

WJEC Context Resource for poems in the Anthology: War and Nature

Remember for each of the poems you have to embed the context.

AO3

Candidates: show an assured understanding of the relationships between texts and the contexts in which they were written, including, where relevant, those of period, location, social structures and literary contexts such as genre, and the contexts in which texts are engaged with by different audience

Which means:

Students are able to write about why the poet chose to write the poem?

What it was like at the time when they wrote the poem?

What meaning they were trying to give to the reader

Who the poet is?

This resource has been researched and sourced from GCSE Bitesize, Yorkshire Post, Cliff Notes, Schmoop and other websites

**The Manhunt By Simon Armitage**

‘The Manhunt’ was originally aired as part of a Channel 4 documentary, *Forgotten Heroes: The Not Dead*, in which ‘the painful truth of lives damaged beyond help is shown. In the film ‘The Manhunt’ is read by Laura, wife of Eddie Beddoes, who served as a peace-keeper in Bosnia before being discharged due to injury and depression. The poem describes the human cost of the conflict as it describes her experience on her husband’s return and the effect on their relationship of the physical and mental scars that he bore.

Bosnian Conflict information: **Bosnia-Herzegovina is recovering from a devastating three-year war which accompanied the break-up of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.** The 1992-1995 conflict centred on whether Bosnia should stay in the Yugoslav Federation, or whether it should become independent.

Post-Traumatic Stress disorder

"They were all prepared, ready and willing for war. But they were not ready to come back, they didn't get help. Most occupations look after their own, they get professional help. These men didn't feel they'd had that. They felt their employers were suspicious and embarrassed and preferred to push them to one side.

"All suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, it came over strongly that they had been neglected. It's common among younger soldiers that they go into a tailspin – drink, drugs, homelessness, and continual court appearances – a complete contrast to the normal.

"Unlike most psychological analysis – which stresses the need for a traumatised individual to move on – these veterans are told they've got to learn to live with it. That advice seems specific to this condition, post-traumatic stress disorder.

**The Soldier by Rupert Brooke**

[Rupert Brooke](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/181e): was a handsome young man. He was also part of the Bloomsbury Group – a group of artists and intellectuals

In 1914, Brooke wrote a series of sonnets called *1914*, the fateful year in which [World War I](http://www.shmoop.com/wwi/) broke out (this was a really bloody and destructive war that ended up claiming the lives of some 20 million people).

Brooke's 1914 sonnets display only a limited awareness of the potential consequences the Great War would have—**"The Soldier,"** begins by talking about the soldier's possible death, but the manner in which these poems explore death is not what we might expect. Indeed, it is not so much a gruesome death on the battlefield or in a trench (a very common theme in much World War I poetry) that is shown by Brooke. It is the blissful afterlife that soldiers will get to experience when they die. To die in battle for one's country is noble—even honorable—in Brooke's sonnets, but especially so in "The Soldier."

Brooke himself died while serving in the Royal Navy in 1915. A mosquito bite became infected, and he died of sepsis in April of 1915.

Well, it's a perfect example of the "before photo" of how folks feel before they commit themselves to the violence of war. Rupert Brooke wrote "The Soldier" in 1914, just as World War I was about to begin. There is no way he could have known what course the war would take, and how horrible it would be. As a matter of fact, nobody could have foreseen just how bad things would get for everyone.

And that's kind of the point. Brooke's poem reflects this pre-war perspective and is an important difference to much World War I poetry, which gives us some insight into how people can romanticize war when they haven't yet experienced it

**Dulce et Decorum Est by Wilfred Owen**

**Wilfred Owen fought and died in the First World War and much of his poetry is about the horrors of that conflict.**

Wilfred Owen is one of the most famous war poets. He was born in 1893 and died in 1918, just one week from the end of World War One. His poetry is characterised by powerful descriptions of the conditions faced by soldiers in the trenches.

**World War One**

World War One took place between 1914 and 1918 and is remembered particularly for trench warfare and the use of gas. Owing to the technological innovations in use during it, the war is often referred to as the first modern war.

**The War Poets**

Poets such as Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg and Ivor Gurney have a strong association with World War One. As a group, their poems are often violent and realistic, challenging earlier poetry which communicated a pro-war message. The first-hand experience of war is arguably one reason why there is such a shift in the attitude of poets towards war.



**A Wife in London – Thomas Hardy**

Thomas Hardy was born in Dorset in 1840 his mother encouraged Hardy’s love of learning and story-telling.

At 16, he left school and trained as an architect in Dorchester.

His first wife’s death (who he was estranged from) had a big effect on him and his writing.

He re-married and Hardy wrote 15 novels, many short stories, an epic drama and various collections of poetry. In 1910 he was awarded the Order of Merit, for services to literature.

He died in 1928 after becoming ill with pleurisy (an inflammation of the lungs).

**Mametz Woods by Owen Shears**

Born in Fiji, Owen Sheers grew up in Wales. As well as poems, he has written plays, non-fiction and fiction, including a best-selling novel called 'Resistance'.

