



## Interpreting the Imagery of War

Curriculum Unit 12.01.09  
by Leszek Ward

### Rationale

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Why should we read poetry about war? Why should students spend valuable class time looking at paintings of battles and soldiers? War often seems distant from our lives, foreign and remote. The experiences of soldiers seem so uniquely extreme that they appear to have no real bearing on our own daily existence. What is to be gained by studying the literary and visual art that is born of such distant worlds?

I would argue that the chance to participate in unique and distant experiences is one of the most valuable opportunities afforded by the study of literature. I believe that momentarily inhabiting the perspective of another person to be intrinsically valuable, especially if that person is separated from us by time or space. In this light, the experience of war should be studied because it is so unique and distant from our own. This is especially true if we are to function responsibly as citizens, bear the responsibility of sending soldiers to war, and appropriately honor the veterans that return. We are obligated to listen to these perspectives, no matter how distant they might seem.

However, I also ultimately believe that studying the art of war in its various forms provides us with a unique opportunity to grapple with exactly the kinds of struggles that dominate our seemingly peaceful lives. War seems distant, but it raises the kinds of questions that exist at our very core. In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien states:

War has a feel – the spiritual texture – of a great ghostly fog, thick and permanent. There is no clarity. Everything swirls. The old rules are no longer binding, the old truths are no longer true. Right spills over into wrong. Order blends into chaos, love into hate, ugliness into beauty, law into anarchy, civility into savagery. The vapors suck you in. You can't tell where you are, or why you are there, and the only certainty is overwhelming ambiguity. <sup>1</sup>

The feelings of confusion and uncertainty O'Brien identifies are powerfully universal. We live ambiguous lives. We live suspended between right and wrong, surrounded by beauty and chaos. Our beliefs are challenged. We question ourselves. We search for clarity. In *A Guide for the Perplexed*, E.F. Schumacher identifies such

"divergent problems" as characteristically human. He considers the study of such problems fundamentally important. Such pairs of opposites "put tension into the world, a tension that sharpens man's sensitivity and increases his self awareness. No real understanding is possible without awareness of these pairs of opposites which permeate everything man does." <sup>2</sup> The literature of war is uniquely suited to the study of such divergent problems; it is full of contradictions and powerful opposites that can never be fully reconciled. In this sense, the experience of war differs from the experience of our daily lives in degree, but not in kind. By studying it carefully, we can hope to learn something about the battles that rage inside our selves.

## Context

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I teach 9th–12th grade Literature at New Haven Academy. NHA is a small high school of approximately 230 students. The school is affiliated with both the Coalition of Essential Schools and Facing History and Ourselves. From the coalition, our school has adopted a number of basic principles and philosophies: depth is more important than breadth in curricular design; students are to be known as individuals; the goal of education is learning to use one's mind well. From Facing History, my school inherits a commitment to issues of social justice and a deep curiosity about the ethical complications of history.

My course, "True War Stories," functions within both of these contexts. In their junior and senior year, students fulfill their English requirements by taking half-year electives. These courses are not tracked, resulting in a class of mixed grades and ability levels. Over the course of the semester I push students to grapple with divergent questions and engage the ambiguity that results. When we read Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*, for example, we explore the tension between comedy and tragedy, both in the author's fictional account of war and in the lived experience of our lives. When we read *The Red Badge of Courage*, we discuss courage and cowardice. Our study of *The Things They Carried* is focused on the conflicted relationship between truth and fiction. I hope to use this unit as an introduction to the themes of the course. By carefully selecting poems and paintings, I want students to identify a variety of opposing perspectives regarding the experience of war, pairs of opposites that we can return to again and again as we continue through the course.

I also hope to use this unit to teach key skills of analysis and discussion that students will use for the rest of the semester. In order to effectively analyze literature and art, students must first be taught to notice and describe. As Norman MacLean says in *A River Runs Through It*, "all there is to thinking, is seeing something noticeable, which makes you see something you weren't noticing, which makes you see something that isn't even visible." <sup>3</sup> I want to teach students to carefully notice details in painting before asking them to do so in the less tangible medium of poetry. Such a progression allows me to scaffold the difficult and often confusing process of analysis, which requires the use of literal description to create metaphorical, invisible meaning. Students will learn this process in this unit, but they will continue to use it for the remainder of the semester.

