



Bayonet Charge KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context – *Bayonet Charge* was written by Ted Hughes, and was first published in 1957.

Ted Hughes – Ted Hughes (1930-1998) was an English poet and children's writer, who served as the Poet Laureate between 1984 and his death. *Bayonet Charge* is unusual for a Hughes poem in that it focuses on a nameless soldier in the WWI – although he did write other war-themed poems, much of his work focused instead on nature and the animal kingdom in particular, and myths and legends. His father had fought in the war.



World War I – World War I, also known as the 'Great War', was a global war originating in Europe that took place from July 1914 to November 1918. It involved all of the world's major powers, opposing the Allies (including Russia, France, UK, and USA) against the Alliance (Germany, Austro-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) Over 9 millions armed forces and 7 million civilians were killed in the war.



The Bayonet – A bayonet is a bladed weapon that is similar to a knife or sword. It is designed to be fitted onto or underneath the muzzle of a rifle or similar firearm. From the 17th Century, up until WWII, the bayonet was a primary weapon for infantry attacks and combat at close quarters. It also served other purposes as a general purpose survival knife (when detached). Famously, those attacking in WWI were often mown down by machine guns before they had opportunity to use them.



Going 'Over the Top' – The use of trench warfare significantly influenced the high death toll. Attacks involved going 'over the top' across 'No Man's Land' (in the middle) where attackers were open to machine gun fire, mines, and shells. Even if successful, casualties were huge. Life in the trenches were awful, with diseases like trench foot rife. Men would often spend weeks at a time on the front line, where they would need to sleep, eat, and defecate in close proximity in the trenches



Language/Structural Devices

Juxtaposition – Hughes places violent imagery alongside descriptions of nature, to demonstrate how out of place and unnatural the events of the war are. For example, he describes the pain and discomfort of the soldier as he stumbles around, surrounded by 'rifle fire' and 'bullets', yet juxtaposes language associated such as 'field of clods' and 'green hedge.' Positioning the two ideas next to one another emphasises the extremity of both, showing how preternatural the war seems.

Varied Verbs– Varied verbs are used to show the reader the manner in which actions are completed, telling us a great deal about the soldier himself and his environment. For example, 'stumbling' demonstrates the soldier's inexperience, whilst 'lugged' shows us the physical strain and discomfort that the soldier is experiencing. Furthermore, 'dazzled' and 'smacking' show portray to the reader the depth of confusion and violence that are prevalent on No Man's Land.

Quote: "Open silent, its eyes standing out. He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge"

Quote: "Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge/ That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing."

Personification/ Metaphors – Hughes' use of figurative language gives the poem a violent undercurrent, demonstrating the pain and suffering of the warzone. Bullets are personified as 'smacking' the sky, presenting both sound imagery and an association with pain. The symbolic use of the wounded hare, during the 3rd stanza, shows the terror and trauma of injuries sustained on No Man's Land.

Alliteration/ Repetition – Hughes uses the repetition of sounds and words for emphasis and to replicate sounds throughout the poem. For example, the alliteration of the 'h' sound throughout the opening stanza expresses the soldier's heavy breathing as he charges. Furthermore, harsh, awkward sounds are repeated e.g. 'plunged past' to demonstrate the discomfort felt by the soldier.

Quote: "Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide."

Quote: "In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,"

Form/Meter – The poem is written in 3 stanzas – the first stanza has 8 lines, the second 7, and the third 8 again. Each stanza is filled with words and images, representative of the thick mud that the soldier must run through. The varying line lengths are suggestive of his quicker and slower progress through the mud. There is no clear rhyme scheme, demonstrating the disorder and chaos of the scene.

Structure – The three stanzas depict three very different moments in the poem. The first is fast-paced, depicting the action of the soldier running across No Man's Land. The dashes show that the soldier is, however, starting to hesitate and think. The second stanza happens in slow motion as he contemplates his actions (3 lines are broken by punctuation). In the 3rd stanza, the soldier rushes once more towards death.

Quote: He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge/ King, honour, human dignity, etcetera

Quote: "In bewilderment then he almost stopped - In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations"

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Suffering – In addition to the mental anguish that the soldier experiences, a physical undercurrent of pain and suffering is evident throughout the poem. In stanza 1, for example, the soldier's discomfort is made clear through vocabulary such as 'raw' and 'sweat.' The image of the injured hare in stanza 3 represents his stricken comrades.



