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| The Sambre canal just south of the village of Ors where Wilfred own was killed at the age of twenty-five on 4th November 1918. The Germans held the right bank. In those days there was a line of poplars on this side too, though badly damaged by shell fire. |

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| **MODULE B: Close Study of Text**  This module requires students to engage in detailed analysis of a text. It develops students’  understanding of how the ideas, forms and language of a text interact within the text and may affect  those responding to it**.** |
| Owen, Wilfred, *War Poems and Others,* Random House, 1994, ISBN: 9780900882463  ‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’, ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’,  ‘Dulce Et Decorum’, ‘Futility’, ‘Disabled’, ‘Mental Cases’ |

2009 Question

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| Wilfred Owen, *War Poems and Others*  Wilfred Owen’s poetry is shaped by an intense focus on extraordinary human experiences.  Select TWO poems set for study and explore Owen’s portrayal of suffering and pity.  The prescribed poems are:  – Wilfred Owen, *War Poems and Others*   1. *The Parable of the Old Man and the Young* 2. *Anthem for Doomed Youth* 3. *Dulce Et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori* 4. *Futility* 5. *Disabled* 6. *Mental Cases* |
| Question 5 — Poetry (20 marks)   1. Wilfred Owen, War Poems and Others   How does this extract from ‘Dulce Et Decorum Est’ introduce us to the important ideas  in Owen’s poetry?  In your response, make detailed reference to at least TWO of the poems set for study.  The prescribed poems are:  – Wilfred Owen, War Poems and Others  \* The Parable of the Old Man and the Young  \* Anthem for Doomed Youth  \* Dulce Et Decorum Est  \* Futility  \* Disabled  \* Mental Cases |

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Wilfred Owen

**Wilfred Owen**

1893-1918

**Wilfred Owen has become best known for his angry poetry on the supposed nobility and glory of war. But while he was compassionate to those around him, he was not self-pitying and earned the Military Cross for his bravery.**

Church bells rang out across Europe when news spread of the Armistice that ended the World War I on 11 November 1918. In Shrewsbury they rang too, but while all around celebrated, one family learned of the death of their beloved son.

## Wilfred Owen Facts

Wilfred Owen was born in Oswestry and later in life moved to the county town, Shrewsbury.

He died on the 4 November 1918, aged 25... just seven days before the end of WWI.

One of the greatest poets of his generation, only five of his poems were published before his death.

Wilfred Owen had been killed leading his men across the Sambre-Oise canal in northern France just seven days before the peace was signed.

His parents, Tom and Susan, received the news at their home on Monkmoor Road, but everyone had lost someone in this war, and the death of yet another young officer passed largely unnoticed.  
  
At the time of his death, hardly anyone had heard of this remarkable young man and just five of his poems had been published.

But within a few years, propelled by the energies of Siegfried Sassoon, his mentor, he had become a household name and his compassionate poetry was highly acclaimed.

A myth sprang up around Owen's life and was jealously-guarded by his family, in particular his younger brother Harold, that has only been exposed in recent years.

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born on 18 March 1893, at Plas Wilmot, a large-ish house on the edge of Oswestry that belonged to his mother's family.

While his family were outwardly wealthy, things were far from ideal. In 1897 Owen's maternal grandfather, Edward Shaw, died on the verge of bankruptcy. Plas Wilmot was sold and the family had to sell up to pay debts.



Wilfred Owen's house in Shrewsbury

They moved first to Tom's family in Shrewsbury and then to the Wirral when Tom was appointed station master at Woodside, Birkenhead.

Owen first attended school in Birkenhead, where he studied well, and in 1910 the family moved back to Shrewsbury - to Mahim, a three storey house on Monkmoor Road.

On finishing school he was briefly a pupil-teacher at Wyle Cop, but he failed the scholarship exam for the University of London.

The next part of his life was geared to preparing to retake his university entrance exams. Owen had been brought up according to his mother's strong religious beliefs and had been considering becoming a priest. He became lay assistant to the vicar of the Oxfordshire parish of Dunsden.

The experts tend to disagree when Wilfred Owen began to write poems - some say he was 10 or 11, and others claim he was 17. He had loved poetry from an early age, with Keats as his favourite (and major) influence.

He wrote many poems while in Shrewsbury, experimenting with style, and took inspiration from his surroundings.

The archaeological dig at the Roman city of Viriconium (now Wroxeter), near Shrewsbury, fascinated him, and in 1913 he wrote a 112-line ode to the city and the artefacts found there.

This is said by some to be his first war poem, as it described ancient combat and the violent end the city met.

Later, while in a French casualty clearing station in 1917, he turned his attention to the statue of Hercules in The Quarry, Shrewsbury.



Wilfred Owen memorial

Owen was certainly writing poems while in Dunsden, but the experience seemed to turn him away from the church. He questioned the contradiction between religion and science. In February 1913 he returned to Shrewsbury - and soon had something of a breakdown.

He stayed in Shrewsbury for several months, failing his university scholarship again, and finally leaving England to teach English at the Berlitz School in Bordeaux.