An introductory unit studying poetry and art would also expose my students to a range of fully realized artistic works in the same amount of time I typically spend discussing a single novel. This would meet my school's commitment to depth over breadth by allowing us the time to dwell on individual poems and paintings. The opportunity to spend a full class (or more) on a single text would be a welcome change of pace for my students, who are often reading twenty or more pages between classes. Such focus also lends itself well to student led Socratic seminars. Although I use this mode of discussion elsewhere in my courses, discussions often suffer when students are behind in their reading. Limiting our discussions to poems and paintings for

this unit eliminates this complication.

## The Paintings

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I have chosen the paintings in this unit in an attempt to represent a variety of different thematic and historical perspectives. Comparing paintings from different conflicts provides the opportunity to discuss how attitudes towards war have changed over time, and how they have stayed the same. These paintings also highlight a number of the contradictions identified by Tim O'Brien: ugliness and beauty, civility and savagery, honor and shame.

The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775



Styled after similar works by his friend and mentor Benjamin West, John Trumbull's *The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775*, (1786, Yale University Art Gallery, Fig. 1) is a painting of heroic self-sacrifice and civilized combat. The subject of the painting is General Warren at the time of his death in the battle of Bunker Hill, once of the first major battles of the American Revolution. British infantry swarm up the hill from the right side of the painting in pursuit of the fleeing American forces fleeing on the left. Shot in the head, General Warren lies dying in his comrade's arms. Dressed in bright white clothing and illuminated by a spotlight from the heavens, the general is the focal point of the painting. His death is a spectacle, both for the viewer of the painting and for the characters it depicts; all eyes are on him. The position of General Warren's body, his

bright white garments, and the imminent piercing of his side all reference images of Christ being removed from the cross, lending a sense of glory and moral distinction to his death. In dying, General Warren becomes a martyr for his country and its struggle for independence.

General Warren is not the only figure glorified in Trumbull's painting. His loyal comrade catches him as he falls, protecting him from a British soldier attacking with a bayonet. Also dressed in white, this character shows his dying commander a level of devotion one might expect from an apostle, the same measure of devotion General Warren gives to his cause. The commander of the British force also extends his protection to the dying general, holding off his soldier's bayonet in a gesture of mutual respect. The general's death not only inspires admiration in the eyes of his opponent, but also falls within the boundaries of civilized combat. Trumbull's painting not only glorifies General Warren and the cause he died for, but also honors the field of battle as a place of sacrifice, duty, and virtue.

### The Retreat of Napoleon's Army from Russia in 1812

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There are a number of similarities between Ary Scheffer's painting, *The Retreat of Napoleon's Army from Russia in 1812*, (1826, Yale University Art Gallery) and John Trumbull's depiction of General Warren. Both paintings feature as their subject a defeated commander and his men. Both depict a large number of dead and dying soldiers. Scheffer finds his subjects in Napoleon's army during its disastrous retreat from Moscow. After a long and unsuccessful pursuit of the Russian army during the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon's army was forced to retreat in the height of the Russian mud season, with winter fast approaching and its supply lines cut. The majority of Napoleon's army was destroyed by harsh weather, starvation, or enemy raids during the month long retreat to France.

One of the key figures in Scheffer's painting is placed in an almost identical position on the canvas as the figure General Warren, his body similarly supported in its dying moments. Despite these similarities, however, Scheffer provides us with a much darker image of war. Where Trumbull glorifies and civilizes the suffering of men at war, Scheffer reveals the intensity and shame with which they suffer. The upper half of the canvas is dominated by a dark mass of nearly indistinguishable soldiers in retreat and an ominous blue-black sky. The right side of the painting depicts a hellish scene as freezing soldiers attempt to warm themselves by a makeshift fire. These men suffer far more viscerally than any of the characters in Trumbull's painting: their blood smears in the stark white snow; their hands desperately stretch towards the fire at the edge of the frame; their faces are colorless, frozen, starving, lifeless. Where Trumbull gave us noble, dying gentlemen, Scheffer shows us shamed and suffering corpses.

