‘Attack’ - Siegfried Sassoon

A) Before reading the poem

1. Research trench warfare and the trench landscape.
2. Take one image of the trench landscape and make a spider diagram of words to describe it.

B) Read the poem once

1. In pencil draw a line underneath any words that you do not understand. Look up the words in a dictionary and write their meanings (in pencil) next to the poem.
2. Draw a picture of the images suggested to you in the poem.
3. What are your initial ideas after reading the poem once?

C) Detailed study of the poem

1. The first five lines of the poem describe the landscape. Pick out words and phrases which make the environment seem uncomfortable and menacing.
2. Explain why you have chosen the words / phrases in question 1.
3. Why is there a short sentence in line six?
4. Which poetic device is being used in the sentence in line six and what are its effects on the reader?
5. What is described in lines six to eight of the poem?
6. Why do you think the poet has chosen the phrase ‘bristling fire’?
7. Which words depict the mental state of the men as they go ‘over the top’?
8. Explain the line, While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists.
9. Explain the use of personification in the final two lines of the poem.
10. Who makes the plea at the end of the poem and what do they want to stop?
11. Read the poem aloud and mark the places where the poem seems to pause. How many sections can the poem be divided into? Why has the poet done this, in your opinion?

D) Comparison with ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’

Both of these poems arise out of the First World War. Which poem do you think is more effective? Why?

(In your answer consider the style and tone of the poems as well as their subject matter.)