

War Poets Collection



Britons! It's Your Duty!

In the early days of the First World War there was a great desire amongst young men to enlist and become 'Tommy's' (a name given to privates in the army) and fight against 'the Hun' (a name given to the Germans) believing victory would be short and sweet and they would return home as heroes.

To find out more about the origins of the name 'Tommy' go to:

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/tommy.htm>

To find out more about the origins of the name 'Hun' go to: <http://www.firstworldwar.com/atoz/hun.htm>

As the reality of war exploded like an artillery shell and hit home, it soon became clear that this was not the case, and the number of men enlisting slowed to a trickle. To combat this, campaigns were introduced by the government to persuade young men to enlist.

Poster 1



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Look at Poster 1.

It is a recruitment poster for the British Army and shows Lord Kitchener pointing at the reader. It has been very cleverly made.

This poster immediately attracts – or rather demands – the attention of any passers-by. It uses two techniques to do this. Can you spot what they are?

This poster would be seen by the mass public and yet seems to speak directly to the single reader. Why do you think this is?

With reference to the words used, how does the poster manage this?

Explain why this is a clever technique. Can you suggest a comparison in today's media?

Look at Kitchener's finger. Now take a step to the left. Look again. Move to the right. Look once more. Do you notice anything odd?

Poster 2



But as the War wore on and many young men were still being killed in their thousands every day, many began to question what they saw as needless killing.

Look at Poster 2. It is an anti-war poster loosely based on - and using a similar technique - to Poster 1.

Like the first poster, Poster 2 uses a very clever technique of making certain words jump out at the reader. Stand about five steps back from the screen or page. What does the poster say? Come closer... What does it say now? Has the meaning changed?

The person who created this poster was of a particular political persuasion. What words within the poster provide evidence that help you find an answer?

Unlike Poster 1, Poster 2 uses two subtle, negative connotations to evoke emotions. Can you see what these are?

Compare and Contrast

Although the two posters were created for very different purposes they are, in some ways, very similar. Can you describe two ways in which they compare and two ways in which they contrast?

To help you:

Comparing and contrasting

Comparing and contrasting images and documents is a common way of allowing us to learn about historic events from varying perspectives. This resource studies two posters that have opposite views regarding how the public should view the First World War.

More posters

Can you find other pro- and anti-war posters? They don't have to relate to the First World War. In fact, many anti-war posters are still being created today. You might find some at these websites:

The military collection of the Imperial War Museum is one of the largest in the world.

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources/first-world-war-recruitment-posters>

The Scottish Cultural Resources Access Network (SCRAN) has an enormous digital collection of Scottish-related historical images. Many of them are related to the First World War. (Your teacher should have a password to allow you to access the full-sized images) <http://www.scran.ac.uk>

Building up the evidence

It's not only posters that we can use to represent contrasting views on history. We can use photographs, documents, cartoons, transcripts, audio and video. Can you find any that offer very different interpretations of one event? For example, you may want to quote an anti-war poem by Wilfred Owen alongside a pro-war poster showing war life to be a joyous experience. For example, look at the poster titled 'Army Life Isn't All Work' at <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/24794>

You might find something to help you at these websites:

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/posters/> (for posters, just click a country on the right-hand side of the screen)

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources>

<http://www.scran.ac.uk/> (your teacher should have a password to allow you access to the full-sized images)

<http://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/collections/owen> (for Wilfred Owens poems)

<http://www.brainyquote.com/> (for quotes just search under 'First World War')

Answers

Look at Poster 1.

It is a recruitment poster for the British Army and shows Lord Kitchener pointing at the reader. It has been very cleverly made.

This poster immediately attracts – or rather demands – the attention of any passers-by. It uses two techniques to do this. Can you spot what they are?

ANSWER: The word 'Britons' is in uppercase bold text. Also, Lord Kitchener seems to be pointing directly at the passer-by (more about this later).

This poster would be seen by the mass public, but seems to speak directly to the single reader. Why do you think this is?

ANSWER: The intent is to personalise the recruitment campaign and make the reader feel like Kitchener is talking to them specifically. The war effort relies on them joining up.

With reference to the words used, how does the poster manage this?

ANSWER: The phrase 'Join Your Country's Army' suggests possession and belonging, it makes the reader feel as if he is an important cog in the British 'wheel'. Victory relies upon each individual electing to fight.

Explain why this is a clever technique. Can you suggest a comparison in today's media?

ANSWER: It puts the spotlight on and singles out the reader. The words and imagery combine to try to stir a sense of patriotism. How this is employed in modern media is open to interpretation.

Look at Kitchener's finger. Now take a step to the left. Look again. Move to the right. Look once more. Do you notice anything odd?

ANSWER: It is a cleverly-drawn illusion. His finger follows the reader no matter where they move. So a crowd of men could be reading the poster at the same time and Kitchener would be addressing them all.

Poster 2

However, as the War wore on and many young men were still being killed in their thousands every day many began to question what they saw as needless killing.

Look at Poster 2. It is an anti-war poster loosely based on – and using a similar technique – to Poster 1.

Like the first poster, Poster 2 uses a very clever technique of making certain words jump out at the reader. Stand about five steps back from the screen or page. What does the poster say? Come closer... What does it say now? Has the meaning changed?

ANSWER: When you stand back from the screen the smaller words become blurred and it looks as if the poster reads: 'To Arms! Your country needs YOU in the trenches!!! WORKERS'. A closer look reveals that this is the very opposite of what it actually says.

The person who created this poster was of a particular political persuasion. What words within the poster provide evidence that helps you find an answer?

ANSWER: The words 'capitalist', 'landlords', 'workers' and 'masters' are all frequently used in socialist material. In fact, the poster was created by Tom Barker, a socialist who went to jail for his anti-war beliefs.

Unlike Poster 1, Poster 2 uses two subtle, negative connotations to evoke emotions. Can you see what these are?

ANSWER: Firstly, the poster suggests that it is the working man who is fighting and dying on the battlefield, whilst those with power and wealth stay at home. It also mentions that these men of power and wealth are needed 'in the trenches' – a reminder, if anyone needed one – that war was not a fantastic adventure but a war of attrition being fought out in the muddy trench-filled fields of France and Flanders.