Unlike the General Warren in Trumbull's painting, Napoleon Bonaparte is nearly indistinguishable, hidden among the dark, formless mass of soldiers in the middle of the canvas. While General Warren lies dying in glorious sacrifice for all to see, a nondescript Napoleon hangs his head in shame. In Scheffer's *Retreat*, General Warren has been replaced by another sacrificial figure, that of a young child. Presumably, this youth is one of the thousands of civilians who accompanied Napoleon's army into Russia in 1811. His position in Scheffer's painting is significant. Illuminated by the bright white of the snow, supported from behind with his arms outstretched, this youth is even more Christ-like than General Warren, but he represents a different sort of sacrifice entirely. Whereas General Warren's death is an honorable outcome of civilized combat, the youth in Scheffer's painting is a sacrificial offering to the savagery and horror of war. Like the blood stained snow on which he dies, he represents the innocence lost to the chaos and death around him. Where General Warren is to be glorified, the youth is to be mourned.

## Gassed

The final painting my students will discuss is John Singer Sargent's *Gassed* (1919, Imperial War Museum). Depicting the results of a mustard gas attack in the first world war, it acknowledges the scale of human suffering of World War I while raising serious doubts about the value of such a sacrifice. The painting itself is massive, stretching over twenty feet across. Sargent uses this expanse of canvas to capture the enormous human cost of war. He paints a sea of blinded soldiers, littering the foreground of the painting and stretching all the way to the horizon. Where Trumbull and Scheffer painted chaotic scenes full of action, Sargent shows us hundreds of men languishing as they wait for medical care. The scene is hazy and calm, and there seems to be little urgency or grand purpose in Sargent's Great War. Unlike the public spectacle of General Warren's death, the soldiers suffering in *Gassed* are largely ignored; ironically, a soccer game takes place deep in the background. The lack of attention these soldiers receive challenges heroic notions of war, and the central procession of men questions the wisdom of such a conflict. The blinded and bandaged men stumble cautiously through the soldiers lying at their feet. Assisted by a medical orderly, they lead each other towards medical relief somewhere off the right side of the painting. Through these figures, Sargent raises the idea of "the blind leading the blind," in this case towards a destination that remains unseen. In doing so he communicates a deep ambivalence concerning the meaning or purpose of war.

Scheffer's condemnation of war is a quiet one, but he respects the camaraderie of men at war. Although it depicts suffering on a grand scale, *Gassed* remains a surprisingly tender painting. The men are extremely vulnerable in their blindness, and they depend on each other completely. The physical connection between soldiers spans the entire length of the painting: those on the ground lay on top of each other; those standing in line clutch each other for guidance. While condemning the war at large and mourning the human suffering that results, Sargent celebrates the loving devotion of the men who suffer. There are no generals here, no grand and glorious displays of chivalry. There are however common soldiers who quietly bear the horrible cost of war. Ignored by the world at large, they have lost their ability to see where they are or where they are going, but they turn to each other for support and guidance. Sargent is able to find an honest beauty in the midst of terrible suffering and appreciate the tenderness and love between men at war.

## The Poems

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The poems I have chosen for this unit function much like the paintings; they express a variety of tensions present in the experience of war. The first two poems firmly contradict each other, viewing war from distinctly different perspectives. Like *Gassed*, the final poem takes a different view, rejecting many of the sentiments present in other poems and celebrating a certain precarious beauty.

### The Dead

Rupert Brooke, much like John Trumbull, developed the idea "that death might give glory, dignity, and even nobility to men who could not have claimed such honors in civilian life" <sup>4</sup>. He celebrates the idea of sacrifice for a cause or a country, and stresses the honor that supposedly accompanies such a death. This theme is quite explicitly stated in "The Dead," (1915) which glorifies the death of a soldier while largely ignoring any specific details involved in the act of dying. He imagines the soldiers as "rich dead," <sup>5</sup> who despite unknown (or lowly) birth have gained a sort of wealth through the act of dying, giving their countrymen "rarer gifts than

gold." <sup>5</sup> Brooke acknowledges their sacrifice and loss, referencing the old age they will never experience and the unborn sons they will never know. However, Brooke tells us there is much to be gained by such an in dying. Through their deaths, the soldiers in Brooke's poem affect a return of Honor, Holiness, and Nobleness, although one might wonder precisely how or why such virtues were lost in the first place. He personifies Honor as a king returning to earth, and Nobleness as striding confidently home. What Brooke's soldiers achieve through their death is nobility. With much bugle blowing and fanfare, they restore a proud heritage of courtly virtue and earn the right to partake in England's glory. Brooke makes war into a civilizing force of respectable virtue, well worth the sacrifice of an otherwise undistinguished life. One can imagine that the General Warren of Trumbull's painting, a relatively unknown doctor before his death, might well agree.

