

Module 8: Change and Its Impact
Topic 2 Content: Analysis of "Dulce et Decorum Est"

Introduction

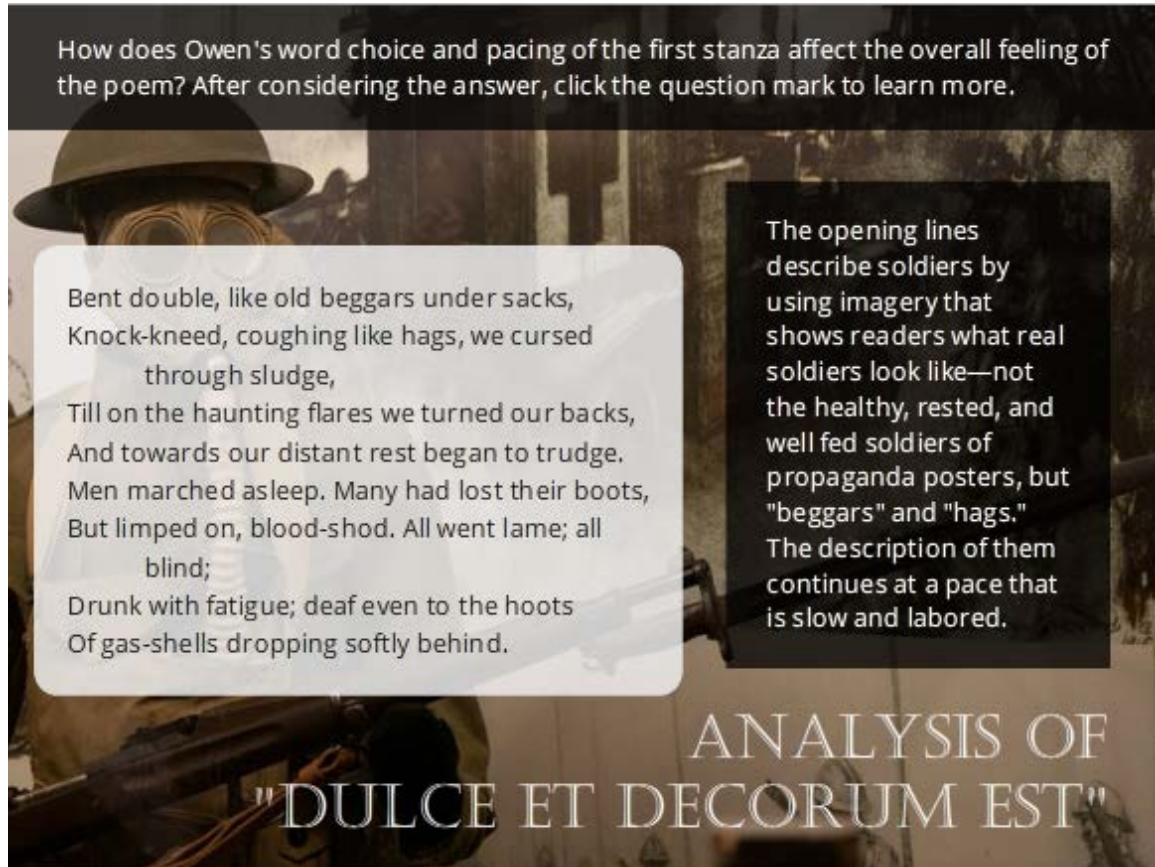


Click the **NEXT** button to explore the poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" by Wilfred Owen.

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Topic 2 Content: Analysis of "Dulce et Decorum Est"

First Stanza



How does Owen's word choice and pacing of the first stanza affect the overall feeling of the poem? After considering the answer, click the question mark to learn more.

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed
through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge.
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all
blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

The opening lines describe soldiers by using imagery that shows readers what real soldiers look like—not the healthy, rested, and well fed soldiers of propaganda posters, but "beggars" and "hags." The description of them continues at a pace that is slow and labored.

