

# THE FIERCEST LIGHT



**NORFOLK  
& NORWICH  
FESTIVAL**

**1418-NOW**  
WW1 CENTENARY ART COMMISSIONS



Schools' resource pack

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**The Fiercest Light 2016**

**Educational resource pack**

'The Fiercest Light' was co-commissioned by 14-18NOW: WW1 Centenary Art Commissions, Norfolk & Norwich Festival, and Writers' Centre Norwich.

**Thanks to** Sam Ruddock, Sophie Scott-Brown, Tanner Barnes, Ros Dixon, Sophie Holdsworth, Adam Pugh, Erin Barnes, Marina Hamilton, Shey Hargreaves, Rufus Lunn, Nicholl Hardwick, Sara Helen Binney, Gary Standley, Wendy Witham and Becky Demmen.

Perhaps no artform captured the complexity and terror of the First World War more acutely than poetry.

Sam Ruddock,  
Producer of 'Fierce Light' and 'The Fiercest Light'

Sassoon's 'sunlit picture of hell', Owen's 'children ardent for some desperate glory', Brooke's 'corner of a foreign field that is forever England' capture the waste, the tragedy, the collective trauma, the patriotism, and the utter folly of it all.

War poetry slides down the ages. As we commemorate 100 years since the Battle of the Somme, Fierce Light brought together outstanding international poets with filmmakers and visual artists to explore the war, its themes and legacy in the 21st century.

Working with world-renowned poets and exciting filmmakers, we wanted to take a fresh look at World War One. We were inspired by the words of Major John Ebenezer Stewart, a Scottish soldier whose poem 'The Fierce Light' laments the stories of war that go untold. What other experiences of war might not have been explored in war poetry? How might we gain a broader understanding of war by focusing on the many peoples from around the world who fought or supported the troops?

Produced by Norfolk & Norwich Festival and Writers' Centre Norwich as part of 14-18 NOW, the UK's arts programme for the First

World War centenary, each poet responded to their commission from their own perspective of war and the history of WW1. Some have taken a personal journey into their family histories and others have looked at their own nation's engagement with the conflict. From New Zealand soldiers crossing the sea to fight in Europe, to those from the Caribbean paid to fight in a war they were made unwelcome in, each brings a contemporary voice to the impact of war through the ages.

The newly commissioned poetry, and the films that have been made in response to it, represent a creative response to the memory of a conflict that was, and remains, a personal and collective trauma.

Now, in The Fiercest Light, we have turned to others whose voices are not often heard in relation to war: the young, the old, the excluded, those whom society and war have disabled. The Fiercest Light offers a platform to learn about war, and to explore relationships with war, trauma, history, and the modern world.

We hope this provides an exciting classroom resource and stimulates creativity for teachers and students alike.

DEAD MEN

DEAD MEN

LOOK ME

LOOK ME

THROUGH

THROUGH

AND

AND

THROUGH

THROUGH

**The pack contains:**

Information on WW1 and War poetry learning resources

The poetry produced as part of The Fierce Light project

In-text glossaries and reference guides

Brief biographical profiles on the poets

Suggested classroom discussion questions

Suggested activities

**Using this Pack**

Each workshop outline is intended to be a stand-alone session. Teachers/group leaders may wish to select one or a number of the works featured.

The workshops can be used as a supplement to class projects or courses of study in English Language and Literature, History, Citizenship and PSHE.

The workshops have been designed to complement the English programme of study and the literacy curricula of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales for upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3.

**Suggested time plan for a workshop**

A typical workshop is 2 hours in length. This can be split into two hour-long sessions.

Activity	Time
Introducing The Fierce Light; silent readings and group readings of the poem	15 mins
Group/Small group discussion: -Starting questions -Themes -Connections	20 (to 30) mins
Writers Reflect: silent reading and small group discussion in response to the questions	15 mins*

**Finding further information on Fierce Light, WW1 and War Poetry****Fierce Light films**

As part of The Fierce Light project, filmmakers were commissioned to produce original films inspired by the poetry.

<https://www.1418now.org.uk/commissions/fierce-light-2/videos/>

**World War One and war poetry**

General overviews, statistical information, images and thematic content

14-18 Now: [www.1418now.org.uk](http://www.1418now.org.uk)

Imperial War Museum: [www.iwm.org.uk](http://www.iwm.org.uk)

BBC: [www.bbc.co.uk/ww1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ww1)

**Introductory overviews to World War One poetry and poets**

The First World War Poetry Digital Archive:  
<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/>

The Great War 1914-1918:

<http://www.greatwar.co.uk/poems/>

**Debates and issues relating to World War One, poetry, history, memory and representation**

'Has poetry distorted our view of World War One?' : <http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z38rq6f>

'Reframing First World War Poetry':

<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/reframing-first-world-war-poetry>

**Wider Aims**

Extend the legacy of Fierce Light (2016) project

Make Fierce Light poetry and films accessible to a youth audience at upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3

Support deepening engagement with the legacy of World War One in line with curriculum requirements in English and History

Provide a framework for exploring themes addressed in the poetry within a contemporary context

Provide a springboard for students' original writing.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will have read the original Fierce Light poetry

Students will have an awareness of how the featured poetry relates to World War One as part of our social and cultural heritage

Students will have formulated a personal interpretation of the poetry and discussed this with others

Students will have discussed themes arising from the poem (both composition techniques and content) and drawn connections to contemporary events or personal experience

Students will have used the poem and their discussions as a springboard for their own original imaginative writing

Students will produce a range of creative writing outcomes which can be planned, drafted and edited.

