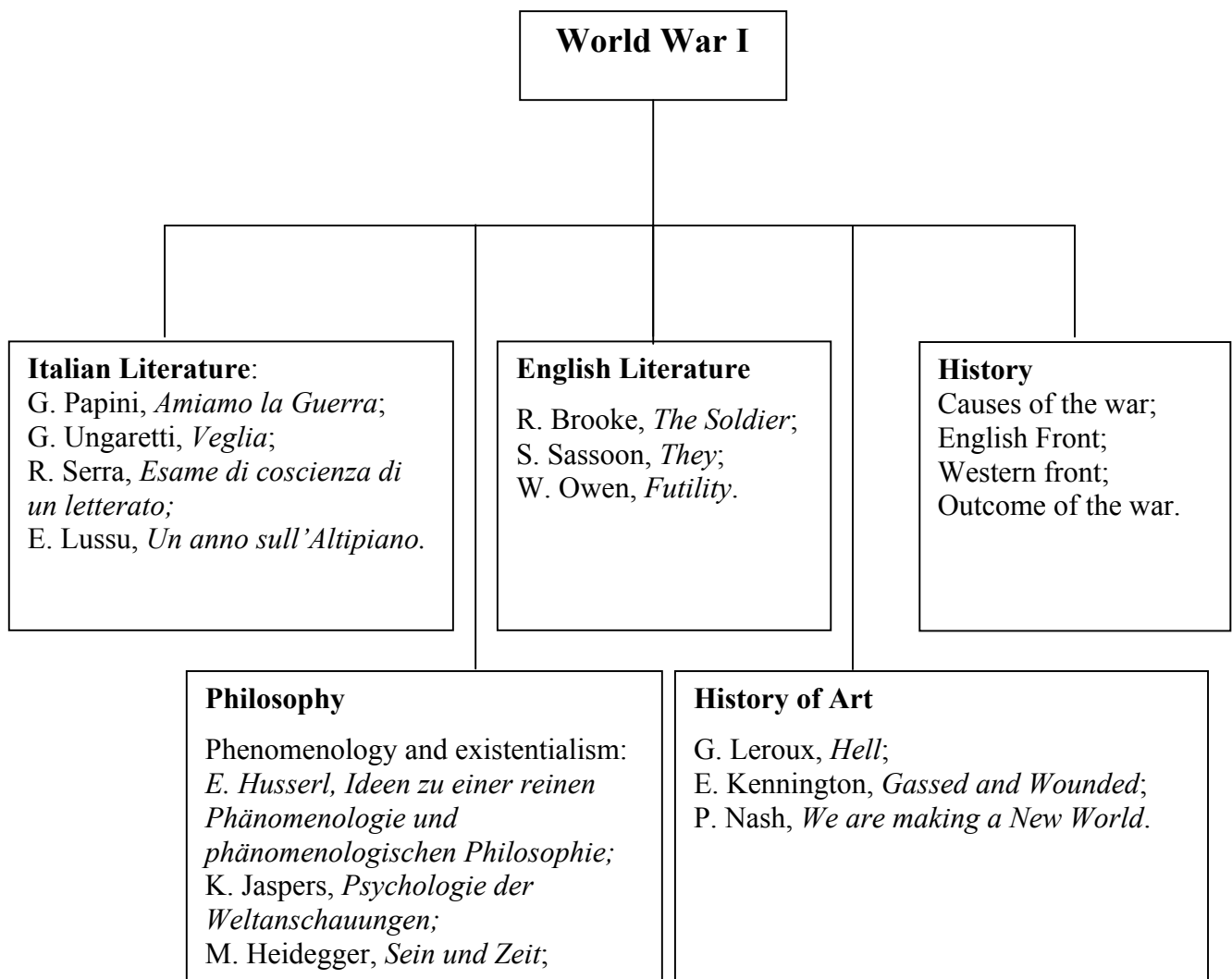


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**WAR POETRY: DIFFERENT POINTS OF VIEW.  
A LITERATURE TEACHING UNIT**

**Introduction**

I planned a literature teaching unit dealing with ‘War Poetry: Different Points of View’, suitable for a 5<sup>th</sup> class of an Italian «Liceo Scientifico». The unit will last approximately 8 hours and it is part of a **thematic** and **interdisciplinary module**, whose title is ‘**World War I**’ and which is organized as follows:



I assumed that my students had already the following prerequisites:

- An adequate knowledge of the poetic form of the sonnet;
- The ability of performing metric scansion of poetry;
- The ability of identifying the theme of a poem;
- A general knowledge of the historical period in which the poems I'll

deal with were composed;

As to the general objectives of my teaching unit, I decided to achieve the following:

- Supporting the students' ability to develop a critical response;
- Developing the students' pleasure in literature;
- Linking literature texts to life experiences;
- Improving the students' ability to summarize a text;
- Improving the students' reading strategies;
- Improving the students' ability to interpret a poetic text in all of its

features;

As for the specific objectives of my teaching unit, they will deal with:

- Identifying and comparing different responses to war;
- Analysing how responses to war may vary over a given period of time;
- Analysing the meaning and implications of war;

In order to achieve the objectives just mentioned, I decided to present two different visions of war: the former, through the analysis of Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*, considers war as an exciting experience, an experience in which war is seen as a good opportunity to show one's patriotism and an occasion to gain glory and honour; the latter, through the analysis of Siegfried Sassoon's *They*, regards war under a more realistic light, i.e. without neglecting the bereavement and sorrow it brings with it.

I will begin my teaching unit with a **Warming up** phase, which will be helpful in order to create interest in the topic and raise the students' motivation. To do that, I planned three different activities: firstly, the students will be told they are reading a poem whose title is *The Soldier* and then will be asked about their expectations for a poem with such a title; later, I will lead a discussion on the different aspects and problems of war putting the learners some personal questions and finally, in order to bridge the warming up phase and the extensive reading, I will propose an intermediate activity which consists in making the students watch some TV extracts dealing with original World War I reportages.

The **Extensive Reading** will take place by asking the students a few general questions aiming at helping them develop a general understanding of the poem. The next phase will deal with the **Intensive Reading** of the text, which will be subdivided into four steps. The first one deals with a detailed comprehension of the

text: appropriate questions will lead the learners to take a closer look at the literacy of Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier*. In a second moment, I will make the students analyse the sound patterns of the poem and explain how rhyme, rhythm and meter relate to the construction of the meaning of the poem. During the third step, I will propose a cloze exercise dealing with the poem structure. Since *The Soldier* is a sonnet, the learners will be challenged to identify and explain the differences between Brooke's lyric and the traditional sonnet form. The last step will begin with an analysis of the relationship between the lexical choices made by the poet and the meaning they convey. This task will be performed with the help of charts and suitable questions and has the aim to allow the students to get a deeper understanding of the poem, that is the relations between lexical implications and the meaning, the author's view of death, war and home country. This stage will conclude with a written production in which the students will have to state what feelings dominate the poem, define its tone and theme, and give a brief summary of the poem in their own words.

Subsequently, I will pass to the **Contextualization** of the poem, making the students spot the historical setting in which the author composed the poem and therefore the students will be invited to go back to the reasons for which the poet made the choices he did. For this purpose, I will reproduce some authentic propaganda material, asking the students to collect some more on the net if they want to. I will also quote from Brooke's contemporaries to introduce different views

of war and, thus, put a first connection with the second text I will deal with later in the unit, i.e. Siegfried Sassoon's *They*.

Later on, since I assumed that the teacher of Italian literature has already begun to deal with the Italian literary production of the period, I will make the students read an Italian poem by Giuseppe Ungaretti. Although the poem has almost the same title as Brooke's, it treats the subject in a complete different way. To define this, I will invite the students to explain in which way the Italian poet's view differs from his English colleague's. The part of the teaching unit dealing with the first text will conclude with a **Personal Response** stage in which the students will be asked to:

- express their critical global considerations about the poem and give the reasons for their choices;
- consider why people, despite their experiences of the horror of the wars made in the past, still keep on fighting.

Finally, I will propose two **Extension** activities, consisting in interviewing people who were really involved in wars and in supposing to interview Rupert Brooke.

As to the **Testing phase**, which will occur at the end of the module, I will present my students a text similar to the ones they have dealt with (e.g. Wilfred Owen's *Futility*) and ask them to carry out a few structured, semi-structured and unstructured activities, like the ones they were already given in the classroom, because as

everyone knows, the students must always know what they will be tested on and how they will be evaluated.