While playing up the virtues that come with a noble death, Brooke downplays or ignores the physical experience of dying. He does so by not focusing on any single soldier; he speaks only of an abstract collective: "The Dead." Despite the title of the poem and its explicit focus on death and dying, there are no bodies in Brooke's poem. The only hint of human suffering is euphemistically glossed over; blood becomes wine in a clever metaphor that both denies the reality of battle and subtly links dead soldiers to a miraculous Jesus. In almost every way, the dead in the poem become something much greater than themselves. In Brooke's poem, war is a place of abstraction, civility, and honor. As other poets have shown, the business of dying is typically much more graphic than Brooke makes it seem.

### **Dulce et Decorum Est.**

If Brooke's poem echoes the death of General Warren, Wilfred Owen's *Dule Et Decorum Est* (1917) is a worthy companion to Napoleon's retreat. Like Scheffer's painting, the poem is a horrified lament focused on visceral, bodily suffering. It opens by describing a pitiful force similar to Napoleon's retreating army:

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,

Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,

Till on the haunting flares we turned our backs

And towards our distant rest began to trudge.

Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots

But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind <sup>6</sup>

These men are struggling. There are no heroes here, only beggars and hags, slowly struggling through the mud towards a distant and unlikely respite. By describing the men as beggars, Owen uses similar imagery as Scheffer, who's soldiers desperately reach out their hands towards a hellish flame, present here in the form of the "haunting flares" that seem to pursue them in their march. Like Napoleon's army, these men stain the ground with blood from their bare feet. Like Napoleon himself, these men turn their backs on the flares of the battlefield, and retreat. They are defeated in mind, body, and spirit. They are a huddled mass of the dead and dying.

Like Shaffer, Owen focuses the majority of his poem on a single, extremely unpleasant death in order to lament a violent loss of innocence. He dwells on a single unfortunate man who fails to secure his gas mask in time. As a result, we watch him flounder through a green sea of gas, "guttering, choking, drowning" <sup>6</sup>. Owen

links these very sounds to the lie of glory in battle, condemning the notion that it is "sweet and right" to die for one's country. He laments the destruction of "innocent tongues,"<sup>6</sup> corrupted by mustard gas in the field and old lies of glory at home. Owen joins Scheffer in mourning the destruction of youthful innocence in war. Together, these artists dispel hollow notions of glory. By creating vivid images of human suffering, they show us just how savage warfare can be.

### **An Irish Airman Foresees His Death**

William Butler Yeats' "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death" (1919) largely rejects the abstractions glorified by Brooke, but also rises above the tragic gore depicted by Owen. It is a poem that hangs in the balance between a variety of tensions; as such, it provides a fitting conclusion to a thematic unit focused on raising and exploring a variety of divergent questions.

Although the speaker in Yeats' poem echoes Brooke in declaring his time before the war a "waste of breath,"<sup>7</sup> he flatly rejects the kind of glory or distinction championed by Brooke and others like him: "Nor law, nor duty bade me fight, / nor public man, nor cheering crowds."<sup>7</sup> The speaker here does not seek spectacle or feel compelled by duty. He does however choose to fight, assuring us that he was not forced into service by conscription or law. He explains that he feels no particular allegiance to those he protects, nor does he feel any particular hatred towards those he fights. Although this is likely explained by the fact that Yeats wrote the poem about a fellow Irishman, fighting for England at a time when Ireland was seeking independence, it remains a surprisingly frank admission. Certainly, this is no sacrificial General Warren, spilling wine on the glorious field of battle. Nor is this speaker an innocent casualty of the gore Wilfred Owen so sadly displays. He is an airman, "somewhere among the clouds above,"<sup>7</sup> far from the suffering below. He is well aware of the consequences of his choice to enlist; as the title indicates, he sees where he is headed and has long since accepted his fate.