He writes about places and landscapes but is really interested in people who live or have lived within them. The history and identity of Wales has formed a large part of his development as a poet and writer. It is people, their lives and their families that provide most of the focus for his work, though, especially the difficulties people face in simply trying to live.

*Mametz Wood* was the scene of fierce fighting during the Battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest battles of the First World War. Soldiers of the Welsh division were ordered to take *Mametz Wood*, the largest area of trees on the battlefield. The generals thought this would take a few hours. It ended up lasting five days with soldiers fighting face-to-face with the enemy. There were 4,000 casualties, with 600 dead. The Welsh succeeded but their bravery and sacrifice was never really acknowledged.

**References in the poem**

**The battle of Mametz Wood** was a real event that took place in July 1916, part of the First Battle of the Somme. The 38th Welsh Division was trying to take a heavily fortified wooded area on high ground. German forces were well equipped with machine guns and the attacking soldiers had to approach across exposed, upwardly sloping land. The 38th Welsh suffered heavy losses (almost 4000), including some to what is now called ‘friendly fire’.

**Dance macabre** or ‘Dance of Death’ was a theme of much medieval poetry and art. It depicts a skeleton (Death) leading all ranks of people (from the highest to the lowest) to their graves. It symbolises the inevitability of death for all, and the futility of earthly rank and material possessions. Its appearance in religious imagery was meant to urge viewers to reflect on the state of their souls.

**Death of a Naturalist by Seamus Heaney**

***Death of a Naturalist*** is the title poem of [Seamus Heaney](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/seamus-heaney)'s second collection of poems. After its publication in 1966, it won awards in Europe. It's the book that really put Heaney on the map in Ireland and helped him gain international celeb status.

Heaney’s poetry is focused on natural imagery. Heaney takes us through a rural setting where the adventures of discovering frogs and frogspawn take, and then change, shape

Our world and our lives are constantly undergoing change. Some changes are big (birth and death, for example) while others aren't so big (growing up you liked hot dogs, but now the smell of them makes you queasy). Our knowledge is always growing, and our opinions and preferences are subject to change. If you've ever looked back at a family photo and wondered what you were *thinking* with that haircut, you know what we mean. That's what this [Seamus Heaney](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/seamus-heaney) poem is about. At first our speaker is thrilled by the slimy frogspawn and starts his own private collection (practically a shrine) of it, but as the bigger picture becomes clearer (mainly, where frogspawn comes from), he becomes repulsed. This shows that life is always changing perspective.

**To Autumn John Keats**

Keats was born in 1795 to a lower-middle-class family in London. When he was still young, he lost both his parents. His mother succumbed to tuberculosis, the disease that eventually killed Keats himself. When he was fifteen, Keats entered into a medical apprenticeship, and eventually he went to medical school. But by the time he turned twenty, he abandoned his medical training to devote himself wholly to poetry. Keats’s brother Tom died of tuberculosis in December 1818, and Keats moved in with a friend in Hampstead.

In Hampstead, he fell in love with a young girl named Fanny Brawne. During this time, Keats began to experience the extraordinary creative inspiration that enabled him to write, at a frantic rate, all his best poems in the time before he died. Keats was one of the most important figures of early nineteenth-century Romanticism, a movement that focused on the beauty of emotion and imagination, and privileged the beauty of the natural world. Many of the ideas and themes evident in Keats’s great odes are quintessentially Romantic concerns: the beauty of nature, the relation between imagination and creativity, the response of the passions to beauty and suffering, and the transience of human life.

**Hawk Roosting Ted Hughes**

Ted Hughes (1930-1998) was born in Yorkshire, in the North of England, and grew up in the countryside. After serving in the RAF for two years, he won a scholarship to Cambridge University where he studied Archaeology and Anthropology. **The themes of the countryside, human history and mythology therefore already deeply influenced his imagination by the time he started writing poetry as a student.**

He made his name as a poet in the late 1950s and 1960s and also wrote many well-known children's books including The Iron Man (which was filmed as the Iron Giant). It is for his poetry that he remains important. He was *poet laureate* from 1984 until his death from cancer in 1998.

This poem comes from an early volume of poetry called 'Lupercal'. Published in 1960, it contains many poems about animals and nature and takes its title from an ancient, pre-Roman festival celebrating spring.

We can interpret the poem: **literally** (celebrating the hawk itself). The hawk is a bird of prey, known for its intelligence and incredibly sharp eyesight. In medieval times hawks were also used by kings and aristocrats for hunting. ***metaphorically* (**exploring themes associated with the bird). We talk about being hawk-eyed - **observant**. We also think about politicians being 'hawkish' or hawk-like, which means being **aggressive** towards other countries, favouring, for example, **military intervention**.

**Excerpt from the Prelude by William Wordsworth**

The poem begins in his boyhood and continues to 1798. It was actually finished in 1805 but was carefully and constantly revised until 1850, when it was published after he died.

The poem is split into a variety of stages.

In the last analysis, *The Prelude* is valuable because it does precisely what its subtitle implies: It describes the creation of a poet, and one who was pivotal in English letters.