

The Charge of the Light Brigade

1.

Half a league, half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns!' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

2.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'
Was there a man dismay'd?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

3.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon in front of them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
Boldly they rode and well,
Into the jaws of Death,
Into the mouth of Hell
Rode the six hundred.

4.

Flash'd all their sabres bare,
Flash'd as they turn'd in air
Sabring the gunners there,
Charging an army, while
All the world wonder'd:
Plunged in the battery-smoke
Right thro' the line they broke;
Cossack and Russian
Reel'd from the sabre-stroke
Shatter'd and sunder'd.
Then they rode back, but not
Not the six hundred.

5.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse and hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

6.

When can their glory fade?
O the wild charge they made!
All the world wonder'd.
Honour the charge they made!
Honour the Light Brigade,
Noble six hundred!

Activity 1

Copy out one key line from each stanza which conveys the story.

Stanza 1:

Stanza 2:

Stanza 3:

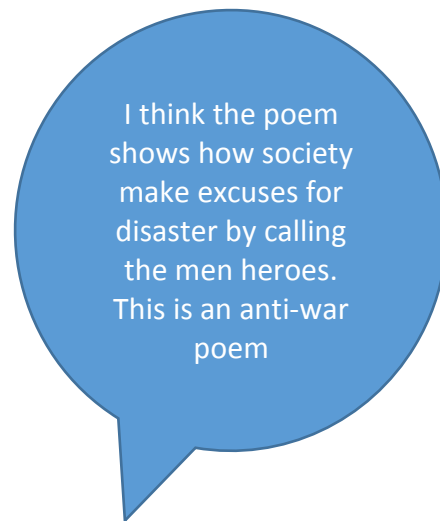
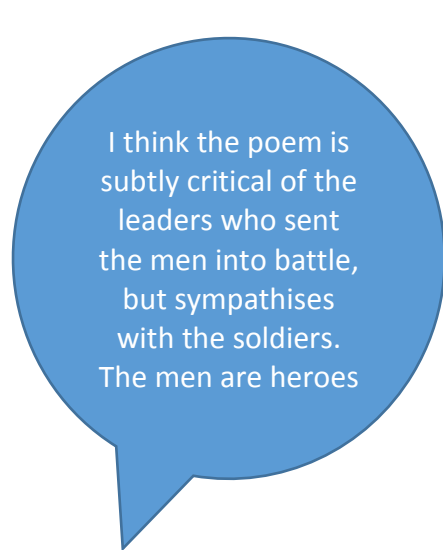
Stanza 4:

Stanza 5:

Stanza 6:

Activity 2

Consider the following views about the poem. Which one do you agree with most?



Answer

Comparative Task

Compare how Tennyson presents ideas about suffering in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and one other poem.

You should focus on:

- the events of the poem and how you react to them
- the way Tennyson depicts suffering in the poem

1. Which poem will you compare it to?
2. What do both poems say about suffering?

Sample Answer

In 'Bayonet Charge' and 'Charge of the Light Brigade', both poets present war as a terrible experience which cannot be justified by any cause. While Alfred Lord Tennyson explores the effects of war on soldiers as a whole, in 'Bayonet Charge' Ted Hughes focuses on the soldier's detailed perspective of war. The effect is the same – the coruscating condemnation of war's horror and futility.

in 'Charge of the Light Brigade' the poet explores the impact of war on all the soldiers collectively. The poet wants us to "honour the Light Brigade, honour the charge they made". This creates the impression that all the soldiers go through this experience together and are all affected. The word "they" shows the reader that, as a whole, the soldiers in war must go through seeing deaths and other horrors but he doesn't focus on the experience of a single soldier. Also, "honour" shows that unlike Hughes in 'Bayonet Charge', the poet believes that the soldiers should be respected and appreciated and includes some positivity. Here, Tennyson shows how grateful he is for the soldiers who fought in the Crimean War and shows that they should be honoured. In 'Bayonet Charge', the poet illustrates the horrible experience of one unnamed soldier and presents the effects of war on him as being completely negative. By beginning it with "suddenly he awoke" Hughes immediately throws the reader straight into the chaos of war which intensifies the impact the poem has on readers. Hughes uses the adverb "suddenly" to demonstrate how the soldier feels vulnerable and confused because he has just woken up but is instantly in a dangerous war zone. Also, the use "he" keeps the soldier anonymous which tells the reader that each soldier goes through this terrible experience of war. In comparison,

Tennyson's poem seems to focus more on the physical sacrifices made in war. The first few stanzas all end with the same line, "Rode the six hundred". This is a constant reminder to the reader of just how many soldiers are killed in war and the repetition could suggest that he is angry at this. He portrays the violence and ridiculous number of killings which war results in. However, 'Bayonet Charge', the poet shows the reader how soldiers are mentally affected by war and how being in a war zone changes them. Now, "the patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye" is "sweating like molten iron." This suggests that actually being in the war changes the soldiers' perspectives as they no longer care about honour and patriotism when their lives are in danger. Hughes may have intended to show the reader that in war, soldiers are permanently changed because they have to go through such a terrible event. Here, the poet might have wanted to show that war is always pointless as it can never justify the mental impact it has on soldiers, for example, after the war some suffer from PTSD and struggle to come to terms with what they have done or been through.

'Charge of the Light Brigade' presents the impact of the war caused by the leaders who seem to be the soldiers' enemy. Tennyson describes how "someone had blundered". This demonstrates how because of a mistake of those in authority, the soldiers are going through such a horrible experience. The reader infers that the enemy of the soldiers is not the opposing army but the leaders who put them in this position in the first place. The poet included this because in the Crimean War, the people in charge of the soldiers gave them the wrong orders so the soldiers followed them which resulted in many deaths.

However, in 'Bayonet Charge', the poet presents how the main enemy of the soldier is the opposition which causes the main impact on the soldier. The writer's use of the metaphor "bullets smacking the belly out of the air" creates the impression that the weapons were extremely dangerous and harmful. The use of "smacking" and "belly" could suggest to the reader that because weapons are almost personified as humans, it also seems as though the soldiers are being dehumanised; they are a mere weapon to be used in war.

In addition, 'in Bayonet Charge', the poet presents the effects of war as solely negative because the soldier cannot escape his situation. Even his "king, honour, human dignity, etcetera" are "dropped like luxuries in yelling alarm". This shows how the experience on the battlefield is so chaotic and harsh that nothing else but his life matters to him anymore. Hughes uses the word "etcetera" to suggest to the reader that patriotism is now unimportant as the soldier dismisses any reason that he is in the war, he just wants to escape and get "out that blue crackling air". Here, we learn how, in war, soldiers find it extremely difficult to endure the situation but feel as though they cannot escape. Similarly, in 'Charge of the Light Brigade', Tennyson also presents the way soldiers are trapped by using the metaphors "valley of Death" and "mouth of Hell". This shows the reader that for the soldiers, death is inevitable and they must face the reality of their situation. This helps the reader to sympathise even more with soldiers because not only do they suffer physically, they are haunted by the fact that they will die in this way. Tennyson does this to show how the soldiers must have felt in the Crimean War as well as other wars where they are constantly surrounded by "cannons" and life threatening danger.

Overall, both poets present the impact of war in an extremely horrible way; although the experiences they focus on differ, both writers reveal the fundamental pointlessness and human cost of conflict.

Your main points about suffering in the poem you chose....