

## “Do Now” Work

How does Hughes present his ideas in 'Bayonet Charge'?

*Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.*

**What do these terms mean?**

- caesura / caesurae
- enjambment
- simile
- metaphor
- personification
- in medias res

**Challenge:** Can you add an example?

In Silence Please

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This poem seems to be heavily influenced by the fact that Hughes' father was a veteran of the First World War (having survived his regiment's massacre at Gallipoli), as well as by the poetry of Wilfred Owen.

Ted Hughes served in the RAF, but he did not see combat. He spent much of his time in the services reading.

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**Key Words**

- 'bayonet' – a long knife that fits to the end of a rifle
- 'clods' – lumps of earth
- 'statuary' – like a statue
- 'threshing' – a farming term that means to separate grain; also means moving violently
- 'furrows' – grooves made in the ground for planting



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**Bayonet Charge**

Suddenly he awoke and was running – raw  
In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,  
Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge  
That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing  
Bullets smacking the belly out of the air –  
He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;  
The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye  
Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, –

In bewilderment then he almost stopped –  
In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations  
Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running  
Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs  
Listening between his footfalls for the reason  
Of his still running, and his foot hung like  
Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows

Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame  
And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide  
Open silent, its eyes standing out.  
He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,  
King, honour, human dignity, etcetera  
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm  
To get out of that blue crackling air  
His terror's touchy dynamite.

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**Comprehension Questions**

1. What is a bayonet?
2. Where is the soldier in this poem?
3. How many stanzas are in this poem?
4. What colour is the hare?
5. What is 'smacking the belly out of the air'?
6. Which war poet's work is alluded to in this poem?

**Deeper Thinking Questions**

1. What do you think persuaded the man to become a soldier? What drives anyone to join the forces?
2. Is it right for a poet to write about things he or she hasn't experienced first-hand?
3. Do you think this poem depicts a nightmare or a real scene?

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Compare the ways poets present fear in 'Bayonet Charge' and in one other poem from Power and Conflict.

## 'Bayonet Charge' Hughes

### Context:

Hughes' father was a soldier in the trenches in WWI. This poem was written in 1957, but it is set in the trenches in WWI. It is a criticism of the propaganda used to get soldiers to go to war as the soldier realises that his patriotism doesn't matter when faced with the reality of battle.

### Themes:

Effects of conflict  
Experience of soldiers  
Reality of conflict  
Patriotism

**S** 'Suddenly he awoke' - The poem begins *in medias res* to show the chaos and unpredictable nature of war. 'Awoke' reminds the reader that this is reality.

**P** 'raw' is repeated. This emphasises the pain the soldier is in. It also reflects his inexperience.

**L** 'he lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm'. The verb 'lugged' suggests it's an effort to carry his rifle. The simile implies the rifle is useless in battle.

**I** 'terror's touchy dynamite' - metaphor - fear is driving the soldier forward. Fear has become a weapon.

**T** 'King, honour, human dignity etcetera'. Hughes lists the reasons soldiers went to war. These are undermined by the adverb 'etcetera'. The reasons are insignificant when faced with the reality of the battlefield.

