  - How does the predictability of the couplets and the unpredictability of the final three lines of each verse add to the terror and tension Owen creates?

#### Investigating imagery and symbolism in *The Last Laugh*

- ❖ The power of the poem lies in the personification of the armaments. Compare personification of the weapons in *The Last Laugh* with their personification in *Anthem for Doomed Youth*
  - Now compare the above with Owen's personification of the 'Great Gun' in *Sonnet On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought into Action*
- ❖ Each of *The Last Laugh*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth* and *Sonnet On Seeing a Piece of Our Heavy Artillery Brought in to Action* is equally sinister in its own way. Which poem do you personally find most horrific in terms of Owen's representation of the weapons?

#### Investigating themes in *The Last Laugh*

- ❖ *The Last Laugh* may be said to be the most cynical and despairing of Owen's poems. 'The pity is the poetry.' How far do you agree that this is true for *The Last Laugh*?
  - Do you feel that this may be the darkest of Owen's poem? If so, explore the reasons for this being the case.