**Contents may be copied and used as handouts in a classroom or other learning environment settings only.**

**The suggested discussion questions** are aimed at deepening engagement with the themes and issues contained in Fierce Light poetry. They are intended to encourage students to connect the poetry's themes with contemporary issues relevant to their own lives and experience. The discussions' outputs provide the basis for students' original writing. Teachers should treat these suggestions as a stimulus for explorative discussion only. We recommend whole-class discussions for Key Stage 2. Key Stage 3 students may find small group work more productive.

**The Writers Reflect sections** are intended for older students (Key Stage 3) keen to develop their understanding of the creative writing process. These sections can be copied and distributed. Students may wish to work through the questions as a group, in small groups or individually.

**The suggested activities** can be undertaken in small groups or individually. They are intended to create a meaningful basis for students to engage with the themes contained within the poem. They do not require or refer to historical knowledge of World War One. Activity suggestions aim to draw out the broader issues (for example, memory, trauma, conflict) explored and communicated through Fierce Light poetry.

## The Fierce Light

John Ebenezer Stewart

- 1 If I were but a Journalist  
And had a heading everyday  
in double column caps, I wist,  
I too could make it pay;
- 2 But still for me the shadow lies  
Of tragedy, I cannot write  
of these so many Calvaries  
As of a pageant fight
- 3 For dead men look me through and through  
With their blind eyes, and mutely cry  
My name as I were one they knew,  
In that red-rimmed July;
- 4 Others on new sensation bent  
Will wander here with some glib guide  
Insufferably eloquent  
Of secrets we would hide
- 5 Hide in this battered crumbling line  
Hide in these rude promiscuous graves  
Till one shall make our story shine  
In the fierce light it craves

**Major John Ebenezer Stewart, 8th Battalion, Border Regiment** was born in 1889, Glasgow, the son of Isabella and William Stewart, a plasterer and a slater. In 1907 he won a scholarship to the University of Glasgow. Following the outbreak of world war in 1914, he enlisted to fight with the Highland Light Battalion, later serving with the Southern Staffordshire regiment. In 1915, he was sent to France where he fought in both Flanders and the Somme. In 1917 he was awarded the military cross. He was killed in action on 29 April 1918.

### Glossary and Reference Guide

**Calvaries** A representation of the crucifixion. An experience of extreme suffering.

**Pageant** An elaborate dramatic procession or presentation that usually depicts an historical or traditional event.

**Red-rimmed July** Refers to the Battle of the Somme, 1st July 1916–19th November 1916: 141 days of battle.

**Glib** Fluent but insincere; shallow.

What sort of mood do you think the poem sets?  
Why do you think the poet does this?  
What lines do you find the most interesting? Why?

### Themes to discuss

**Right to Write?** The poem seems torn between the impossibility of writing about the scale of the tragedy and the need to have these stories told. Look at verses 1 and 4 for evidence of this.

What is the difference between the story a journalist would tell and that of a poet?

What responsibilities do you think writers have when telling stories about other people's experiences?

**Haunted?** The poem raises the issue of guilt and memory and how it affects people's behaviour. Look at verses 2 and 3 for evidence of this.

Why do people feel guilty about things they cannot control?

How do memories shape what people choose to do?

### Connections

What sort of large-scale disasters can you think of that have happened or are currently happening today?

How do we find out about these events?

How do we find out about the people involved?

### Suggested Activity: Unheard Voices

Imagine you have been asked to report on a contemporary world crisis. You have just read John Ebenezer Stewart's poem and want to find a way to give the people involved a voice. Make a list of the sort of questions you would ask them about themselves and their experiences. Imagine how they would answer you: write their story.

## When Your Mother Calls You, Come

Yrsa Daley-Ward

- 1 There are things that you've got to do in this life.  
There are things that you need to do.
- 2 If your mother was stolen  
Or you never had one  
You go to the one who calls you  
Even if her voice comes through from far away  
And she doesn't know your name.
- 3 Your name is  
Royden. Roy for short.  
Conrad, perhaps,  
or Walter.  
Laselle,  
Lionel,  
Ward,  
Campbell
- 4 ...where you're headed  
These things hardly matter.
- 5 The morning is red  
and tough as your hands.  
The sun is on your head  
preparing to leave.  
Everyone knows  
but nobody says  
Where you're headed it will hardly be.
- 6 Your uncle holds his grief in his pocket.  
Keeps his thoughts buttoned up to the top  
smiles so low in his throat  
you wouldn't spot it.  
Nods goodbye with dark eyes,  
dry with hope.
- 7 Your grandma said,  
"Don't you go.  
This war that isn't ours  
will take the best of us  
and the worst of us  
and the ones that don't deserve this

And of course  
the ones who do  
and the brave ones  
and the foolish  
what's the difference  
when we lose them?

- 8 Our men too black  
so they send dem away  
Our men try back again  
dey send dem away  
Some of dem too soft  
and dey run them 'way  
most they a guh lose  
and few they take  
why our boys a run guh foreign  
to be German bait?"
- 9 But you were born  
Black  
and itching to see the world  
Black  
and cool under fire  
Black  
and handsome  
In a suit
- 10 They wouldn't take your cousins  
For reasons you don't know  
Your brother stands  
trembling beside you.
- 11 The motherland called from across the water.  
She said Rule Britannia  
You heard the cry  
sure as you stand here  
or  
sure as you don't  
you paid your money  
to go and to fight
- 12 and when your mother calls you  
you come swiftly  
come fuss-less  
come full of want  
and good intention  
come heavy footed  
come half-reciting  
parables you learned

as a child  
running over fields  
with pans of water  
quoting English  
verse

13 but wait

14 one thing mother  
did not say  
I could be ashamed  
or  
I will be ashamed of you

15 One thing she did not say  
They won't want to fight  
Beside you.

16 One thing you were never told  
Some of you wont make it all the way  
You can be taken out  
Laying telephone poles  
And there is nothing like this cold.

