

X270/12/11

NATIONAL
QUALIFICATIONS
2014

THURSDAY, 1 MAY
9.00 AM – 10.45 AM

ENGLISH
HIGHER
Close Reading—Text

There are TWO passages and questions.

Read the passages carefully and then answer all the questions, which are printed in a separate booklet.

You should read the passages to:

understand what the writers are saying about the First World War (**Understanding—U**);

analyse their choices of language, imagery and structures to recognise how they convey the writers' points of view and contribute to the impact of the passages (**Analysis—A**);

evaluate how effectively they have achieved their purpose (**Evaluation—E**).



PASSAGE 1

The passage is taken from the introduction to Peter Parker's book "The Last Veteran", published in 2009. The book tells the life story of Harry Patch, who fought in the First World War, and eventually became the last surviving soldier to have fought in the trenches. He died in 2009, aged 111.

MUD, BLOOD AND FUTILITY

At 11 a.m. on Monday, 11 November 1918, after four and a quarter years in which howitzers boomed, shells screamed, machine guns rattled, rifles cracked, and the cries of the wounded and dying echoed across the battlefields of France and Belgium, everything suddenly fell quiet. A thick fog had descended that morning and in the
5 muffled landscape the stillness seemed almost palpable.

For those left alive at the Front—a desolate landscape in which once bustling towns and villages had been reduced to piles of smoking rubble, and acre upon acre of woodland reduced to splintered and blackened stumps—there was little cause for rejoicing. The longed-for day had finally arrived but most combatants were
10 too enervated to enjoy it. In the great silence, some men were able to remember and reflect on what they had been through. Others simply felt lost. The war had swallowed them up: it occupied their every waking moment, just as it was to haunt their dreams in the future.

There have been other wars since 1918 and in all of them combatants have had to
15 endure privation, discomfort, misery, the loss of comrades and appalling injuries. Even so, the First World War continues to exert a powerful grip upon our collective imagination. In Britain, the international catastrophe that was the First World War has been adopted as a peculiarly national trauma.

When remembering the War, the British continue to talk about a lost generation. The
20 statistics are, of course, extraordinary: over thirty per cent of British men who were aged between twenty and twenty-four in 1914 were killed in action or died of wounds; on the first day of the Battle of the Somme alone, 20,000 British soldiers were killed.

There is a sense that we have never quite recovered from this loss. Not only was the
25 flower of British youth cut down in Picardy and Flanders, but an almost prelapsarian state of innocence was destroyed for ever in the years 1914–1918. Cast out of our pre-war Eden, where it was somehow always perfect summer weather, we have ever after tended to look yearningly back rather than expectantly forward.

The War continues to occupy a tremendously large place in our sense of the world and
its history. It has become a seemingly endless resource not only for historians but for
30 novelists, poets, dramatists, filmmakers and composers. The sounds and images of the First World War are engraved on the national consciousness. We recognise them instantly: the foreign place names such as the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele; the lines of men at the recruiting offices on 4 August 1914; the rows of crosses in war cemeteries; the scarlet poppies blowing in a landscape rendered unrecognisable by
35 shellfire.

Our popular notion of the First World War is that it was indeed uniquely horrible; that it was conducted by an incompetent High Command that repeatedly sacrificed thousands of men in order to gain a few yards of churned earth; that it was characterised by “mud, blood and futility”. There is, however, another view of the conflict: that

40 not all the generals were callous incompetents, not all ordinary soldiers hapless and
unwilling victims. Nowadays, revisionist historians insist that some of the battles were
brilliantly planned and fought. They remind us that we did, after all, win the war.

By giving an overview of campaigns and strategy, military historians can tell us what
the war was about; although what really interests us is what it was *like*. For that we
45 have always turned to those who were there, notably the poets and memoirists, but
latterly to those more ordinary people, the diminishing band of living witnesses. The
gulf between military history and personal experience was exemplified by the man who
became Britain's Last Veteran, Harry Patch.

For Harry, the War was not about military intelligence or the plan of attack. He may
50 have forgotten exact dates and places, but he knew what a battlefield was like. It was,
he said, about wading around in filth with no opportunity to bathe or to change your
lice-ridden clothes for the months you were at the Front. It was about discomfort
and exhaustion and fear and having your friends quite literally "blown to pieces".
Revisiting the battlefields he commented, "Millions of men came to fight in this war. I
55 didn't know whether I would last longer than five minutes. We were the Poor Bloody
Infantry—and we were expendable. What a waste. What a terrible waste."

PASSAGE 2

This passage has been removed due to copyright issues.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Close Reading Passage 1 – Passage is adapted from ‘The Last Veteran’ by Peter Parker, ISBN 9780007357963. Published by 4th Estate.

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