He stayed there for two years, and even though WWI began in September 1914, it was another year before he volunteered for the army.

Officer training followed basic training, and postings to various camps, including Oswestry's Park Hall, followed that.

Eventually, in January 1917, it was Owen's turn to go to the front, as a second lieutenant and platoon leader in the Manchester Regiment.

Almost immediately he found himself in the thick of the action. He was ordered to occupy two captured German dugouts with his men.

They held their position - a muddy hole deep in stinking water - for 50 hours while the enemy constantly shelled them.



Soldier at Somme

One of his men was blinded in an explosion, and this incident became the basis for his poem, The Sentry.

In March 2004 the BBC screened a documentary in which researchers excavated the site of this dugout. Under the French field, they found the German front line positions, including the floor of the German trench.

Emerging intact from this incident, he continued to fight with the Manchesters. In March Owen received a concussion when he fell into a cellar, which saw him receive hospital treatment, and a few weeks later he took part in fierce fighting at St Quentin.

In April, as he slept during an artillery barrage, a shell exploded a few yards from him, leaving him unhurt but killing some of his closest friends.

Owen had survived many brushes with shells and bullets, but this was too much. In the next few days it was noticed that he had begun behaving strangely and seemed confused.

He was diagnosed as suffering from 'shell shock', and sent back to England for treatment.

He found himself at the now-famous Craiglockhart War Hospital, near Edinburgh. It was this event that was to be the making of him as a poet.

His doctor encouraged him to write his poems, while he met Siegfried Sassoon, an already-established war poet, whose work he admired.

Encouraged by Sassoon and his doctor, he produced his best work at the hospital, fired on by the writing and attitudes of the jingoistic people who had never been to war, yet chose to glorify it.



Body of a WW1 British soldier

Owen's work was marked with an extraordinary compassion for the young victims of war - on both sides - and a brutal telling of the reality of war.

This was misunderstood, both on publication of his poems after the war and still today, and he is often accused of being a pacifist.

But to accuse him of this is to miss the point. Neither were his poems self-pitying. Instead he pitied others caught up in this seemingly unstoppable machine: Modern warfare.

Some of those who commented on his work after his death seized on Owen's shell shock episode and accused him of cowardice. But this, as was later illustrated, couldn't be wider of the mark.

Owen was discharged from hospital in November and posted to the Manchesters' reserve battalion at Scarborough.

Thanks to Sassoon, he met several other authors, including Robert Graves and H.G. Wells, and his own poetry began to attract attention, despite the fact that very little of his work had been published.

Supporters began to request non-combat positions on his behalf, but it's unlikely he would have accepted them. To do so would have added ammunition to those who wanted to accuse him of cowardice.

Besides, in his letters home, Owen revealed a sense of obligation. He wanted to stay in the war, to bear witness.

Pronounced fit for duty, Owen returned to France and the trenches in September 1918, two months before the end of the war. The fighting was as tough as ever.

The following month, during an action at Joncourt, his company commander was wounded, and as senior 2nd Lieutenant, Owen took command.

During a German counter attack he raced to a captured machine gun in full view of both sides, and used it to drive away the enemy.

For this he was recommended for the Military Cross, although the medal was not awarded until after his death. The citation for the medal read that Owen had 'inflicted considerable losses on the enemy'.

### After the war

After the war, Owen's brother Harold, who took it upon himself to become the guardian of his brother's memory, didn't approve of this.

As Owen biographer Dominic Hibberd put it, the great poet of pity could not be thought to have won a medal for killing Germans. Harold changed the wording to: 'took a number of prisoners'.

Harold had much to do with constructing the myth of Owen, and this is one of the strangest instances. After all, Owen led men into battle and had been a soldier for three years. He had to kill people, because it was his duty.

Wilfred Owen died on the 4 November 1918, one day before his promotion to full Lieutenant came through... and just seven days before the end of the most horrific war the world had seen.

**Parable of the Old Man and the Young**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gz1sXwp3V2I>

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,

And took the fire with him, and a knife.

And as they sojourned both of them together,

Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,

Behold the preparations, fire and iron,

But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?

Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,

and builded parapets and trenches there,

And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.

When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,

Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,

Neither do anything to him. Behold,

A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;

Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.

But the old man would not so, but slew his son,

And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

*Wilfred Owen*

1. In your own words, give a definition of the word parable.
2. In your own words, retell the story of Abraham and explain its significance to you.
3. Read Genesis 22. What words and ideas does Wilfred Owen borrow for his poem? What differences are there?
4. Discuss Owen’s use of modern words such as ‘parapet’ and ‘lad’. Why would Owen use such language to tell a Biblical story?
5. Why is “Ram of Pride” capitalised?
6. Why did Abraham slay his son and half the seed of Europe? Is that the kind of person Abraham was in the Bible?
7. Why did Owen use a Biblical figure and change his character radically in this poem?
8. Is this a modern parable about the iniquity and pride of the older generation that was leading youth to die in a futile battle? Pleas explain.