17 There will be blood on your mind,  
always blood on your mind  
and you are only loved back home.

18 and one more thing to know  
one more shocker  
The Somme is a bloody free-for-all,  
shells love every man equally.  
Shells won't point at the mud on their  
faces, laugh and say  
now I look like you Sam.

19 Shells will catch you at mealtime  
smiling in your face.  
Shells will spot you through the earth

20 everyone burns the same.

**Yrsa Daley-Ward** is a writer and poet of mixed West Indian and West African heritage. Born to a Jamaican mother and Nigerian father, Yrsa was raised by her devout Seventh Day Adventist grandparents in the small town of Chorley in the north of England. Her first collection of stories 'On Snakes and Other Stories' was published by 3:AM Press.

### Where do you think Grandma is from? What sort of accent do people from this place have?

If you don't know, where do you think you could find out and how?  
Does the poem sound better spoken aloud or read to yourself? Why?  
Which of the characters (the young man, the uncle, the grandma)  
interests you the most and why?

#### Connections

Can you think of modern examples where people feel compelled to fight for things that are not directly connected to them?

What would motivate you to fight for something you thought was a good cause?

#### Suggested Activities: Two-sided Story

Imagine a cause or a situation that you feel so strongly about, you are willing to fight for it. What is it and why do you feel willing to risk your life for it?

You want to go off and fight but, as in Yrsa's poem, your family has doubts. Write a dialogue or a short play script between you and your family outlining your case for doing what you want to do and why you believe it is so important. Write your family's case for you not doing it.

#### Themes

My war? The poem reflects on the complicated reasons why different people are drawn into conflict situations. In World War One, many black soldiers found themselves fighting for a country that had not treated them or their ancestors well. Look closely at stanzas 7-8 and 9-12. The poem offers two perspectives.

Why do you think 'uncle' didn't say anything? Why do you think 'Grandma' was angry and against the young man going to war?

Why do you think the young man wants to go to war?

The democracy of death? Throughout the poem, the politics of fighting in the war are important, but at the end (stanzas 13-20) we are reminded that war, battle, death does not discriminate on skin colour: 'everyone burns the same.'

What do you think this suggests about the reality of war?

**Notes on performing the poem out loud** The idea of different voices is important in this poem. Look at verses 7-8: the character 'Grandma' is speaking and she sounds very different from the narrator. The poem is written to try and capture the sound of her voice in written form.

## “I wondered what it would have been like for a black soldier to fight in that war”

Yrsa Daley Ward shares some of her thoughts in writing ‘When Your Mother Calls You, Come’

### Yrsa Daley Ward shares some of her thoughts in writing *When Your Mother Calls You, Come*:

“When I was invited to write a piece about the Somme one thing came into my mind. ‘A Jamaican soldier going to war.’ School taught me something about trench warfare about that time for the European soldiers, how many soldiers lost, the battle, the experience and conditions – and I think that was it (it’s a while ago since I was in a history lesson!). As a black person, particularly one with a parent from Jamaica, I wondered what it would have been like for a black soldier to fight in that war, especially those who had been enlisted from overseas, since I had a vague idea that West Indian and African soldiers had taken part in both World Wars but I’d never been told anything about them.

As soon as I was asked however, I remembered that there was a book that I’d always wanted to read entitled *Black Poppies*, by Stephen Bourne. The book was an eye-opener – I think I read it in one sitting, and

then I was ready for the poem! Part of what I love about being a writer is really putting myself into a time or place; imagining the faces, smells, temperature, feelings and energies of the characters in the piece. I love to free-write when I’m writing – that is just writing in a continuous flow without reading or editing, just letting the words come out. It’s also a fantastic thing to do if you hit a blank wall or feel stuck. Doing this for ten to fifteen minutes is always for me a sure-fire way to come out with some real emotion: things you don’t even know you’re thinking that surprise you when they’re on the page. I’m not a planner and never have been, and it keeps things exciting! Otherwise you’re just writing a poem based on facts you’ve read about something a long time ago. But when things become real and you can see and understand and even love your characters, the process is so much fun.”

Looking back at her earlier education, Yrsa describes how, as a black person, she found herself wondering about the experience of black soldiers on the battlefield. Why do you think it was important to Yrsa to find a personal connection to the topic?

Yrsa talks about reading ‘*Black Poppies*’ by Stephen Bourne. How do you think reading this book helped Yrsa develop her ideas?

Yrsa describes ‘imagining the faces, smells, temperature, feelings and energies of the characters.’ Why do you think this helped her to enjoy writing the poem?

Yrsa starts by finding her point of personal connection to a topic. No matter what you are looking at, there will always be something about you find interesting. Find that connection and you’re off and away!

Yrsa spends a lot of time imagining the details of her characters, even things she might not use in her poem. The more you can ‘get to know’ your characters, the more ‘real’ it will feel.

You’d be surprised what’s hiding in your brain. Take a leaf out of Yrsa’s book and just ‘free-write’ (write whatever comes into your mind without stopping) when you’re feeling unsure of what to do.



**Private Joseph Kay**

Jackie Kay

- 1 My grandfather – Joseph Kay, Highland Light Infantry,  
After his capture on the 17th January,
- 2 Prisoner of war Boulon, Cambrai, and on and on  
From the second battle of the Somme,
- 3 After the death of friends who did not become  
Fathers, grandfathers, husbands, old sons;
- 4 Tram drivers, shipbuilders, miners,  
Lovers, joiner-inners – never, ever raised his voice in anger.
- 5 My father: John Kay, boy, up at dawn,  
Spies his father (shy man, bit withdrawn, shrapnel in his arm)
- 6 Polishing the brass buttons of his tram driver's uniform,  
Heavy, green,
- 7 In a slot-like machine,  
The smell of Woodbine, shoes shined, his voice rising
- 8 Coories Doon; if I was the man on the moon;  
I'm only a rough old diamond,
- 9 Come to me Thora! And what was that Wagner aria?  
Song sheets flutter. Blood, bone, air,
- 10 Ballads slide down the years, broken lines.  
My father, ninety, still singing his father.
- 11 The past is lively, impossible to pin down.  
There's life in the old dog yet, John pipes
- 12 Private Joseph Kay takes a long breath  
Hits the sharp note, hangs on, blows out.

