



# LITERATURE HAVO 5

## STUDENT'S HANDOUT:

### World War I poetry

## Content:

Literary analysis & devices

Siegfried Sassoon *Suicide in the Trenches* (1918)



## Literary analysis & devices:

During the literary part of the oral exam, students should be able to talk about read literary works and be able to answer questions with reference to:

- author & period (contextual)
- genre (textual)
- plot (textual)
- structure (textual)
- title / subtitle (textual)
- motives (textual)
- theme (textual)
- setting; place & time (textual – contextual)
- characters (textual – linguistic – contextual)
- narrator / speaker (textual – linguistic – contextual)
- form (linguistic – textual)
- rhyme, meter (linguistic)
- poetic/literary devices (textual – linguistic)
- reader response (textual – linguistic – contextual)

### POETIC DEVICES:

#### *Alliteration:*

Figure of speech in which the same sound repeats in a group of words, e.g.<sup>1</sup> “b” sound in “**B**ob brought the **b**ox of **b**ricks to the **b**asement.”

#### *Consonance:*

Figure of speech in which the same consonant sound repeats within a group of words, e.g. “Traffic figures, on July Efourth, to be tough.”

#### *End-stopped line:*

A line of poetry in which a sentence or phrase comes to a conclusion at the end of the line, e.g. “Ithaca gave you a marvelous journey.” If a line of poetry contains a complete phrase whose meaning doesn’t change in light of what follows, it is

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. = (Latin) exempli gratia = for example



considered to be end-stopped. However, an end-stopped line is often the end of a longer sentence that stretches across several lines.

*Enjambment:*

The continuation of a sentence or clause across a line break, e.g. “I knew a simple soldier boy / who grinned at life in empty joy.” (line 1 & 2). It is devoid of punctuation and often ends abruptly.

*Juxtaposition:*

It occurs when an author places two things side by side as a way of highlighting their differences, e.g. in Cinderella the good-natured main character with a cruel step-sibling.

*Metaphor:*

Figure of speech (figurative language) that compares two different things by saying that one thing is the other. The comparison in a metaphor can be stated explicitly, as in “Love is a battlefield.” or implicitly, e.g. “he was wounded by love”. Comparisons are not meant to be taken literally.

*Polysyndeton:*

Figure of speech in which coordinating conjunctions-words such as “and”, “or” and “but” that join other words or clauses in a sentence into relationships of equal importance – are used several times in close succession, particularly where conjunctions would normally not be present at all, e.g. “We ate roast beef and squash and biscuits and potatoes and corn and cheese and cherry pie.”

**FORM, METER & RHYME:**

*Couplet:*

A unit of 2 lines in a poem.

*Quatrain:*

Verse written in four lines.

*Stanza:*

“Paragraph” of a poem.

*Iambic:*

Two-syllable metrical pattern in which one unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable, e.g. “define”. Iambic tetrameter is an iambic pattern (beat) repeated four times in one line. It is easily read aloud; pa-DUM pa-DUM pa-DUM pa-DUM.



*Rhyme scheme:*

A pattern according to which end-rhymes are repeated in poems. Pattern is noted in letters, e.g. AABB, ABAB etc.

*Speaker:*

The 'narrator' of a poem. Offers perspective on the content.



### **Suicide in the Trenches**

I knew a simple soldier boy  
Who grinned at life in empty joy,  
Slept soundly through the lonesome dark,  
And whistled early with the lark.

In winter trenches, cowed and glum,  
With crumps and lice and lack of rum,  
He put a bullet through his brain.  
No one spoke of him again.

You smug-faced crowds with kindling eye  
Who cheer when soldier lads march by,  
Sneak home and pray you'll never know  
The hell where youth and laughter go.

S. Sassoon (1918)

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#### **Reference:**

Sassoon, S. L. (1918). *Suicide in the Trenches*. Cambridge Magazine.



## **Summary:**

I knew an innocent young man who became a soldier.  
This young man had a happy, carefree life.  
He used to sleep peacefully all through the dark, empty night,  
and he would rise cheerfully in the morning, whistling along with the birds.

At war, he became depressed and scared.  
Driven to despair by the relentless explosions of the shells, insect bites, and lack of alcohol,  
He shot himself in the head.  
After that, he was quickly forgotten.

All you self-satisfied people back at home have fire in your eyes  
as you applaud young soldiers marching through the streets. After the soldiers pass,  
go scurry back home and hope to God you'll never have to experience  
the hell that is war, which destroys all joy and innocence.

## **Themes:**

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## **Symbols:**

## **Poetic devices:**

Alliteration

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Consonance

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End-stopped line

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Enjambment

- "I knew a simple soldier boy / who grinned at life in empty joy." (line 1 & 2)



Metaphor

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Polysyndeton

- 

Juxtaposition

- 

**Form/rhyme/meter:**

**Vocabulary:**

Soundly (Line 3)

Lark (Line 4)

Trenches (Line 5)

Cowed (Line 5)

Glum (Line 5)

Crumps (Line 6)

Lice (Line 6)

Smug-faced (Line 9)

Kindling (Line 9)

Lads (Line 10)

**Speaker:**

**Setting:**

**Context:**





