Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

KEY CONCEPT: Patriotism, Pacifism
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

OVERVIEW:
This lesson will enhance students’ knowledge and understanding of the terms patriotism and pacifism to gain insight into the views of Wilfred Owen and other war poets. It would be useful for the students to be familiar with the war poet Wilfred Owen and to have some understanding of poetic terminology.

KEY CONCEPT:
Patriotism
Pacifism

KEY WORDS:
War, conflict, loyalty, honour, peace, dedication, politics, individual vs. society, responsibility, love, suffering, allegiance, support and betrayal.

LEARNING INTENTION:
To be able to define patriotism and pacifism and identify examples of this in poetry.

SUCCESS CRITERIA:
We can
• Explore and discuss our understanding of the terms patriotism and pacifism.
• Classify symbols, images and quotes which are connected to the key concepts.
• Look for clues within extracts of war poetry which show us ideas and attitudes related to patriotism and pacifism.
• Identify evidence in Wilfred Owen’s poetry and letters which help us understand his views on war.
• Decide if Wilfred Owen is a patriot or a pacifist.

STRATEGIES USED:
Venn Diagram
Opinion Line
1. Identify Important Concepts:

Some of the key areas to investigate within and around the concepts of ‘patriotism’ and ‘pacifism’ are the following:

- War
- Justice
- Morality
- Individual vs. society
- Protection
- Safety
- Peace
- Loyalty
- Responsibility
- Nobility
- Suffering
- Death
- Sacrifice
- Duty

2. Challenge Students’ Understanding of the Concept:

Here are some examples of cognitive conflict we expect your students to experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Conflicting opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Patriots and pacifists are complete opposites. | It is possible to be patriotic and a pacifist at the same time.  
For example, “I don’t want to sacrifice our young soldiers in a foreign war.” |
| Pacifists object to conflict in all situations. | You can be a pacifist only in relation to certain conflicts.  
For example, “We should fight invaders but not be invaders.” |
| Patriotism means always putting your country first. | You can be patriotic because of the freedom your country gives you to put yourself first. |
| Pacifists aren’t brave. | Some pacifists have been willing to die for what they believe. |
| Patriotism means thinking that your country is the best. | Patriots can admire all nations and peoples of the world. |
| Patriotism demonstrates loyalty. | I am loyal to my friend, but that doesn’t mean I’m a patriot. |
Questions for challenge

- What is patriotism?
- What is pacifism?
- What are the differences between patriotism and pacifism?
- What makes someone a patriot or a pacifist?
- What makes someone a patriot and a pacifist?
- Can you be neither a patriot nor a pacifist?
- What makes someone a pacifist but not a patriot?
- Could you be a patriot if you disagreed with war?
- Does everyone have a duty to be patriotic?
- Which is more important – a duty to your country or a duty to ourselves?
- Should we always be loyal to our country?
- Should we always agree with the views and actions of our government?
- What if we were all patriots or all pacifists?
- Are the decisions governments make always for the benefit of their country and its citizens?
- Does fighting for your country make you a patriot?
- Is it possible for a soldier to be a pacifist?
- Is it possible to be a patriot and a pacifist at the same time?
- When is patriotism a bad thing and when is it a good thing?
- When is pacifism a bad thing and when is it a good thing?
- What evidence is there that pacifists love their country?
- What if there was no patriotism?
- What if there was no pacifism?
- What is the difference between patriotism and nationalism?
- When does patriotism aid peace?
- When does pacifism create conflict?
- What is the difference between a pacifist and a conscientious objector?
- When should pacifists not be conscientious objectors?

3. Construct Understanding:

Activity 1: Venn Diagram

Distribute the Activity 1 Orange resources to pairs or small groups. Ask your students to sort and classify the cards into things linked to patriotism and things linked to pacifism.
If your students begin to populate the cross-over section of the Venn Diagram, ask them:

**How is possible for something to be linked to patriotism and pacifism?**

Your students can be encouraged to add their own ideas or images to blank cards. Once the cards have been sorted, students work together to complete the sentences below to demonstrate their understanding of pacifism and patriotism.

*Patriotism is...*

*Pacifism is...*

Once the teacher feels that the students have a clear grasp of the terms patriotism and pacifism, the **Activity 1 Blue resources** set of cards can be distributed where students read and study lines of poetry from a range of poets.

Encourage your students to explore what the language and devices reveal about the poets’ views and add these extracts to the sorted patriotism and pacifism sets.