**Jackie Kay** was born and brought up in Scotland. She has published five collections of poetry for adults (The Adoption Papers won the Forward Prize, a Saltire award and Scottish Arts Council book award) and several for children. She was awarded an MBE in 2006.

**Glossary and Reference Guide**

**Boulon** A town in Normandy, France  
**Cambrai** A town in France and the site of a key battle in 1917  
**Woodbine** Cigarette  
**Coorie Doon** Traditional miner's lullaby. Coorie Doon means 'to snuggle down'.

T R A M D R I V E R S

J O I

S H I P B U I L D E R S ,

N E R -

M I N E R S ,

I N N

L O V E R S ,

N E R S



## Known Unto God

Bill Manhire

To you your name also,  
Did you think there was nothing but two or three  
Pronunciations in the sound of your name?  
Walt Whitman

Boy on horseback,  
Boy on a bicycle, boy all the way  
From Tolaga Bay

Blow to bits in a minute.  
\*  
Once I was small bones  
In my mother's body  
Just taking a nap.  
Now my feet can't find the sap.  
\*

In Devil's Wood  
I broke my leg and went beneath a tank.  
Strange beast! Last thing I heard  
Was the guns all going, you know,  
Blanket-blankety-blank  
\*

My last letter home  
Turned out entirely pointless  
I wrote whizz-bang  
A dozen times

To try and say the noises  
\*

Well I was here from the start, amazing....  
Straight of the farm at Taieri Mouth.

I lifted my head and ran like the blazes.  
Went south  
\*

I whistled while I could.  
Then I was gone for good.  
\*

So strange to be underground and single  
And dreaming of Dunedin.

But such a picnic!

The last thing I saw  
Was a tin of Ideal Milk.  
\*

I remembered my father and my mother.  
They yelled, they cursed.

My whole head hurt.

Up on the wire I couldn't hear a thing.  
I who had spent my whole life listening.  
\*

They dug me up in Caterpillar Valley  
And brought me home –  
Well, all of the visible bits of me.

Now people arrive at dawn and sing.  
And I have a new word: skateboarding  
\*

Not all of me is here inside.  
I build Turk Lane before I died.

Kia ahatia!  
\*

Somewhere between Colombo and Cairo,  
The ocean seemed to dip. I thought I could hear  
the stamping of horses coming from it.  
\*

They taught me to say refugee.  
Then my father and mother floated away from me.

This was on the way to Lampedusa.  
By now we were all at sea.  
\*

They called out while they could.  
They called out while they could.

Then they were gone for good.

**Bill Manhire** (born in 1946) grew up in small country pubs at the bottom of New Zealand's South Island. He was educated at the University of Otago and at University College London, where he almost became an Old Norse scholar. For many years he taught at the Victoria University, where he founded the International Institute of Modern Letters, home to New Zealand's leading creative writing programme. Bill was New Zealand's inaugural Poet Laureate. His most recent collections are the prize-winning *Lifted*, *The Victims of Lightning*, and *Selected Poems*. He has also published short fiction, most of which was recently collected in *The Stories of Bill Manhire* (VUP, 2015).

**Glossary and reference guide**

**Tolaga Bay** A small town on the East coast of New Zealand's North Island.

**Devil's Wood** Refers to Delville wood, one of the battle sites in the Somme, Northern France.

**Taieri Mouth** A small fishing village on the Taieri river, New Zealand, South Island.

**Dunedin** A city in New Zealand, South Island.

**Caterpillar Valley** Cemetery valley in Northern France, location of the grave of the New Zealand unknown warrior.

**Turk Lane** An 8km communications trench from the New Zealand Division trench to the front line, built by the New Zealand Pioneer Battalion, a Maori unit. Maori are the first peoples of New Zealand.

**Kia Ahatia** A Maori expression meaning 'what can be done?' in the sense that it's not important now.

**Colombo** The capital city of Sri Lanka, a small island south of India.

**Cairo** The capital city of Egypt. New Zealand soldiers travelling to the war from New Zealand by boat would travel through Asia (Colombo) down to Northern Africa (Cairo) and from there onto France.

**Lampedusa** A small Italian island between North Africa and the Southern Italian coast. In October 2013 Lampedusa became the site of a terrible tragedy when a fishing boat carrying refugees, heading from Africa to Europe, capsized. Many lives were lost in the disaster.

There seems to be lots of different voices speaking in this poem.

Who sounds friendly? Who interests you the most? Why?

**Connections**

Who can you think of in today's world whose stories you might hear about but whose names you don't know?

**Themes**

**Home and Away:** The poem reflects on the thoughts of people who have travelled far from home. They think about home and try to describe their situation to the people they left behind.

How do your memories of home change when you are away? Why does this happen?

**Namelessness:** The poem is concerned that so many of the soldiers that died were not known by name. They died unknown and now lie in unnamed graves. Why do you think it is important to have a name? What does a name give a person?

**Suggested Activities: Epitaphs**

Bill was inspired by epitaphs which are short sentences, often written on gravestones. Cleverly, he turned final words into final thoughts – the last things the soldiers were thinking when they died. Quite often, they were thinking very normal things.

Imagine that you are a young soldier just about to go over the top of the trench. You have time to write one last postcard, just a few sentences, to your family back home. What do you most want to say?

