



Dulce Et Decorum Est

Based on the poem by Wilfred Owen

Heavy rain fell from a leaden sky like bullets. Each drop rang like a bell against our helmets as we trudged through thick, clinging mud. All of us were bent double like old beggars under heavy sacks, fighting in a second war against the wind and our aching backs. Every step was followed by a hacking cough and curse against the enemy. Behind us, flares cast their haunting glow on the barren landscape. Up ahead, lost in the thick fog, was a damp cot and wet blanket. It was towards this rest that we trudged. Many of us were marching while half-asleep - eyes dropping and jaw hanging open - while others had lost their boots yet each soldier limped on, drunk with fatigue and deaf to the noises of war.

“Gas! Gas!” The shout every soldier feared. Screaming voices pierced our addled minds, and suddenly each man stood upright and scrambled with numb fingers for their masks. Most of us managed to get our helmets on just in time; just as the green tide washed over the mud drowning out sight and sound. But still, breaking through the mist, someone was yelling and stumbling in the sludge. Desperation gripped us as we saw our friend flounder like a man on fire. Helplessly, we watched him through the misty glass as he drowned in the dry, green ocean. The image of the damned man clutching at my hem and guttering, choking, gasping for each burning breath is one that will haunt me.

The dreams are the worst. They smother me as I sleep; a thick blanket pressing down on my chest. Each time, I am back there, pacing behind the wagon that we flung him onto. I see his eyes rolled back in his head, only the bright whites showing against his blistered face. I see his skin hanging loose like a mask. Sometimes, I wish people could hear the blood bubbling in his lungs each time the cart jolted on the rutted field or the incurable sores that erupted on his tongue. I wish everyone could see the devil dance across my friend and watch him die like we had to.



I assure you that if you saw those things, or heard those noises, you wouldn't be so zealous in your cries for glory. You wouldn't tell with such high zest children who are eager to be brave that oldest of lies: Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori.

It is a sweet and fitting thing to die for one's country. I'm not sure my friend would agree.



EXPLANATION FOCUS

1. How does the author feel about war? Explain how you know this using examples from the narrative.
2. Explain what happened when gas weapons were used. Use quotes from the text to support your explanation.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What does the use of the word **leaden** tell you about the sky?

I

How did the man feel as he watched his friend struggle in the gas? What tells you this?

I

What do you think the man means when he says his dreams **smother him**?

R

What colour was the gas used in the attack?

I

Why does the man wish everyone could see his friend die, like he had to?