**Activity 2: Mystery**

A Mystery is a useful tool for challenging the thinking of students. Distribute the **Activity 3** resource cards to groups of 3 – 4, and encourage your students to use the evidence on those cards to answer the following question:

**Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?**

It is often useful to support the students when they are sorting through the information in front of them. This can help them to interpret and handle the information more easily, and reconstruct their thinking to reach an understanding.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence to show that Wilfred Owen was a patriot.</th>
<th>Evidence to show that Wilfred Owen was a pacifist.</th>
<th>Evidence that is not relevant.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Our conclusion is...*

*The key reasons for this are...*

**Questions to promote further dialogue**

- Could Wilfred Owen have avoided enlisting for war?
- Wilfred Owen fought and died for his country. Does this make him a patriot?
- Was Wilfred Owen loyal to his country?
- Is there a difference between loyalty and patriotism?
- Why did Owen write about war in his poetry?
- Who did Owen write the poems for?
• How did Owen want the reader to feel after reading his poems?
• Does Owen offer an alternative to war?
• Are Owen’s actions more important than his words?
• Why did Owen return to the war after getting injured?
• Does Owen’s praise of his fellow soldiers suggest patriotism? ‘...a band of friends half so fine as surround us here.’
• Does Owen present soldiers as brave and noble?
• How does Owen present the government compared to the soldiers?
• Why does Owen address the reader as ‘my friend’ in *Dulce et Decorum Est*?
• What did Owen want to ‘warn’ his readers about? Did he have a moral purpose?
• Does Owen’s opinion of war change?
• Is Wilfred Owen a war hero? Does this affect our view of whether he is a patriot or a pacifist?
• ‘Above all I am concerned with poetry. My subject is War, and the pity of War. The poetry is in the pity.’ How far do you agree that Owen was true to this statement?

**Adaptation**

You or your students could select a smaller range of cards for the Venn Diagram activity.

**Extension**

To add extra challenge to Activity 1, give some students blank cards so they can add extra ideas and symbols to represent patriotism and pacifism.

Students create a timeline using the cards from the Mystery activity, matching historical information and poetry extracts. Students could be encouraged to explore how and if Owen’s attitudes to war change over time.

Timelines could be created on:

• Wilfred Owen’s life 1893 – 1918.
• 1914 – 1918 when he wrote most of his most famous war poems.

To promote discussion on Owen’s different views of war, the students could be encouraged to compare the poem *Apologia Pro Poemate Meo* with poems such as *Disabled*, *Anthem for Doomed Youth* or *Dulce et Decorum Est*. They could lift quotes from these poems that show examples of either patriotic or pacifistic writing.

Having explored this concept, you could ask your students to plan and write an essay in response to the key question.
4. Consider The Learning Journey:

At the end of the activity it is usual to encourage the students to review their learning journey and the thinking process they have engaged in throughout the session.

This can include reflection on the thinking that has taken place to this point and a summary and conclusion of the new understanding reached.

They can do this by returning to and re-examining some key questions:

- What have we learnt about the terms patriotism and pacifism?
- Do you believe you can be both a patriot and a pacifist?
- Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?
- What questions do you still have?

Idea for transfer

Jigsaw Groups

In pairs or groups, students could explore and analyse the political speeches of Barack Obama. His speech *The America We Love* (June 2008) addresses the term patriotism.

- Split the speech into equal sections and allocate each section to a pair/group.
- Encourage each pair/group to explore how the speaker presents the term patriotism.
- Challenge each group to explore how the speaker uses language to present his ideas.
- Each group shares their findings and teaches the rest of the class.

Your students could write their own poem which reflects their own views on patriotism and pacifism. They could use the same techniques employed by war poets they have studied in this activity.

Encourage your students to explore and study how the media play a role in promoting pacifism and patriotism.
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?
We must remember, though, that true patriotism cannot be forced or legislated with a mere set of government programs. Instead, it must reside in the hearts of our people.

Barack Obama, 2008

‘6,845 Americans Died and 900,000 Were Injured in Iraq and Afghanistan. Say ‘No’ to Obama’s War.’

H. A. Goodman
The Huffington Post, 2015

‘Praise the power that hath made and preserved us a nation! Then conquer we must, when our cause it is just, And this be our motto: “In God is our trust”.’

Excerpt from the American national anthem

Support for one’s country.

Loyalty to one’s country.

The belief that war and violence are unjustifiable.

Love of peace.

Religion
The word ‘pacifism’ is derived from the word ‘pacific’, which means ‘peace making’.

Support for values of freedom and democracy.

Support for one’s fellow man and woman.
ACTIVITY: Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

'Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.'

_In Flanders Fields_
John McCrae
May 1915

‘Bent double,
like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed,
coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge …’

_Dulce Et Decorum Est_
Wilfred Owen
1917-1918

‘If I should die,
think only this of me: That there’s some corner of a foreign field That is for ever England.’