Or

Imagine that conflict is destroying your home country. Suddenly, in the middle of the night you are woken and told you must leave immediately. You have just a few minutes to write a short note, just a few sentences, to your best friend. What do you most want to say?

# “I thought especially of all the refugees who are trying to cross the Mediterranean”

Bill Manhire writes on his experience of writing ‘Known Unto God’

“My knowledge of the First World War was always pretty limited. When The Fierce Light commission came along my head was full of the usual stereotypes: trenches and mud and foolish generals.

I made myself less ignorant by reading and reading and reading, especially letters from New Zealand soldiers. Many of the soldiers were very young men, away from home and writing to their parents. I wondered if I could write back to one of them – asking him for more information about his life, and telling him about my life, too, maybe touching on ways in which mine was and wasn’t like his . . .

I think poems written as letters can be very effective. They stop you offering grand generalisations about the state of the universe. You have to write at the level of human particulars.

But then I had another idea. Soldiers back then sang a lot, so maybe I could write new songs for them to sing – something more interesting than, say, Tipperary. But everything I came up with sounded like bad country music.

Then I saw a photograph of a grave from the Somme. The words written on the headstone were:

A NEW ZEALAND SOLDIER  
OF THE GREAT WAR  
KNOWN UNTO GOD

There are several hundred of these graves. A headstone without a name is a very unsettling thing, so I thought I might try to write some inscriptions that said something about the person who lay there. After a while I found I was starting to speak in the voices of the dead soldiers. That’s when the soldiers – and my poem – came alive for me.

I kept the pieces small, small enough to fit on a headstone, and I wrote far more than I could possibly use. Eventually the challenge was to choose the ones that were most convincing, and to get them in the right order. Selection and arrangement were at least as important as the actual writing. For example, having decided to give New Zealand’s Unknown Warrior something to say, I decided he should go somewhere near the end. (As you can see, his tomb for a while became a magnet for skateboarders.)

The Fierce Light project invited poets to think about the contemporary world in relation to the Somme, and at some point I realised that there are many other people in our own time – victims of war – who are nameless and ‘known unto God’. I thought especially of all the refugees who are trying to cross the Mediterranean. So my poem ends out at sea with words spoken by another young person. I don’t know why, and it doesn’t say so in the poem, but I imagine it’s a 12-year-old girl.”

At first, Bill is concerned that he doesn’t know much about World War One apart from ‘the usual stereotypes: trenches and mud and foolish generals.’ To help him, he read a lot on the topic. What did he read and how do you think this helped him to improve his understanding?

One, he sees a connection between her and the soldiers. Why do you think this was? What do the girl and the soldiers have in common?

From his research, Bill was haunted by the idea that these soldiers died without anyone knowing their names. He decided his poem should address that. He just needed to find the right form or way of doing this. At first he thought of writing epitaphs (these are short poems or lines often found on gravestones) for the soldiers. Epitaphs are often written about people rather than by them. Soon Bill discovered that he was writing in the voice of the soldiers. It was at this point, he tells us, that the soldiers and the poem came alive for him.

Why do you think short fragments of speech helped make the soldiers more real to Bill? (It may help to think about talking in everyday life – do we always talk to each other in full sentences?)

Even though the refugee ‘girl’ that Bill imagines at the end of the poem was not a New Zealand soldier in World War

Extra research can help you understand your subject more. Not only does it give you more information about it but it can also offer different ways of thinking about that information. Read lots: anything you can!

It helps to find something that really interests or intrigues you, a problem or an issue you want to address. This will be as much about how you feel as what you think.

It’s ok to change what you are doing if it helps you to explore your subject better. As you’re writing, you might find unexpected connections with other subjects, times or places. This is good because it means you really understand your theme and can see it in different places.

## July 1 1916: With the Ulster Division

Paul Muldoon

You have to wonder why one old ram will step  
out along a turf bank on the far side of Killeeshil, his feet raw  
from a bad case of rot,  
while another stays hunched under his cape  
of sackcloth or untreated sheepskin.  
The memory's urgent as a skelf  
in my big toenail, or a nick  
in my own ear, drawing me back  
to a bog hole where black water swirled  
and our blaze-faced mare  
sank to her hocks. For even as I grasped a camouflage net  
hanging over the dressing station in Clairfaye Farm  
I thought of the half and lame  
who, later today, must be carried along a trench

named Royal Avenue, who'll find themselves entrenched  
no less physically than politically. I think now of young O'Rawe  
of the Royal Irish Rifles, barely out of step  
though he digs with the wrong foot. I see him on Hodge's farm  
of a winter morning, the sun hinting like a tin  
of bully beef from a high shelf  
in the Officers' Quarters. A servant boy tugging at the hay-rick  
for an armful of fodder. At least we'll be spared the back-  
breaking work of late August in a flax dam, the stink unfurled  
like a banner across the moor  
where great-coated bodies ret.  
I think of Giselle, her flaxen hair in a net,  
Who served me last week in a village café, teaching me the Game  
Of the Goose even as she plucked a gander's cape.

2.  
At a table in Giselle's café one orderly was painting a landscape  
in yellow ochre, raw sienna and raw  
umber, pausing once in a while to gnaw at a tranche  
of thick-skinned Camembert. Something about that estaminet  
where I had tried a soupçon of gin  
from an eggcup made of delf  
made me intolerably homesick.  
The music the orderly played on the Victrola was Offenbach's  
Overture from Orpheus In the Underworld.  
It was as if a servant girl from Vermeer  
was pouring milk to steep  
the bread for panady, Giselle lighting my cigarette

as Hodge himself once set a flame  
to a paraffin lamp in the cowshed on that valuable farm

of land in Killeeshil. Later this morning I'll shoulder my firearm  
and fill in as a raw  
recruit with the veterans who followed the Boers from the Cape  
of Good Hope to the Orange Free State like rats  
following the Pied Piper of Hamelin  
in search of gold and pelf.  
That officer from the Rifles carried a blackthorn stick.  
The wound in his back  
Brought to mind a poppy, of all things. Something has curled  
Up and died in the quagmire  
Of the trench  
Named Sandy Row down which the boys will surely step  
On the Twelfth of July. It's a shame  
it was only last week I met Giselle and fell into her amorous net.