The fulfilment of the objectives indicated at the beginning of my teaching unit will be the parameters for the **Evaluation phase**.

### **WARM UP**

1. Consider the title of the poem. What do you think you will find in the poem?
2. After discussing the problem of war from the point of view of the other disciplines in your curriculum, you surely got a clear idea of what war is and about its consequences. Discuss on the possible aspects of war (as to invaders, invaded and those who have to fight actually).

Questions:

- Would you support war in any case or reject it in any case? Give reasons for your choice.

- In your opinion what's the difference between a pacifist and a peaceful man?

- Do you think war can resolve any problem?

- If your country were in danger, would you support it in any case?

3. Students will watch some TV extracts taken from original World War I reportages. A discussion about the students' answers to the previous questions will follow.

**The Soldier** by Rupert Brooke

If I should die, think only this of me:  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.  
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the Eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.

**EXTENSIVE READING**

1) What about the setting of the poem? Where do you think the speaker is? Give reasons for your choice.

2) Could you identify the speaker with the poet or not?

3) Does the speaking voice address someone in particular?

4) The character's feelings reflect

Fear    Anger    Pride    Discomfort

5) Despite the poem refers to a specific moment in a specific situation in European history, is the message it conveys specific or general?

## **INTENSIVE READING**

### COMPREHENSION

A. Focus on lines 1-8.

- What hypothesis does the poem begin with?
- Is the soldier afraid of dying?
- What are his feelings about the situation he is in?
- Which nationality is the soldier?
- Is he in his home country or abroad?
- In your opinion, what reason is he there for?
- How does he consider death?
- Should he die, what would his body turn into?
- Where will his mortal body rest?
- How is the 'earth' where the body will be buried?
- How will his burial affect the foreign land?
- Will the change be temporary or permanent?
- According to the poet, why will the dust be richer?
- What is the relationship between England and the dust?



B. Focus on line 9-14.

- Whose is the 'heart' referred to in line 9?
- In your opinion, what is the 'evil' the poet refers to in the same line?
- In what way will the 'heart' manifest its presence?
- What shall occur before doing so?
- What is implied about the conclusion of the war?

### SOUND PATTERNS

1. What is the rhyme scheme?
2. Scan the poem and state what the meter and the rhythm used are. How do they relate to the content of the poem? What effects do they achieve?
3. Find significant examples of alliterations and assonances: how do they relate to the content?
4. The poem presents some enjambements, that is run-on lines whose logical sense does not conclude within the verse where the thought began, but flows in the following one. Go back to the text, find where enjambements take place and the effect they achieve.
5. Does Brooke use other particular poetic devices? If so, what are they? What their effect?

POEM STRUCTURE

1. Complete the following passage with appropriate choices:

Rupert Brooke's *The Soldier* is made up of ..... (12 / 13 / 14) lines of ..... (iambic / trochaic / anapaestic) ..... (tetrameters / pentameters / hexameters), divided into a(n) ..... (tercet / quatrain / octave) and a(n) ..... (quatrain / sestet / octave). The ..... (tercet / quatrain / octave) rhymes after the ..... (Petrarchan / Shakespearean / Spenserian) rhyme scheme, i.e. \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ (ababcdcd / abbacddc / ababcbdd), while the ..... (quatrain / sestet / octave) rhymes after the ..... (Petrarchan / Shakespearean / Spenserian) rhyme scheme, i.e. \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ \_ (eeffgg / efgefg / effegg). Although Brooke observed, from a formal point of view, the ..... (sonnet / ballad / villanelle) form, he has deviated from the traditional thematic ..... (unity / division / link) associated with this poetical form; although it is possible to identify the ..... (turn / word / continuity) at the beginning of the ..... (quatrain / sestet / octave), i.e. in line ....., this doesn't reflect the original relationship between the different parts of this poetic form.

2. Do you think that there is a reason for this 'strangeness'? Give your opinion.

3. The author has chosen, among the several possible poetic forms, to opt for the sonnet. Do you think it is a casual choice or there is a deeper reason? Motivate your

answer (remember to take into consideration the results to the previous question too).