ANALYSIS OF
"DULCE ET DECORUM EST"

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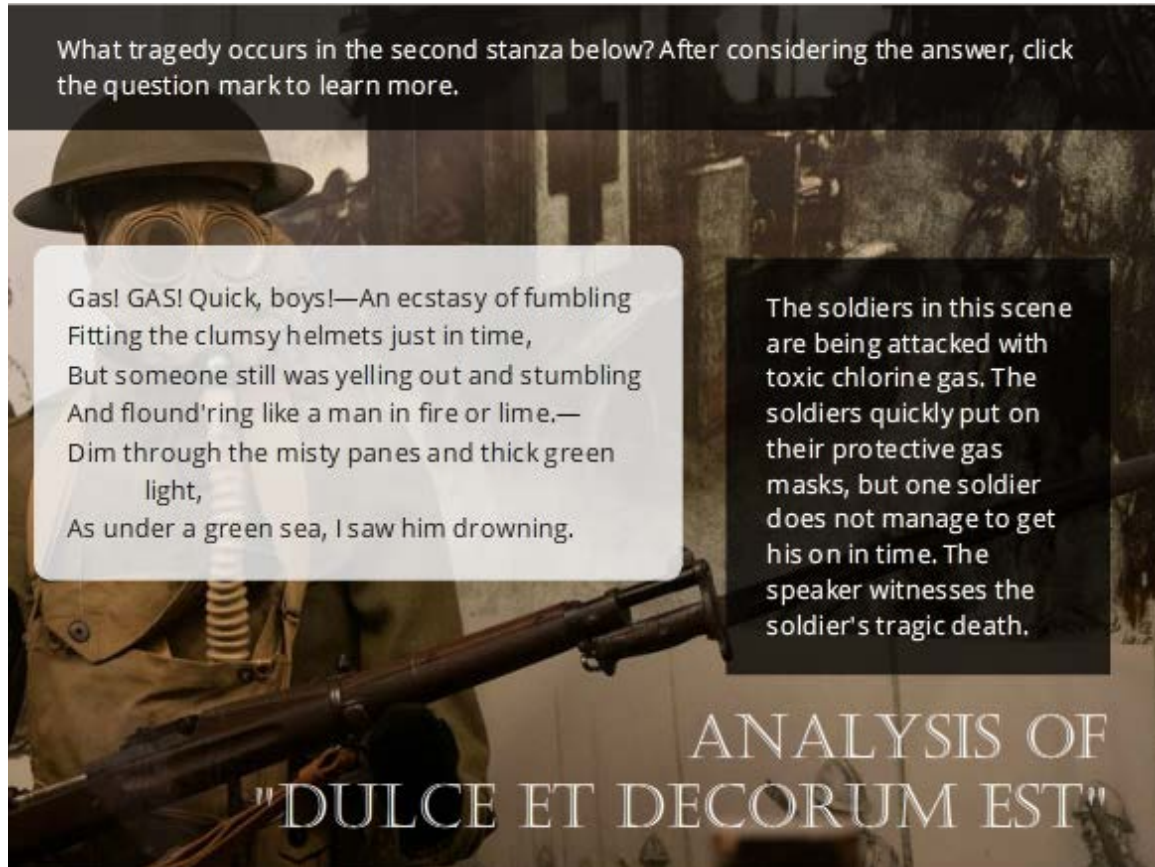
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Second Stanza



What tragedy occurs in the second stanza below? After considering the answer, click the question mark to learn more.

Gas! GAS! Quick, boys!—An ecstasy of fumbling
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time,
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime.—
Dim through the misty panes and thick green
light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

The soldiers in this scene are being attacked with toxic chlorine gas. The soldiers quickly put on their protective gas masks, but one soldier does not manage to get his on in time. The speaker witnesses the soldier's tragic death.

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Third Stanza

Owen breaks form in lines 15 and 16 and separates them from the other stanzas. Why might he do this? After considering the answer, click the question mark to learn more.

In all my dreams before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

The speaker is haunted by the image of the dying soldier. By setting apart the psychological aftermath of war trauma from the longer stanzas, the poem draws emphasis on the continued suffering of the speaker.