3.  
You have to wonder at the zeal with which some drive a bayonet  
through a straw-  
stuffed effigy of Lundy. It'll be no distance to Clairfaye Farm  
from Thiepval Wood. It'll be one step  
forward into No-Man's-Land between the Ghibbelines  
and Guelphs  
with their little bags of tricks, ich, ich -  
one step forward, two steps back  
towards the Schwaben Redoubt. I noticed how O'Rawe twirled  
his mustache as he sang Tom Moore's  
'Let Erin Remember.' Commanding officers in sheepskin capes  
Are under orders not to leave the trench  
And go over the top. It's the duty of the rest of us to seek fame  
And fortune. The needle had stuck in a rut

on the Victrola halfway through a foxtrot.  
The blaze-faced mare Hodge bought from a farmer in Ardstraw,  
the ram from a farmer in Tydavnet.  
It seems now everywhere I go there's a trench  
That's precisely as tall and thin  
as my good self  
and through which, if I march double quick,  
I may yet find my way back  
To bounteous Killeeshil, the bog farm from which I was hurled  
Into this bog. There's a strong chance that Giselle, mon amour,  
will hold me hostage in my bed at Clairfaye Farm  
and simply not allow me to escape.  
For the moment I must concentrate on taking aim  
as I adjust my helmet and haversack and mount the firing step.

**Paul Muldoon** is one of Ireland's leading contemporary poets, along with being a professor of poetry, an editor, critic and translator. The author of twelve major collections of poetry, he has also published innumerable smaller collections, works of criticism, opera libretti, books for children, song lyrics and radio and television drama. His poetry has been translated into twenty languages and has won numerous awards. Muldoon served as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University from 1999 to 2004. He has taught at Princeton University since 1987 and currently occupies the Howard G.B. Clark '21 chair in the Humanities. He has been poetry editor of *The New Yorker* since 2007.

### Glossary and Reference Guide

**Killeeshil** A town in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland

**Skelf** A splinter or sliver of wood

**Game of the Goose** A board game of uncertain origin. The aim of the game is to reach square 63 before any other player whilst avoiding obstacles such as 'The Inn', 'The Bridge' and 'Death.'

**Estaminet** A small café selling alcoholic drinks

**Delf(t)** Tin-glazed pottery

**Victrola** A wind up phonograph (music machine)

**Offenbach** Jacques Offenbach (1819–1880), German–French composer and cellist. Best remembered for his comic operas.

**Vermeer** Johan Vermeer (1632–1675), Dutch painter. Best known for his highly lifelike portrayals of everyday life in seventeenth century Holland.

**Panady** Bread with sugar and milk.

**Boers from the Cape of Good Hope** Reference to the Boer War (1899–1902), which took place in South Africa between the United Kingdom, the South Africa Republic and the Orange Free State.

**Pelf** Money, especially when gained dishonestly.

**Quagmire** Soft bog-like land  
A difficult situation or predicament

**Effigy** A sculpture or model of a person

**Lundy** Reference to Robert Lundy (b. unknown, died. 1717), Governor of Londonderry (Derry) during the Siege of Derry (1688/9). A figure of hate to extreme Ulster Loyalists (people who believe Northern Ireland should be part of the Republic of Ireland and not Britain). Later 'Lundy' became a term for a traitor.

**Thiepval Wood** A woodland commune in Picardie, Northern France.

**Ghibbelines and Guelphs** Originally two factions supporting the Pope and the Holy Roman Emperor in the city-states of central and northern Italy. During the 12th and 13th century the factions split, a division lasting until the 15th century. Here used to indicate two violently opposed forces.

**Ich** German for 'I'

**Schwaben** Natives of Swabia, a region in Southwestern Germany, and speakers of Swabia, the language of that region.

**Redoubt** A temporary or supplementary fortification.

**Ardstraw** Small town in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland.

**Tydavnet** Small town in County Monaghan, Ireland.

The poem narrates the thoughts and experiences of a typical soldier.  
What sort of things does he think about?  
What sort of person does he sound like he was?  
Where is this suggested in the poem?

### Themes

A terrible ticking clock. The title of the poem, July 1 1916, Ulster Division tells us that we are hearing the thoughts of a soldier on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. By the end of that day 19,240 British soldiers had died, the bloodiest day in the history of the British army.

As a reader, how does it make you feel knowing something will happen to the narrator that he does not know about himself?

Does it change how you think about what he says?

Everyday life on the front. In the poem, the narrator thinks about both his life back home and his everyday life as a soldier. He provides lots of details: the names of people he knows, places and activities. By doing this, the poem is making the suggestion that this was the sort of thing people were thinking about. No matter how huge the scale of the war, people were still concerned about everyday things.

Why are these details interesting?  
How does knowing about them affect what we think about the narrator?

### Connections

The poem makes the point that as terrible as the war was and as hard as trench life was, soldiers still had to get on with everyday life.

Think about people who are forced to flee their homes. They are forced to stay in refugee camps or temporary accommodation.

What sort of things do you think preoccupy them on a daily basis?

### Suggested activity

Paul takes you right into the head of the young soldier. We see through his eyes and hear the flow of his thoughts. We are reminded how many soldiers were just ordinary young people.

Imagine someone whose life has been affected by war. This might be from the past or from present conflicts. It could be a soldier or an ordinary person – it could be a child. Keeping your character in mind, write how you think the world may appear to them. How has the war affected their lives and day-to-day activities? What sort of things do they think about? Like Paul, you could write in the first person (as if it were you who were speaking).

