Reading ‘The Dug Out’ by Siegfried Sassoon and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think the main character’s face is described as being sullen?
2. Why does Sassoon dislike watching this person sleep?
3. What do you think the narrator’s relationship to the person described in the poem is? Provide evidence to support your answer.
4. Why do you think the last two lines are in italics?
5. Identify three poetic techniques used by Sassoon, and consider the effect of each one.

Now read the following prose extract:

Excerpt from Memoirs Of An Infantry Officer by Siegfried Sassoon

New Trench, which we took over, had been a good deal knocked about, but we passed an unharassed night. We were opposite Sunken Road Trench, which was 300 yards away up a slope. Gaps had been cut in our wire for the attacking battalion to pass through. Early on the next afternoon Kinjack came up to inspect the gaps. With the assistance of his big periscope he soon discovered that the wire wasn’t properly cut. It must be done that night, he said. Barton brought me the news. I was huddled up in a little dog-kennel of a dug-out, reading Tess of the D’Urbervilles and trying to forget about the shells which were hurrying and hurrooshing overhead. I was meditating about England, visualizing a gray day down in Sussex; dark green woodlands with pigeons circling above the tree-tops; dogs barking, cocks crowing, and all the casual tappings and twinklings of the countryside. I thought of the huntsman walking out in his long white coat with the hounds; of Parson Colwood pulling up weeds in his garden till tea-time; of Captain Huxtable helping his men get in the last load of hay while a shower of rain moved along the blurred Weald below his meadows. It was for all that, I supposed, that I was in the front-line with soaked feet, trench-mouth, and feeling short of sleep, for the previous night had been vigilant though uneventful. Barton’s head and shoulders butting past the gas-blanket in the dug-out doorway wrecked my reverie; he wanted me to come out and have a squint at the uncut wire, which was no day dream since it was going to affect the fortunes of a still undiminished New Army Battalion.

1. What is life like in the trenches? Provide at least two quotes to support your response.
2. How well does Sassoon think the war is being run? Provide quotes to help explain your view.
3. What is Sassoon’s attitude towards the war, as shown in this extract? Provide quotes to support your view.
5. Why is Sassoon thinking of England in this situation?
6. Give three examples of poetic techniques which have been used in this excerpt. Explain their effect on the reader.
7. Based on the evidence in both extracts, what do you think a dug-out is?
Extension:

Both of the Sassoon pieces are autobiographical, so both describe real experiences and express emotions felt by Sassoon.

1. How does Sassoon’s attitude and emotions differ in the two pieces of writing? Provide quotes to support your view.
2. Sassoon also uses poetic techniques such as alliteration and metaphor in the prose extract. Why do you think he did this?
3. What are the advantages of writing prose over writing poetry?
4. Why would Sassoon choose to write a poem about this dug-out experience when he could express the same views by prose? Why did he feel that the poem was more effective?
5. Which piece of writing do you think is the most effective? Why?