



THE BORELLA RIDE

Poetry of the First World War
English
Year 9

Poetry of the First World War

Lesson objective

Students will examine, discuss and respond to two poems written by Australian First World War veterans.

Materials

None required.

Key Fact

The poets, Vance Palmer and Frederick Manning, both fought as infantrymen in a battle on the Somme River in France, and both afterwards became well known; Palmer as a poet and Manning as a novelist.

Task

1. Before reading the poems individually a student, or the teacher, should read them aloud. Students should write down the words that strike them as important, as well as words they do not understand.
2. Clarify the meaning of words.
3. After discussing the questions students should write a 30-40 word answer to each.

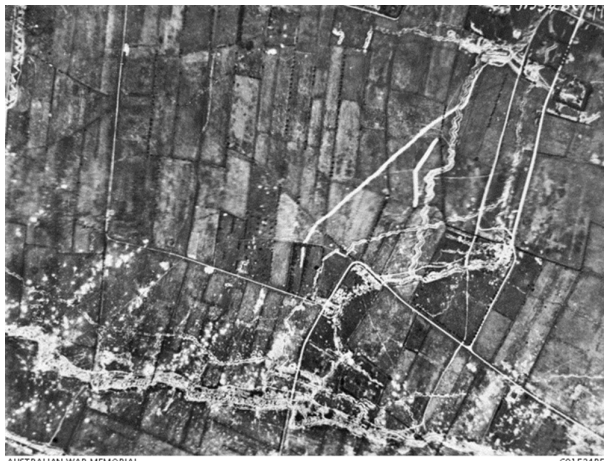
What is each poem about?

What questions do you have about the poems?

How do the poems differ from each other?

Is there anything in the poem that shows the poets were war veterans, or could any poet write something similar?

While we might expect war poems to have a sombre mood, there are lines expressing joy and contentment. Which ones are those? What do the poems tell you about the personality of these two poets?



AWM GO1534BE Aerial view of German trenches on the western front (copyright expired)



AWM H1 2360 Bullecourt, France, 1917. View of trenches close to the village. (copyright expired)

A farmer remembers the Somme, by Vance Palmer

Will they never fade or pass!
The mud, and the misty figures endlessly coming
In file through the foul morass,
And the grey flood-water ripping the reeds and grass,
And the steel wings drumming.

The hills are bright in the sun:
There's nothing changed or marred in the well-known places;
When work for the day is done
There's talk, and quiet laughter, and gleams of fun
On the old folks' faces.

I have returned to these:
The farm, and the kindly Bush, and the young calves lowing;
But all that my mind sees
Is a quaking bog in a mist - stark, snapped trees,
And the dark Somme flowing.



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

ART03497

AWM ART 03497 The Somme Valley near Corbie 1918,
by Arthur Streeton (copyright expired)



THE BORELLA RIDE

The Trenches, by Frederic Manning

Endless lanes sunken in the clay,
Bays, and traverses, fringed with wasted herbage,
Seed-pods of blue scabious, and some lingering blooms;

And the sky, seen as from a well,
Brilliant with frosty stars.
____ We stumble, cursing, on the slippery duck-boards.
Goaded like the damned by some invisible wrath,
A will stronger than weariness, stronger than animal fear,
Implacable and monotonous.

Here a shaft, slanting, and below
____ A dusty and flickering light from one feeble candle
And prone figures sleeping uneasily,
Murmuring,

And men who cannot sleep,
With faces impassive as masks,
Bright, feverish eyes, and drawn lips,
Sad, pitiless, terrible faces,
Each an incarnate curse.

Here in a bay, a helmeted sentry
Silent and motionless, watching while two sleep,
And he sees before him
With indifferent eyes the blasted and torn land
Peopled with stiff prone forms, stupidly rigid,
As tho' they had not been men.

Dead are the lips where love laughed or sang,
The hands of youth eager to lay hold of life,
Eyes that have laughed to eyes,
And these were begotten,
O Love, and lived lightly, and burnt

With the lust of a man's first strength: ere they were rent,
Almost at unawares, savagely; and strewn
In bloody fragments, to be the carrion
Of rats and crows.

And the sentry moves not, searching
Night for menace with weary eyes.



THE BORELLA RIDE