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Fourth Stanza

In the last stanza, the speaker addresses an unknown "you." Who might that be? Why? After considering the answers, click the question mark to learn more.

If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: *Dulce et decorum est*
Pro patria mori.

The "you" could be either any reader of the poem, the British people, or anyone who needs to understand the reality of war. The sentiment of the stanza is that people would not be in favor of war if they understood the horrors that soldiers suffer in battle.

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"DULCE ET DECORUM EST"

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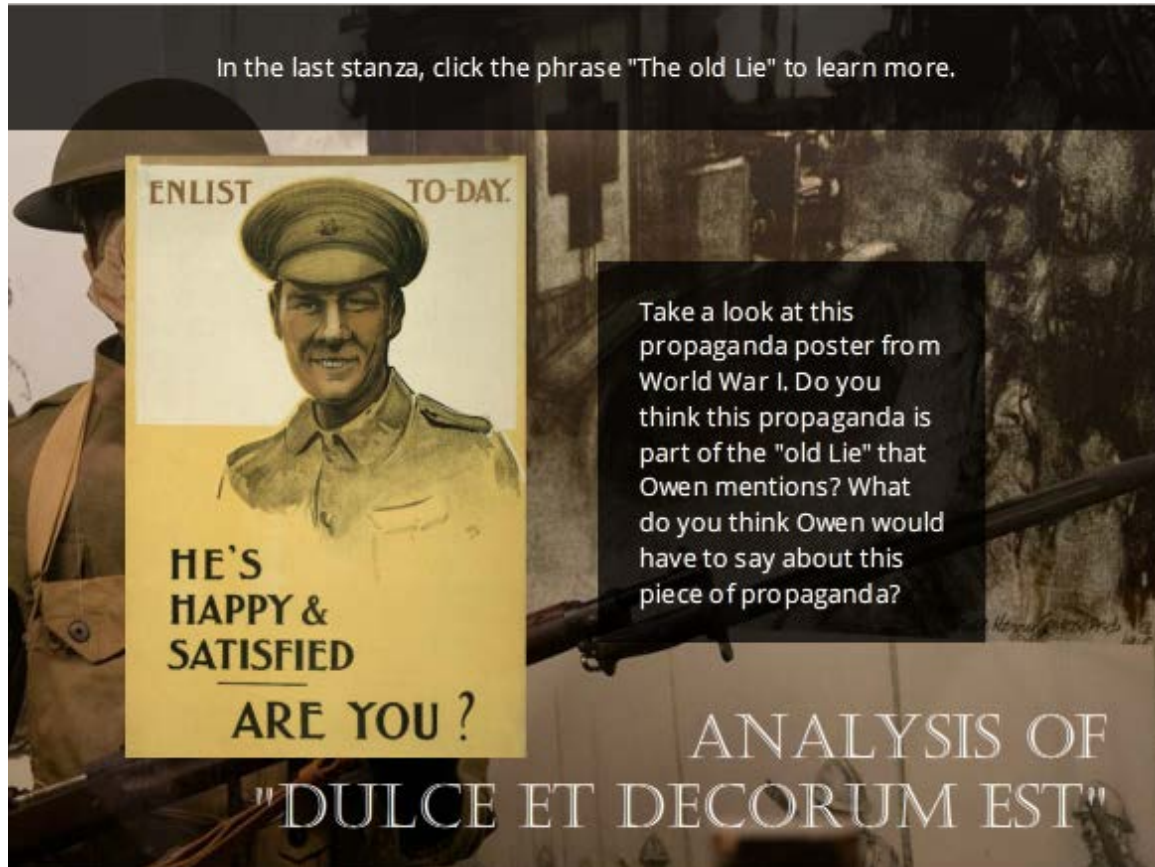
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War Propaganda

In the last stanza, click the phrase "The old Lie" to learn more.



Take a look at this propaganda poster from World War I. Do you think this propaganda is part of the "old Lie" that Owen mentions? What do you think Owen would have to say about this piece of propaganda?

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