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| **Literature Paper 2 Section B: Anthology Poetry****Learning compendium****‘Bayonet Charge’ Hughes** |
| Key ideas\*The poem explores the dehumanising impact of leaving the trenches into no-man’s land.\* A soldier in the midst of battle suddenly questions his reasons for risking his life for his country. In a split second of realization, he recognises his own insignificance in war and the values he once held important become trivial to him.\*Hughes was influenced by his father’s stories of WW1 (He was a WW1 veteran), the poetry of Owen and from growing up in the aftermath of WW1. Hughes also had an avid interest in nature.\*The poem describes the process of soldiers ‘going over the top’ and running across no-man’s land. These types of dangerous charges often resulted in heavy causalities and deaths. |
| Form and structureHughes uses a three stanza structure in order to describe the soldier’s charge. The soldier’s movements and thoughts over a short space of time are described.Third person is used in order to present the soldier as a universal figure who could represent any young soldier.Present tense is used to create the feeling of movement and continuous motion (in stanzas 1 and 3).Stanza 1: the poem starts ‘in medias res’ meaning ‘in the middle of the action. This creates a disjointed feeling and creates a sense of frantic pace and the terrified thoughts of the soldier.Enjambment is used throughout the stanzas in order to further add to the sense of disorientation the soldier feels and create the sense of the forward motion (running) of the soldier in stanzas 1 and 3.The pace of stanza 2 is much slower. The first line of stanza slows the action and the use of the dash at the end of it forces the reader to focus upon the thoughts in the soldier’s mind. In line 11 the poet also uses caesura to slow the pace of the poem and to draw the reader’s attention to one of the key ideas in the poem of the contrast between the idealism of patriotism and the reality of fighting and killing.By the last stanza the solider has abandoned his thoughts and ideals and is driven purely by his terror. On the last line of the poem, the poet has made the soldier synonymous with a weapon of war (‘dynamite’) suggesting that the soldier’s terror has taken his humanity and left him as a weapon. |
| LanguagePresentation of the soldierThe use of verbs give a frantic sense as the soldier makes his charge. In stanza one, the soldier acts from terror and is overwhelmed and confused by the sights, sounds, movement and situation. For example the poet juxtaposes the following verbs: ‘awoke’, ‘running’, ‘stumbling’, ‘dazzled’, ‘smacking’ and ‘lugged’.At the end of the stanza the poet has used a simile ‘The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye/ Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest’ in order to show how his feelings of and belief in patriotism have been changed into fear due to the horrendous reality of war.In stanza two the poet switches to the feelings and thoughts of the soldier. The first three lines of the stanza explore the soldier’s confusion about why he is part of the charge and realisation of how insignificant his life appears at that moment. The use of metaphor and alliteration ‘cold clockwork of the stars’ reflects the cruel and futile aspects of war which takes the soldier’s life out of his control and makes him feel powerless in the hands of fate but also powerless as a young soldier under government control.Presentation of warThe poet uses onomatopoeia such as ‘smacking’ and ‘smashed’ in order to create/mimic the sounds of war. This creates auditory imagery of how dangerous war can be and how the soldier’s life hangs perilously in the hands of fate.Presentation of natureNature is also presented as another victim of war. In stanza one the air is personified ‘Bullets smacking the belly out of the air.’ On a literal level this describes the huge volume of bullets which are being fired towards the soldier. On a metaphorical level this could suggests that nature/ the surroundings are also a victim of humans’ battles.This idea is further developed in stanza two. The battlefield is also described as ‘shot-slashed furrows’. The use of sibilance implies that the field is also wounded by the bullets. In stanza three, the innocent hare is a symbol of death and parallels the life of the soldier. The poet uses a simile to describe the distressing image and pain of the hare. ‘Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame and crawled in a threshing circle’ in order to convey the hare’s frantic movement. The fact that its ‘mouth wide/ Open silent’ suggests the hare is in pain and fear beyond expression.The use of the colour yellow could be linked to cowardice or even illness, infection.   At this point of high fear, time slows for him to notice the hare thrown up violently away from its natural habitat, paralleling how he is out of his natural habitat.  It may be suggested that it is almost like the soldier is looking at himself.  Instinctively, in spite of his fear and cowardice, he keeps going. This could be because the hare is a ‘warning’ to the soldier or that he has lost his feelings of humanity and runs as a ‘machine’. |
| Feelings and attitudesFearConfusion |
| ThemesWar and reality of conflictPoliticalDeathPower |
| Compare with…‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ (representation of a group of soldiers/ representation of war/battles) ‘Remains’ (representation of a soldier- modern view)‘Kamikaze’ (exploration of ‘duty’ in war)‘Poppies’ (two different viewpoints of war)Poems which represent people (such as ‘The Emigree’, ‘London’ etc) |
| Key quotations awoke’, ‘running’, ‘stumbling’, ‘dazzled’, ‘smacking’ and ‘lugged’.‘The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye/ Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest’‘cold clockwork of the stars’‘Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame and crawled in a threshing circle’ |
| Glossary **Bayonet-** a blade/knife that’s attached to the end of a rifle.**Clods-** lumps of earth**Statuary-** a group of statues**Threshing-** thrashing or the beating of crops (e.g. corn) to separate the corn from the straw. |