**On Your 'A 1940 Memory'**

Daljit Nagra

Not one of your Somme poems,  
yet Sassoon, you'll end up there.  
From a 1940 afternoon of war's  
worst troubles, you're caught  
by a clouded yellow butterfly.  
You claim you're marked by it;  
That its loveliness is a scorch  
when suffering is everywhere.

The poem written years' after  
Your day like a dream-hunter  
who stalks a loitering butterfly.  
The freighted gain of each step  
in a sunless mid-September  
invokes in me your youthful ire  
for the Somme's sunlit picture  
of hell. No wonder you state  
how Time will blur the pain.

Dear Jack, what blurs you most  
so great words forever moral  
your mind to war recall?  
Is it the soldier smithereens  
at your arm, the Hun dispersed  
by your pluck that day you lay  
in their bunker to read sonnets?  
Or how you just couldn't die?

Look at you now, our haunted  
hero. Perhaps an image of Britain  
whose kin made a killing in India,  
who chases from his country  
home a clouded yellow butterfly  
that's gone off course to recover  
a sunny afternoon of Empire.

**A 1940 Memory**

Siegfried Sassoon

One afternoon of war's worse troubles,  
Disconsolate on autumn's stubbles,  
I marked what rarely stumbles by –  
A Clouded Yellow butterfly

From those appalled and personal throes,  
Time will dissolve the pain one knows;  
And days when direful news was heard,  
Be indistinct, unreal, and blurred.

Yet every walk I pass that way,  
A sunless mid-September day,  
Will faithfully recur, and I  
Stalk that slow loitering butterfly.



**Daljit Nagra** was born and raised in West London, then Sheffield. He currently lives in Harrow with his wife and daughters and works in a secondary school. His first collection, *Look We Have Coming To Dover!*, won the 2007 Forward Prize for Best First Collection and was shortlisted for the Costa Poetry Award. In 2008 he won the South Bank Show/ARTS Council Decibel Awards. 'Tippoo Sultans Incredible White-Man-Eating-Tiger Toy-Machine!!!' was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize 2011.

**Siegfried Sassoon** was born in Kent in 1886 to a Jewish father from a family of Baghdad merchants and an Anglo-Catholic mother. He attended Cambridge University but left before completing his studies. He lived the life of a country gentleman, hunting, playing cricket and publishing small volumes of poetry. In May 1915, Sassoon was commissioned into the Royal Welch Fusiliers and sent to France. He soon earned the nickname 'Mad Jack' for his outrageous dare-devil exploits such as sneaking behind enemy lines to read poetry in the German trenches. Sassoon was injured and sent home in April 1917. Increasingly disillusioned, he became an outspoken critic of the war. As a decorated war hero and published poet, this caused public outrage. After the war, Sassoon continued to write prose and poetry to great acclaim. He died in 1957.

#### Glossary and Reference Guide

**Smithereens** Small pieces

**Hun** Originally referring to an Asiatic, nomadic, war-like people who attacked different parts of Europe in the 4th and 5th century. Later used as a derogatory term to describe a German or, collectively, the Germans, during World Wars One and Two.

**Jack** Sassoon was known by the nickname 'Mad Jack' during his time serving on the front. He became notorious for pulling off daring stunts such as sneaking behind German lines and reading sonnets in the German camp.

**One afternoon of war's worse troubles**  
This refers to Battle of Britain Day, 15th September 1940, the worst day of aerial warfare and bombing that took place during the 'Battle of Britain.'

**Direful** Extremely bad; dreadful

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Commanding officers  
in sheepskin capes  
are under orders not to leave the

# IS IT THE SOLDIER

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AT YOUR ARM

Which of the two poems did you prefer and why?  
If you could meet one of the two poets and talk to them, who would it be and why?

## Themes

**A Clouded Yellow butterfly:** In Siegfried Sassoon's poem the Clouded Yellow butterfly becomes something other than just a butterfly, it becomes a way of remembering things from the past. Daljit's poem reflects on Siegfried seeing the unusual insect and being reminded of his earlier experiences.

Why do you think something like a butterfly could have such an effect on Siegfried Sassoon?

A letter to a fellow poet. Daljit tells us that he wanted to understand what was in Siegfried's mind when he wrote the poem. Why do you think Daljit was interested in this?

## Connections

The Clouded Yellow butterfly is not connected to the war but it reminds Siegfried of the war. The butterfly is a symbol, like a magical key that unlocks a door to the past.

Can you think of other natural things (like flowers or animals) that also remind people of other things?

Have you ever seen anything unusual that made you think differently about things?

## Suggested activities

Think of an animal, plant or object and imagine it is also a key, unlocking memories of a difficult or troubled time in the past. Write a personal response covering the following questions:

What is your key? What does it look like?

Where do you find it? Where does it take you?

What memories does it unlock? How do they make you feel? How do they affect your life in the present?

Use this as the basis for a story about how memories of conflict travel from the present to the past and back again.

## “Perhaps we are like Siegfried Sassoon, who back in 1940 chased after a Clouded Yellow butterfly as though a future depended on it”

Daljit Nagra on writing ‘On Your ‘A 1940 Memory’

“When I was invited to write a poem about the First World War, my first worry was about how to respectfully honour an experience so utterly beyond my range of knowledge. I live in suburbia with a wife and children in the comforts of a three-bed semi. Apart from the time I took part in a marching parade through Bournemouth with the Boys Brigade when I was younger, much younger, I have little experience of the great outdoors, and certainly no understanding of trench warfare, or the sound of mortar shells, or how to walk through sludge amid rats in the rain while holding a gun so I can shoot down as many of my youthful enemy as possible.