So where does this lofty poem land? Yeats seems to reject both Trumbull and Scheffer, Brooke and Owen. James Winn tells us that the war poets he admires most help us question and "confront, in all its contradictory power, the terrible beauty of war"<sup>8</sup>. In achieving this purpose, Yeats' poem most closely mirrors Sargent's painting. Like Sargent, Yeats' accepts the inevitable cost of war. The mood is somber, and there is no question that the speaker of the poem will die. The poem also rejects the notion that this death will achieve any personal or national significance. He fights only because of the momentary joy of flying, "the lonely impulse of delight"<sup>7</sup> that draws him skyward. Like Sargent, Yeats acknowledges the ultimate cost of war and questions its ultimate meaning, but also recognizes a vague and fleeting beauty in his experience among the clouds.

## **Objectives**

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When planning units for my students I tend to rely on the method of planning backwards outlined by Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe in *Understanding by Design*. Wiggins and McTighe suggest that teachers begin with the questions that will guide their unit and the understandings that they seek to build in their students. They describe "essential questions" as "questions that lie at the heart of a subject or curriculum" and promote inquiry or "uncoverage" of a subject.<sup>9</sup> They go on to say that these questions should be open ended and produce many different plausible responses. Wiggins and McTighe also distinguish between overarching and

topical understandings, describing them as insights that are either general and transferable or specific to a particular topic. <sup>10</sup>

The essential questions that guide this unit focus on the experience of war and the purpose of war stories: What is it like to experience war? Why read war stories? In considering these questions, I ultimately want students to understand that the unique experience of war allows for many seemingly contradictory ideas to coexist in tension with each other. I want students to see that they can come to such an understanding by carefully studying the art and poetry of war, and that their lives are fraught with similar contradictions. I also want students to understand that claims must be based on the careful analysis of relevant evidence.

This unit is also designed to teach students a number of essential skills. At the end of the unit, students will be able to identify significant details in both paintings and poems, and raise interpretive questions concerning their meaning. Students will also be able to write a thesis statement that makes an interpretive claim describing the experience of war. Finally, they will be able to write organized paragraphs to support their interpretations using significant details as evidence.

## Overview

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This unit takes much inspiration from George Hillock's Jr.'s work in *Teaching Argument Writing* and seeks to engage students with increasingly complex problems. Hillock's rightfully draws attention to the fact that claims must begin with a careful examination of evidence, and that to "without analysis of any data...any thesis is likely to be no more than a preconception or assumption or clichéd popular belief that is unwarranted, and at worst, totally indefensible <sup>11</sup>. For this reason, each stage of this unit begins with the careful examination of data.

Initially, the data set and problem at hand are relatively simple. Students first examine mystery cartoons and their accompanying narratives in order to make what Hillocks calls arguments of fact. Such cartoons can be found in the "Crime and Puzzlement" series, by Lawrence Treat. These lessons introduce students to careful observation, description, and analysis of evidence in order to develop a logical claim. Hillocks focuses his lessons on the Toulmin model of argument and spends time teaching his students to develop warrants, or general rules, in order to explain the evidence they see in the cartoons. I would use slightly different language, substituting "analysis" for "rules" or "warrants," because my focus is slightly different from Hillocks, but the difference is minor. Our departmental rubric for literary analysis expects students to provide specific and thorough analysis of evidence, and I want to make the connections between our work with cartoons, paintings, and literature as clear as possible.

The second stage of the unit calls for the examination of the paintings described above. Students continue to carefully observe and describe the data presented in these paintings, but now begin to make interpretative arguments of judgment. Rather than arguing the facts of a murder mystery, students must develop claims that identify the paintings characterization of war. As in the previous stage, these claims must be drawn from the evidence presented in the paintings themselves, but the task here is far more complex, demanding that students make judgments based on far more sophisticated imagery.

Finally, students repeat the process using the poems I have chosen, making interpretive claims describing the



experience of war. This is a far more difficult task because poems are inherently more abstract than paintings or cartoons, but students will by this point be well practiced in the routine of analysis. Students need to make the leap from describing what they see in a painting to describing a poem, using quoted words and phrases as evidence. Because they are likely to struggle with this transition, modeling and whole class instruction take on renewed importance at the beginning of this stage. By the end of the unit however, I would expect students to be able to conduct their analysis independently. One potential scaffold if students are having difficulty is to ask which painting most closely connects to the poem at hand. Questions like "Which painting would Wilfred Owen want on his wall?" would push students to draw on previously constructed knowledge and recognize similarities between the paintings and the poems. They should then be able to make similar claims about their meaning.

