

1917 Trailer Teacher's Notes **B1** **B2**

It's always interesting to include a newly released film to add to a sequence in class, or start a new one.

The new World War I drama from director Sam Mendes, *1917*, unfolds in real-time, tracking a pair of British soldiers as they cross the Western Front on a desperate rescue mission. Posted in northern France, two young soldiers, Blake and Schofield are given a sealed letter of command by General Erinmore containing intel of an attack against British troops by the enemy. They must travel nine miles across the treacherous war zone to deliver the intelligence to Colonel MacKenzie, demanding his regiment to step down from advancing towards enemy lines within the next 24 hours. If they fail to do so, 1,600 British lives will be lost, including Blake's brother. On their journey, they must overcome obstacles they face at any cost.

Sam Mendes (*Skyfall*, *American Beauty*) was inspired by his grandfather, Alfred Mendes who fought in the First World War (1916-1918, he joined up at just 17). He told his grandchildren stories that weren't stories of heroism but they were more stories of luck and chance.

This trailer is a good addition to *Shine Bright 1^e* Advanced File 18 "War will not tear us apart". It can also be used with the *Speakeasy Files 3^e* Euro sequence on heroism in wartime.

Vocabulary and structures

- Humans at war: *human bonds / feelings / combat*
- Past simple & past be...ing, les modaux (obligation, nécessité, conseil), the passive

Culture

- At the height of the WWI in April 1917, in the north of France, the Germans pretended to retreat to the Hindenburg Line. During the Somme fighting, the Germans constructed a tough new defensive system some miles in their rear. From February 1917 they began to withdraw into it, giving up ground but in carrying out "Operation Alberich" they made the ground as unlivable and harsh as possible. British patrols finally detected the withdrawal and cautiously followed up and advanced, being brought to a standstill at the outer defences of the system. Germany's withdrawal was a strategic tactic, they

consolidated their forces in preparation for potential further offensive operations. Operation Michael, a spring 1918 campaign found the Germans breaking through British lines and advancing farther to the west than they had been almost since 1914. (The Allies, meanwhile, only broke through the Hindenburg Line on September 29, 1918.)

Listening, speaking, writing

- We suggest describing the film poster, then watching the film trailer in order to remind students of the atrocities of WWI but also to talk about humans at war, their feelings going from excitement, hope to despair. Finding ways to survive in atrocious conditions of life in the trenches. Finally, a study of the poem "Exposure" by Wilfred Owen could complete the sequence.

Trailer Transcript

1917 trailer transcript

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqNYrYUiMfg>

Officer: Blake. Pick a man. Bring your kit.

Colonel Mackenzie: I hoped today might be a good day. Hope is a dangerous thing.

General Erinmore: You have a brother in the second battalion?

Lance-Corporal Blake: Yes, sir.

Erinmore: They're walking into a trap. Your orders are to deliver a message, calling off tomorrow morning's attack. If you fail, it will be a massacre.

Lance-Corporal Schofield: Let's talk about this for a minute.

Blake: Why? We've got orders to cross here.

Soldier: That is the German front line.

Sergeant: HOLD FAST!

Schofield: If we're not clever about this, no one will get to your brother.

Blake: I will.

Mackenzie: There is only one way this ends. Last man standing.

Blake: We need to keep moving. Come on!

Officer: We can't possibly make it that way, man. You bloody insane?

Erinmore: If you don't get there in time, we will lose 1,600 men. Your brother among them. Good luck.

Going further

This would be a good opportunity to study the poem "Exposure" by Wilfred Owen, asking pupils to make links between the poem and the trailer.

SOLUTIONS

A. and B.1. Two soldiers.

2. black background (colour associated with danger and death). The colours of sunrise, the sun might mean the light and a bright future but the dark cloudy sky means there will be danger, traps...

3. We can see the soldiers running, braving danger. Every minute is life won over death. We learn when listening to the trailer that the life of 1,600 soldiers is in their hands. (if they fail, it will be a massacre and Blake's brother will be among them.)

C.1. Open to as many words as possible that concern war.

2. We can see that the trenches were very uncomfortable, cold, wet and dangerous. Lifting your head too high meant receiving a sniper's bullet. But in the trailer, the trenches are often oddly/eerily empty, with no other soldiers. We see how exposed the men were to planes and snipers as well as explosions. Some of the scenes in the trenches are strangely silent, making the sound of firing or explosions more shocking when they come

3. The soundscape follows danger and violence. It emphasizes the viewer's feeling of fear, threat...

4.a. The two characters are impacted by time, every minute counts. Time for the attack to end, time to reach their goal and complete their mission.

b. Duty: the officer makes it clear they an important mission: they have to act now before it is too late. One of the characters has his brother's life in his hands.

5. Friendship: we follow the two soldiers in their quest for better or for worse, helping each other. Brotherhood: Blake wants to save his brother. Bravery: we follow and are sensitive to the two soldiers' courage in such

terrible conditions.

D.1 & 2: Free expression by each student or group of students, using what was said all through the lesson.

Exposure

1 Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us...

Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...

5 Low drooping flares confuse our memory of the salient...

Worried by silence, sentries whisper, curious, nervous,

But nothing happens.

10 Watching, we hear the mad gusts tugging on the wire,

Like twitching agonies of men among its brambles.

Northward, incessantly, the flickering

15 gunnery rumbles,

Far off, like a dull rumour of some other war.

What are we doing here?

The poignant misery of dawn begins to grow...

20 We only know war lasts, rain soaks, and clouds sag stormy.

Dawn massing in the east her melancholy army

25 Attacks once more in ranks on shivering ranks of grey,

But nothing happens.

Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence.

30 Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow,

With sidelong flowing flakes that flock, pause, and renew,

We watch them wandering up and down

35 the wind's nonchalance,
But nothing happens.

Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—

We cringe in holes, back on forgotten

40 dreams, and stare, snow-dazed,

Deep into grassier ditches. So we drowse, sun-dozed,

Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses.

45 —Is it that we are dying?

Slowly our ghosts drag home: glimpsing the sunk fires, glozed

With crusted dark-red jewels; crickets jingle there;

50 For hours the innocent mice rejoice: the house is theirs;

Shutters and doors, all closed: on us the doors are closed,—

We turn back to our dying.

55 Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;

Now ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.

For God's invincible spring our love is

60 made afraid;

Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,

For love of God seems dying.

Tonight, this frost will fasten on this mud and us,

65 Shrivelling many hands, and puckering foreheads crisp.

The burying-party, picks and shovels in shaking grasp,

70 Pause over half-known faces. All their eyes are ice,

But nothing happens.

Wilfred Owen 1917-1918