To write about the Somme and to even think about its extreme conditions and its daily death rate is to feel the perfect inadequacy of art. What can art do in the face of these horrors?

I reflected on a poet who’d written about the First World War and whose verse about the war I greatly admired, Siegfried Sassoon. Perhaps the best way to honour the war would be to write a poem about his experiences of the Somme? As a starting point in this research, I began reading his war poems. I’d previously read his biography and his *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, and I’d watched a play about

his fleeting friendship with Wilfred Owen. So it was time to seriously engage with what made him great in my mind: his verse.

What struck me on rereading Sassoon’s poems was how hard he found it moving on from an experience as all-encompassing as the First World War. Sassoon’s verse is testimony of a man who remains loyal to the memory of those who fought and died in the war. He outlived many of the men who were closest to him, in some cases by several decades. Throughout his poetic life, he remained committed to writing poems about the Great War, and in each poetry collection his finest verse is frequently about the war. Even the few poems he wrote about the Second World War return to his own war experience and forge painful connections between these two tragic events.

Sassoon is now partly famous for being famous during the First World War. He was known as Mad Jack for his devil-may-care kamikaze acts of bravery. He’d been a kind of poster boy for war, then a passionately political poster-boy for the anti-war campaign.

In my poem, I recount Sassoon’s poem. I imagine Sassoon is in his garden. It’s a sunny September day. He says it’s a day of war’s worst troubles. No doubt horrific events had

been taking place at this time in 1940. He is then distracted when he sees a Clouded Yellow butterfly which he chases. This moment leads him to reflect on the First World War. Sassoon then sums up to suggest that time will blur the pain. This is a powerful moment and a moving one, especially as it comes from a wise and elder soldier-poet. Sassoon seems to be offering consolation to those who are learning of true suffering for the first time, those who are experiencing the full force of war for the first time, and he gently consoles them with a conventional appeasement, that the pain will gradually go away, as we assume it has for Sassoon. We are equally aware that pain will not disappear but will be blurred, to use his word. ‘Blurred’ implies that the pain will always remain but will relent. This very idea is dramatised by the figure of Sassoon himself as suggested by his inability to move on from his personal experiences of war in so many of the poems of his collected verse.

As for the Clouded Yellow butterfly that he chases, it seems to take on all sorts of symbolic possibilities, among which the butterfly represents a world of lost beauty, and, by its own inevitably brief life, the young soldiers who will die in the war.

In the face of this beautiful richness which is effortlessly established by Sassoon, my job was to simply re-present Sassoon’s poem while touching on the First World War which hovers unspoken in Sassoon’s poem. So when he chases the butterfly, he is an old man: I imagine his pace is slow, and this reminds me of the tragically slow pace of all the aspects of the First World War. The only thing that wasn’t slow was of course the death rate.

I found myself recalling Sassoon’s famous description of the Somme battle-ground which he’d written during the Great War, that it’s a ‘sunlit picture of hell’. Then I found myself recalling one of the most memorable and flamboyant images of the First World War and of British pluck in general: Sassoon attacking a trench of German soldiers all by himself. On his attack, the Germans fled and Sassoon was left alone in this enemy trench whereupon he settled himself on the ground, pulled out a

books of sonnets from his breast-pocket and sat there, in the trench, reading the sonnets before the rest of his platoon arrived.

This almost comic image also masks a darker inner side to Sassoon, that he was ready to die, that he’d had enough of war and was disgusted by it. That if he had died then or on another day, he wouldn’t have minded at all. And this was one of the most disturbing thoughts about the war for me, not only the waste of lives on the battlefield but that death was also the only way to escape all the lies and the desire for power on both sides.

I moved on from this dark thought in my poem to a more troubling one. Sassoon’s family had built up their wealth in the East, and this reminded me of the British Empire. Sassoon’s family had benefitted from the empire, so he was no longer a British figure in a duel with the Germans but an empire man battling with another nation with imperial ambitions.

Britain’s empire stopped growing after the First World War. Something broke in the British spirit, and Britain would no longer be a forward-looking people. I can’t help seeing us, the British people, as a tribe that can’t help but look back on an astonishing historical greatness, and on all that lost glory, and think, wow, did we achieve all that? Did we do all those things? Perhaps we are like Siegfried Sassoon, who back in 1940 chased after a Clouded Yellow butterfly as though a future depended on it. As though a butterfly enfolded in the clouds could revive a dream.”

Daljit starts by worrying whether he can really understand the horror of World War One, let alone write about it. Finally, he finds a way he can connect to the subject, through writing about another poet. Why do you think Daljit was worried about not understanding the war? Why do you think he felt a connection with Siegfried Sassoon?

What sort of research does Daljit do to help him learn more about Siegfried?

Why do you think this was important to do?

Daljit imagines Siegfried as an old man, chasing a butterfly. Why do you think it helps Daljit to imagine Siegfried?

Daljit also starts to think about things the poem does not talk about directly but is connected to. He thinks about the wider history of the war, of Britain and Europe in the early twentieth century. Doing this helps him to see Siegfried from different angles. Why do you think it is important to see these other points of view?

There are lots of ways to approach a subject. If you don't feel you know about or can understand one, just keep on looking for a way that does make sense to you. It is easier to write when you feel a natural interest and connection.

Being able to really picture your subject helps you understand them. When you're writing, try to build a picture of what you're writing about in your mind. Put lots of detail into it, even things you might not use in your final piece. Even if you start quite small, looking at one person, place, or event, very quickly you will begin to see how your topic relates to lots of other ideas, some very big in nature. It's a bit like following a trail of clues; one after another they will lead you off into lots of different worlds. You might not have time to explore them all in one piece of writing but sometimes just suggesting they are there makes your writing more interesting to the reader – it inspires them to think for themselves. Who knows, they might take up the trail for you!