_The Soldier_
Rupert Brooke
1914

ACTIVITY: Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

‘When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wondered.
Honour the charge they made!’

_The Charge of the Light Brigade_
Alfred Lord Tennyson
1854

‘HAVE you news of my boy Jack?’
Not this tide.
“When d’you think that he’ll come back?”
Not with this wind blowing, and this tide.’

_My Boy Jack_
Rudyard Kipling
1915

ACTIVITY: Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

‘They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.’

_For the Fallen_
Robert Laurence Binyon
1914

‘O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weather’d every rack, the prize we sought is won…’

_O Captain My Captain!_
Walt Whitman
1865

‘Yes; quaint and curious war is! You shoot a fellow down You’d treat, if met where any bar is, Or help to half a crown.’

_The Man He Killed_
Thomas Hardy
1902
‘What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns.’

Anthem for Doomed Youth 1917

He became an assistant to the vicar of Dunsden near Reading 1911-1913.

On October 3, 1918 Owen was awarded the Military Cross for ‘conspicuous gallantry’.

‘I, too, saw God through mud—’

Apologia Pro Poemate Meo 1917

‘My friend, you would not tell with such high zest To children ardent for some desperate glory, The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est, Pro patria morti.’

Dulce et Decorum Est 1918

‘I came out in order to help these boys - directly by leading them as well as an officer can…’

Letter to his mother about returning to the front line. 1918

‘I hate washy pacifists… Therefore I feel that I must first get some reputation for gallantry before I could successfully and usefully declare my principles.’

Letter to his mother. October 1917

‘He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark, And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey, Legless, sewn short at elbow.’

Disabled Wilfred Owen 1917

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born on 18 March 1893, in Oswestry, on the Welsh border of Shropshire.
‘I am certain you could not be visited by a band of friends half so fine as surround us here.’
Letter to his mother, Susan Owen. 1918

‘The Doctor suddenly was moved to forbid me to go into action. I’m being sent to Craiglockhart hospital in Scotland.’
Letter to his mother, Susan Owen. 1918

‘Our brains ache, in the merciless iced east winds that knife us... Wearied we keep awake because the night is silent...’

Exposure 1917

‘War brought more glory to their eyes than blood...’
Apologia Pro Poemate Meo 1917

In November 1918 he was killed in action at the age of twenty-five, one week before the Armistice.

Strange Meeting 1918

‘I am the enemy you killed, my friend. I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.’

Dulce et Decorum Est 1918

‘I know I shall be killed. But it’s the only place I can make my protest from.’
Letter to his brother. 1918

‘Always they must see these things and hear them, Batter of guns and shatter of flying muscles, Carnage incomparable, and human squander...’
Mental Cases 1918

‘If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs, Obscene as cancer...’

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‘Sudden successive flights of bullets streak the silence. Less deadly than the air that shudders black with snow...’

‘Father would sooner him dead than in disgrace, — Was proud to see him going, aye, and glad.’

‘Courage leaked, as sand From the best sand-bags after years of rain.’

‘We dredged him up, for killed, until he whined “O sir, my eyes - I’m blind - I’m blind, I’m blind!”’

I am more and more a Christian... Be bullied, be outraged, be killed: but do not kill.’

‘I lost all my earthly faculties, and I fought like an angel... I captured a German Machine Gun and scores of prisoners.’

‘I scrambled out myself and felt an exhilaration in baffling the Machine Guns by quick bounds from cover to cover.’

‘All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true poet must be truthful.’

‘Through the dense din, I say, we heard him shout “I see your lights!” But ours had long died out.’
‘Sit on the bed; I’m blind, and three parts shell. Be careful; can’t shake hands now; never shall. Both arms have mutinied against me, - brutes.’

A Terre (Being the philosophy of many Soldiers.) 1919

‘But where the lamb for this burnt-offering? Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps, and builded parapets and trenches there, And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.’

Parable of the Old Man and the Young 1918

‘This book is not about heroes. English Poetry is not yet fit to speak of them. Nor is it about deeds or lands, nor anything about glory, honour, might, majesty, dominion or power, except War.’

Unfinished preface for his book of poetry 1918

patriotism
noun
The quality of being patriotic; vigorous support for one’s country. “A highly decorated officer of unquestionable integrity and patriotism”.

OED

pacifism
noun
The belief that war and violence are unjustifiable and that all disputes should be settled by peaceful means.

OED

In 1918, Owen voluntarily went back to fight in the war.

‘I thought of all that worked dark pits Of war, and died Digging the rock where Death reputes Peace lies indeed.’

Miners 1918

‘I am not only a pacifist but a militant pacifist. I am willing to fight for peace. Nothing will end war unless the people themselves refuse to go to war.’

Albert Einstein (1879–1955)