LANGUAGE AND MEANING

1. How would you define the language used by the poet? Is it harsh or smooth? Does it show signs of anger, bitterness or is it plain and colloquial? Motivate your choices and support them with examples from the text.
2. What effects do the lexical choices try to convey about the poet's view of war?
3. Underline in the poem the words or expressions which evoke 'death' and complete the following chart (add as many boxes as needed).

Line	Word or expression

As you noticed, death, although present, is never mentioned directly in the text. According to the results of the previous exercise, could you explain how does the poet view death?

4. Are there any reasons for comfort in the case the soldier should die?

Underline them in the text.

5. Underline the words or expressions which indicate the writer's patriotism (add as many boxes as needed).

Line	Passage	Reasons

6. Complete the following chart:

In line	The word	Refers to...
1	I	
1	Me	
4	Earth	
6	Her	
6	Home	
10	Eternal mind	
11	Hearts	
12	Her	
12	English heaven	

7. The word 'death' is never mentioned in the text, as well as the word 'war'. Anyway, it is possible to trace its presence in the poem. How does the

poet consider war? Underline the words or expressions in which images of war are present and complete the following chart (add as many boxes as needed):

Line	Passage	Meaning (real or evoked)

8. Underline words and expressions which link the title to war: is war, in some way, emphasized?

9. According to what you found in the text, state the poet's attitude towards war and death.

10. There are many references to the poet's home country. Underline all of them (both explicit and implicit ones) and state:

- How is England presented (compared to other countries) in terms both of physical and moral characteristics?

- What are the feelings which distinguish an English man?

- What are the qualities which are peculiarly transmitted by England to 'her' people?

- How would you describe Brooke's view of England?

- What devices does he use to achieve this result?

- What is the poet's attitude towards his home country? How does he consider 'she'?

11. According to what you found out so far, state what feelings dominate the poem, define its tone and theme, giving a brief summary of it in your own words.

12. Brooke concluded the poem with the expression 'under an English heaven'. In your opinion, was he suggesting the hope that England would win the war? Motivate your answer.

## CONTEXTUALIZATION

1. *The Soldier* was composed in December 1914, four months after the World War I broke out. In your opinion, why didn't Brooke mention any of the real war experiences?



2. Here is a specimen of a poster printed in the UK for war propaganda (find more at <http://www.firstworldwar.com/posters/uk.htm>). In what way do you think propaganda affected enrolment and support? Do you think that Brooke's view of war was shared by other people? How did the British Government use propaganda to build up and maintain civilian support for the war?

3. Brooke's poetic legacy shows a romantic view of war. The poet Charles Sorley said of Brooke that «He has clothed his attitudes in fine words: but he has taken the sentimental attitude»; nonetheless Sorley had a low opinion of this kind of war poetry: «The voice of our poets and men of letters is finely trained and sweet to hear; it teems with sharp saws and rich sentiment: it is a marvel of delicate technique: it pleases, it flatters, it charms, it soothes: it is a living lie.» In your opinion, what did Sorley mean? Do you share his opinion? Why?

### CONNECTIONS

During wartime in Italy, as well as in England, there was a consistent poetic production. Nonetheless, the views of war which come out from the poetry composed just a few years after Brooke's showed a very different point of view. This is what the Italian poet Giuseppe Ungaretti composed near Courton wood in the month of July 1918:

#### **Soldati**

Si sta come  
d'autunno  
sugli alberi  
le foglie

Ungaretti and Brooke deal with the same subject, but they treat it very differently: what did Ungaretti stress mainly? How does the Italian poet's view differ from his English colleague's?

### **PERSONAL RESPONSE**

Give a motivated answer to each of the following questions:

1. Did you like the poem?
2. Would you support Brooke's idealism?
3. Do you share Brooke's view of immortality gained through patriotism?
4. If your country were in danger, would you volunteer?
5. Would you give your life for your country?
6. Would you give your life in order to support an ideal?
7. Although many years passed from World War I, other wars have recently taken place. Can you trace similarities and differences between the past and the present? Why do you think that men still keep on making war in 2012?

### Extension

1. Did any of your relatives ever fight in a war? If so, ask them
  - Why they went to war
  - What they think about war



- What are the differences between an idealist and a realistic view of war and if they would support Brooke's view of war

2. Assume you were time transported in 1914 and had to interview Rupert Brooke. Write down the questions you would ask him and, of course, his answers to them.