Each of these stages of the unit features a gradual release of responsibility as students become able to work more independently. We begin by working through a problem together. My initial role is to guide students through the process as students record and combine each other's contributions. We will also write a paragraph together to serve as a model. This is one of the real strengths in Hillocks' work with students. He provides numerous and extensive transcripts of teachers "coauthoring" with students, which he deems essential. Through class-wide, collaborative writing, Hillocks ensures that "students are exposed to the thinking processes involved in creating the form [of writing] required, and even to the kinds of syntax that students may need to learn." <sup>12</sup> In each stage of the unit, students will repeat the inquiry process in groups, using the work they did as a class as a model to guide them. At the end of each stage, students will work independently to solve an unfamiliar interpretive problem, providing summative assessments of their skills.

Classes at New Haven academy are 75 minutes long, which gives me a great deal of time to accomplish a variety of activities. The lessons could be easily divided into smaller pieces for classes that meet for shorter periods of time.

## Assessment

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The activities in this unit provide numerous opportunities for both formative and summative assessment. At the end of each lesson, students can, if necessary, submit a paragraph of analysis. The first will have largely been coauthored with the class, but could provide me with valuable information regarding each student's understanding of the form. More importantly, it provides students the opportunity to receive feedback that names their struggles or successes. The second paragraph will have been coauthored to varying degrees by the student's group, but again provides the opportunity for me to check students' ability to make claims and analyze evidence. By carefully observing and participating in small group discussions, I can also assess students' understanding of the task and their ability to make interpretations. The final paragraph in each stage of the unit will be true summative assessment; students will work independently to support a claim regarding a mystery, painting, or poem they have not seen before.

## Lessons

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The lessons described below comprise the second stage of the unit, focusing on the paintings. The sequence and process is largely the same for the other two stages; students will have completed these activities using mystery cartoons before beginning these lessons, and they repeat them again using the poems after demonstrating proficiency with the paintings.

### Paintings: Lesson 1

#### *Opening: Observe and Wonder*

I begin by projecting Trumbull's *Death of General Warren* on the wall and handing out copies of the painting to students. Their first task is to make observations and ask questions regarding the painting. Students can do this silently, in the form of a "do now" or they can freewrite given the following prompts: "What do you notice about the painting" and "What do you wonder about the painting". After students have had time to observe and wonder, I ask students to share their thinking and encourage students to respond to each others' questions. This first portion of the lesson will feature many simple arguments of fact regarding what is actually happening in the painting, calling on student's previous work solving mystery cartoons. I will provide context for this painting as needed, helping students establish the facts that that General Warren is dying, that his army is retreating, and that the opposing general is attempting to prevent his soldiers continued attack. Once we have established these facts, we can begin to make interpretive claims of judgment.

#### *Gathering Evidence*

The focus for the next portion of the lesson is determining how Trumbull's painting characterizes war. To ensure students remain focused on the perspective of the painting itself, it may be helpful to have them imagine themselves as John Trumbull when choosing adjectives to describe war. As students share their responses, I record their claims on an overhead chart, pushing them to provide evidence and analysis in support of their ideas. Students record my notes on a chart of their own; a simple chart (such as those used by Hillocks in *Teaching Argument Writing* ) is appropriate. Such organizers can be provided by the teacher or created by students in their notebooks or journals.

Claim	Evidence	Analysis
War is honorable.	The opposing general tries to stop his soldier from stabbing Warren.	Even though they are enemies, the generals respect each other. General Warren has already lost the battle, so stabbing him now would be unnecessary and disrespectful.

This marshaling of evidence continues until we have multiple pieces of evidence to support interpretive claims

of judgment.

### *Coauthoring Claims*

After students have provided a variety of evidence to support their interpretations. We will work together to write a paragraph using multiple pieces of evidence to support a claim about the nature of war. I want students to know that, for our purposes, paragraphs need to clearly state a claim, use specific evidence from a text, and provide analysis of that evidence that clarifies its meaning. This paragraph structure reinforces department wide expectations for student writing. The process of composing this paragraph is largely a restructuring and rephrasing of the evidence and analysis gathered above, but provides the opportunity to teach or review paragraph structure, as well as appropriate sentence structure and syntax. Students can finish this paragraph for homework if necessary, making revisions or adding evidence as necessary.