The Futility of War – The poem portrays one of the most terrifying acts of this or any war, the charge 'over the top.' This was close to a suicide mission, as they were exposed to machine guns and shells. The soldier seems to stop still in time (stanza 2) and question the rationale for carrying out his actions ('running...for a reason').



Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1	Suddenly he awoke and was running- raw	An anonymous soldier charges across <u>no man's land</u> . The use of the <u>adverb</u> 'suddenly' to open the poem thrusts the reader immediately into the action. The <u>verb</u> 'awoke' gives a sense of realism – this isn't a nightmare. Suggests preceding events have been a daze in comparison. <u>Repetition</u> of the word 'raw' and the <u>hyperbole</u> used to describe 'heavy sweat' suggest he is inexperienced and uncomfortable. <u>Violent imagery</u> is used to describe the warzone – <u>personification</u> of the bullets 'smacking' the belly out of the air. <u>Similes</u> used in lines 6 & 8 further describe his discomfort.
	2	In raw-seamed hot khaki, his sweat heavy,	
	3	Stumbling across a field of clods towards a green hedge	
	4	That dazzled with rifle fire, hearing	
	5	Bullets smacking the belly out of the air -	
	6	He lugged a rifle numb as a smashed arm;	
	7	The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye	
	8	Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest, -	
2	9	In bewilderment then he almost stopped -	Hughes slows down time in the second stanza, opening with words such as ' <u>stopped</u> ' and ' <u>bewilderment</u> ', as the soldier considers his actions and surroundings. The surroundings of the 'stars' and 'nations' shows the <u>feeling of insignificance</u> felt by the soldier. Meanwhile, the idea of a man 'running in the dark', 'listening...for the reason' suggests that there is <u>no rational reason</u> for him to be doing this, no reason for war. The last line makes it seem as if the soldier has been turned to stone by his indecision.
	10	In what cold clockwork of the stars and the nations	
	11	Was he the hand pointing that second? He was running	
	12	Like a man who has jumped up in the dark and runs	
	13	Listening between his footfalls for the reason	
	14	Of his still running, and his foot hung like	
	15	Statuary in mid-stride. Then the shot-slashed furrows	
3	16	Threw up a yellow hare that rolled like a flame	The land around is described as 'shot-slashed', giving an <u>image of the carnage</u> that is taking place. From beneath, an <u>injured hare</u> emerges and its movements are associated with pain ' <u>threshing</u> ', ' <u>mouth wide</u> ', 'like a flame.' This symbolises wounded comrades - not literally mentioned in order to present his isolation. <u>Alliteration of the harsh 'p'</u> sound in 'plunged past' shows the unnaturalness of what he is doing, <u>juxtaposed</u> with the image of nature ('green hedge'). Line 20 - reasons to go to war – 'etcetera' suggests they are <u>not worth listing</u> . The simile on 21 shows he is attacking out of desperation – not moral principle. The last line shows the ease with which he may lose control.
	17	And crawled in a threshing circle, its mouth wide	
	18	Open silent, its eyes standing out.	
	19	He plunged past with his bayonet toward the green hedge,	
	20	King, honour, human dignity, etcetera	
	21	Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm	
	22	To get out of that blue crackling air	
	23	His terror's touchy dynamite.	

Poems for Comparison

Exposure/ War Photographer	Bayonet Charge can be compared and contrasted with these poems in its approach to <u>pain and suffering</u> .	Influences on the Poet
Charge of the Light Brigade	Bayonet Charge can be compared and contrasted with this poem in the approach to the theme of the <u>futility of war</u> .	<i>'The big, ever-present, overshadowing thing was the First World War, in which my father and my Uncles fought, and which seemed to have killed every other young man my relatives had known.'</i> About his father's experiences in war: ' <i>I never questioned him directly. Never. I can hardly believe it now, but I didn't. He managed to convey the horror so nakedly that it fairly tortured me when he did speak about it.</i> ' ' <i>My 1st world war nightmare – a dream lived all the time, in my father's memory. How can one confront or come to terms with it.</i> '

