Teaching notes

There are a number of activities to support your students’ understanding of the poem below.

For the group task, you will need to provide copies of the sources listed below. For copyright reasons, the full versions of these (except for Source E) are freely available on the internet, but not printed here. You could give each group a different source, then feed back (which would work as differentiation for mixed ability groups), or circulate all the sources so that all the groups see all the sources.

Source A: Owen Sheers’ explanation of how he came to write the poem
www.sheerpoetry.co.uk/gcse/owen-sheers/mametz-wood

Source B: BBC news report about the unearthing of the remains of 24 British soldiers in northern France in 2001
news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1396474.stm

Source C: BBC blog entry and information about ‘The Battle of Mametz Wood’
http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/wales/entries/fb31ebec-ecce-3fe4-bfdc-e5416b79e8ea

Source D: ‘A Dead Boche’ by Robert Graves
www.bartleby.com/120/19.html

Source E: Images of Mametz Wood (printed below the student tasks on this resource)
Exploring the poem

After an initial reading of the poem, discuss the questions below. Can you answer any of them just by reading the poem? Annotate your copy with any known answers.

1. Where is Mametz Wood? (stanza one)
2. Who are the farmers in the poem? (stanza one)
3. What is meant by the ‘wasted young’? (stanza one)
4. Where is this ‘land’? (stanza one)
5. Who are ‘they’? (stanza three)
6. Why were they ‘told to walk, not run’? (stanza three)
7. Which wood did they walk towards? (stanza three)
8. What happened here? (stanza four)
9. Why does the earth need to heal itself? (stanza four)
10. Which morning? (stanza five)
11. Who are the twenty men? (stanza five)
12. Why were they buried together? (stanza five)
13. Why were they linked? (stanza five)
14. Who or what has unearthed them? (stanza seven)
15. Why now? (stanza seven)

What other questions would you like to ask about the poem? Add these to your copy.

Group task

Look at the source(s) you have been given. Read and study the source(s), looking for further details to add to your answers on the poem.
Reflect on the poem

Which of the following words could sum up Owen Sheers’ attitude towards the First World War in this poem? Find evidence to support those you think apply.

- pity
- anger
- bitterness
- respect
- honour
- glory
- sadness/pathos
- humour
- satire
- celebration
- commemoration
- horror
- nostalgia
- shock
- grief
- sympathy

Making comparisons

Choose another poem about war from the anthology and answer the following question:

What are the similarities and differences in the poets' attitudes towards the First World War, as expressed in these poems? Find evidence from your chosen poem to support your answer.
Source E: Images of Mametz Wood

1. Image from page 140 of "The British campaign in France and Flanders, 1916" (1918)

2. Three soldiers are standing on a wide and dusty road bordered on both sides by scrub. To the right of the road, close to where the men are standing, there appears to be a memorial or monument in the shape of a cross. Printed on a sign next to the cross are three place names, 'Fricourt, Albert, Montauban.' View of Mamets, of Somme Fame
3. The Red Dragon memorial at Mametz Wood

4. The danse macabre, the medieval representation of death

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