## **Paintings: Lesson 2**

### *Opening: Observe and Wonder*

Much like the first lesson, we observe and wonder as a class, this time focusing our attention on *The Retreat of Napoleon's Army from Russia in 1812*. I still want students to work together as a class so as to hear as many diverse perspectives as possible and establish the facts of the painting. As before, I provide context as necessary. It is important for students to recognize that this army too has been defeated, that Napoleon is in fact present in the painting, and that most of the casualties depicted are the result of starvation and exposure to the cold.

### *Gathering Evidence*

Students will be divided into groups no larger than four. After having considered the facts of the painting, these groups are charged with the same interpretive task as before, determining how this painting characterizes war. They will use the same charts as before to record claims, evidence, and analysis. Once the group reaches consensus, they will coauthor a paragraph supporting their claim. If no consensus can be reached, students may at this point write about different claims, but they should have recorded evidence and analysis from their group despite their disagreement. This should reinforce the idea that claims must come from the evidence at hand, preventing students from making predetermined or unwarranted claims.

### *Coauthoring Claims*

Students work together to write a paragraph supporting their claim. They should use both the product and the process of the previous days lesson as a guide. At this point my job is to circulate the room, check in with each group, and to ensure that students are including claims, evidence, and analysis in their paragraphs. I can also remind them of any lessons regarding sentence structure or syntax that may have emerged in the previous lesson at this time.

## **Paintings: Lesson 3**

### *Socratic Seminar*

Because the final lesson is meant to be an independent application of skills students have been learning throughout the unit, I take a step back from our initial examination of the final painting, *Gassed*. In the previous two lessons, I guided this process closely by calling on individual students to speak, ensuring student

questions were addressed by classmates, and by providing necessary context. I believe that this painting requires less background to establish basic facts, but students may find it useful to know about the chemical warfare introduced in WWI. I will again provide this as necessary, but I want students to be practicing conversation without my guidance in the service of furthering collective understanding. Students will silently prepare observations and questions on their own before using them in a class-wide seminar discussion. It is entirely likely that students will begin to offer and solicit interpretations at this stage, and I may allow this to continue for a little while, but once the conversation seems to be focused on interpretive claims, I will move to the final assessment of the unit.

### *Assessment*

Using *Gassed* as evidence, students write an organized paragraph making an interpretive claim about the nature of war. They may use any of their notes or previous work as a guide. I will use a departmental rubric for written analysis to evaluate students on their ability to write a clearly stated claim and support it with relevant evidence and specific analysis.

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## **Appendix 1: Paintings**

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John Singer Sargent, *Gassed* , 1918, Imperial War Museum

Ary Scheffer, *The Retreat of Napoleons Army from Russia in 1812* , 1826, Yale University Art Gallery

John Trumbull, *The Battle of Bunker's Hill, June 17, 1775* , 1986, Yale University Art Gallery

## Appendix 2: Common Core Standards, 11-12

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### Reading

RL.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.2. Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

RL.11-12.3. Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

### Writing

W.11-12.1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

### Speaking and Listening

SL.11-12.1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## Endnotes

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1. Tim O'Brien, "How to Tell a True War Story," in *The Things They Carried* , 78
2. E.F. Schumacher, "Two Types of Problems," in *A Guide for the Perplexed* , 127
3. Norman Maclean, in *A River Runs Through It* , 92
4. James Anderson Winn, "Honor and Memory," in *The Poetry of War* , 13
5. Rupert Brooke, "The Dead," in Stallworthy, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* , 162
6. Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est," in Stallworthy, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* , 188
7. W.B. Yeats, "An Irish Airman Forsees His Death," in Stallworthy, *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* , 174
8. James Anderson Winn, "Terrible Beauty," in *The Poetry of War* , 11
9. Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design* , 342

10. Wiggins and McTighe, *Understanding by Design*, 130.
11. George Hillocks Jr., "Preface," in *Teaching Argument Writing* , xxii
12. George Hillocks Jr., "Solving Problems Kids Care About," in *Teaching Argument Writing* , 96

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