

They Shall Not Grow Old Teacher's Notes **B2**

To mark the centenary of the end of the First World War, Peter Jackson has restored old black-and-white archive footage of British servicemen's life in training and in the trenches. He has colourised it, and has asked lip-readers to help dub in what the soldiers were actually saying. The title he gave to the film (*They Shall Not Grow Old*) refers to a poem by Robert Laurence Binyon, entitled "For the Fallen", but often referred to as the "Ode of Remembrance" – first published in September 1914 in *The Times*, it has been used in memorial services across the English-speaking world ever since. Though Wilfred Owen's "*Dulce et decorum est*" might have been a more realistic and relevant reference to encapsulate both the reality and atrocities of the war.

■ The subject can fit the *cycle terminale's* "Myths and Heroes" notion, or the *LELE* theme "The writer in his/her time". In this B2 sequence, students react to the poster and trailer of the film, before watching a report about the movie in which Peter Jackson briefly explains his intent. Then, in groups, they read and study the poems by Binyon or Owen, and decide which fits Peter Jackson's project better. Finally, they use what they have learnt to reflect on the syllabus notion "Myths and Heroes" or on the literature theme "The writer in his/her time".

Culture, language and structures

- WWI
- WWI poetry, Robert Laurence Binyon's "For the Fallen" and Wilfred Owen's "*Dulce et Decorum est*"
- Opposing and contrasting, comparing
- Some figures of speech: anaphora, simile, metaphor, allegory...
- Vocabulary related to the war, the trenches, heroism and remembrance

Introducing the topic – Speaking

■ Project the film poster, then play the trailer (<https://youtu.be/YPLXlshA0Zc>), and have students react freely. Encourage them to develop their points and help them gradually produce longer utterances. To do so, you may write on the board: "Context (When? Where?) – Subject? (Who? What?) – The film? (Genre? Objective?)" – Personal reaction? (How does it make you feel? Why?) and point at any of those prompts to elicit further and more precise comments. Encourage discussion and press students to defend their views and develop them further whenever possible or required.

Watching a report and interview about the project– Listening

Then, show students a Sky News report which provides further details and elements about the documentary film, together with an interview of Peter Jackson (www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRed-Ri9IpI). Play the video on two or three occasions before discussing it in class. The objective being here to complete their understanding of Jackson's project, intent and motives, rather

than having a comprehensive understanding of the video itself, do not belabour the task. Once they get the gist of it, explain that the soundtrack was created thanks to lip-readers who managed to script what the soldiers on screen were actually saying more than a hundred years ago. Then, Jackson asked actors to record the soundtrack based on those scripts, as well as quotes from interviews soldiers gave historians after the war.

Have students work in small groups to recap what they've learnt so far. **Activity 1**

Two poems – Listening, Reading and Exchanging – Group and Pairwork

■ Tell the class they are now about to study two poems written during WWI and they will have to decide which would correspond best to Peter Jackson's project.

Divide the class into two groups. Each group reads a different poem.

■ Considering they may not be at ease with poetry and that the vocabulary burden is likely to be discouraging, we suggest giving them free access to French versions of the poems so that they can check the translation whenever required and thus be able to focus on analysis. In order to help students find their ways into the poems, also provide groups with mp3 audio versions or send them to the Internet to actually listen to them: Binyon's "For the Fallen" www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aou-TAWG87o - Owen's "Dulce et decorum est" www.youtube.com/watch?v=qB4cdRgIcB8.

■ **Activity 2** provides some guidance towards analysis.

■ Pair up students (one from each group). They share their reading of the poems, decide which corresponds to Peter Jackson's project best, and get ready for a short oral

recap. **Activity 3** Ask two or three pairs to make their presentation before the class. Other students react and comment, compliment or complete what has been said. At this stage, it might be interesting to have the class watch a rap version of Owen's poem (www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yrrbd3wjCo8), and have them comment on it. Is it a good way to make younger generations aware of the past?

Getting ready for the oral examination – Interaction

■ Ask the class what notion from the *Cycle Terminale* syllabus or which theme from the *Littérature étrangère en langue étrangère* syllabus they could deal with using the poems and Peter Jackson's documentary film. Have them justify their choices and elicit discussion.

■ Students work in groups and prepare a short presentation fitting the oral examination demands.

■ It would be interesting to help them focus on the implicit message of the poems: if Binyon celebrates the dead soldiers and turns them into heroes, Owen's poem may be seen as a direct answer (cf the last verses) condemning the myth of heroism and crudely and plainly exposing the reality of war.

Solutions

■ Activity 1

Elements of correction.

It's a documentary film that shows archive films of British soldiers during WWI. Film director Peter Jackson was in charge of the project and supervised the restoration of hundreds of films provided by the Imperial War Museum. The films were colourised and brought to normal speed, which turned old

black and white films into a more realistic experience. Jackson says the faces of these soldiers were thus brought to life. They then asked lip-readers to script what the soldiers on screen were actually saying more than a hundred years ago. Then, Jackson asked actors to record the soundtrack based on those scripts. This made the whole thing even more real. Jackson's objective was to present the war as these men actually saw and experienced it. Jackson got involved in the project for free. His grandfather and great-uncle fought in the war, and he therefore felt committed to this project.

■ Activity 2

Elements of correction.

"For the Fallen" is a heroic and patriotic piece of writing, though the evocation of death also makes it pathetic and elegiac. The metaphor transforming dead soldiers into stars and the allegories of Death and Night, the simile turning England into a mourning mother contribute to the sense of epic that prevails through the poem, as well as the lexical fields of pride and heroism. All this makes it a pro-war poem probably written and published in *The Times* in September 1914, just a few weeks after the outbreak of the First World War. Indeed at this stage people believed the war would not last, and nations and artists produced this type of propaganda to support the war effort. The repetitions and anaphoras may be perceived as a way to reproduce the marching sound of the soldiers.

On the contrary "*Dulce et decorum est*" is far more realistic and describes the atrocities of the fights in the trenches. The poet, a soldier himself, recalls the death of a comrade who, unable to fit his gasmask on time, died in front of his eyes in the mud. The lexical field of war is not used here to praise

heroism, but to denounce war atrocities, and crudely describe the living conditions in the trenches. Assonances and anaphoras of harsh sounds in /p/ or /b/ for example may be a way to express this violence. The final reference to Horace's *Odes* condemns any form of heroism or pro-war propaganda.

■ Activity 3

Though the title of Jackson's movie clearly refers to Binyon's poem, and even quotes one of its lines, Owen's realism makes it probably closer to Jackson's project.