



# English Learning for Curious Minds



**Member-only content  
Transcript & Key Vocabulary**

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## BONUS EPISODE 2

### The Poets of World War I

February 28th 2020



[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to our second members-only English Learning for Curious Minds podcast.

[00:00:11] I guess by now you probably know who I am, but if you need a reminder, I'm Alastair Budge the founder of Leonardo English and the host of the show.

[00:00:22] Firstly, thank you very much for your continued membership to Leonardo English.

[00:00:27] It couldn't be possible without you and I really am truly grateful.

[00:00:32] Today we are going to be talking about the poets of World War One.

[00:00:37] We'll talk about why this war inspired such great poetry.



## The Poets of World War I

[00:00:42] We'll talk about the types of poetry it did inspire, how this changed during the four years of the war and the impact it has left behind on how we think about this war and how we think about war in general.

[00:00:59] And of course we'll read some extracts of some of the most [iconic](#)<sup>1</sup> poems from World War One.

[00:01:07] I had tested out the idea for this podcast on my wife who is not a native speaker, and she said she thought it was too [niche](#)<sup>2</sup> and too hard, but I thought it was at least [worth a shot](#)<sup>3</sup>.

[00:01:21] I have faith that you'll be able to understand and you'll have the transcript and key vocabulary there to help if you need.

[00:01:29] What's more, because it is probably a little harder than most, if you have questions about it or there's anything that you didn't understand, please just email me directly and I'll be more than happy to explain things.

[00:01:45] Plus, there will be another members-only podcast in a couple of weeks about effective ways to memorise and remember vocabulary.

[00:01:54] So that's a slightly easier topic, a slightly less [niche](#) podcast.

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<sup>1</sup> very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time

<sup>2</sup> interesting to, aimed at, or affecting only a small number of people

<sup>3</sup> worth trying



## The Poets of World War I

[00:02:01] Okay, then.

[00:02:02] The First World War was, of course, a war like no other.

[00:02:07] Over 65 million people fought in it, of whom almost 10 million lost their lives.

[00:02:14] Yes, there were wars before where more people were killed and wars after where more people were killed.

[00:02:22] But the First World War is quite unique in terms of how it exists in our collective memory.

[00:02:29] And now that anyone who fought in the First World War is dead - the last soldier died in 2012 - one of the main ways in which the war is remembered, in the English language at least, is through the poetry that was left behind.

[00:02:48] While we can't really [lump](#)<sup>4</sup> together the British war poets into just one category, what we can do is talk about the poetry that came out of the First World War as a way of understanding how public [sentiment](#)<sup>5</sup>, how people felt about the war, changed over its four year course.

[00:03:09] What we see through the eyes of the young men who were sent to war is that war as a concept quickly goes from this [intangible](#)<sup>6</sup> romantic idea to something that's

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<sup>4</sup> put together in the same category

<sup>5</sup> a thought, opinion, or idea based on a feeling about a situation, or a way of thinking about something

<sup>6</sup> impossible to touch, to describe exactly, or to give an exact value



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completely [futile](#)<sup>7</sup>, completely without purpose, that only [serves to](#)<sup>8</sup> destroy the lives and souls of the youngest and brightest men and women in the world.

[00:03:33] So let's take a little walk through this journey and take a moment to think about what these young men and women had gone through

[00:03:43] On the 28th of June, 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated.

[00:03:51] And within two months, the entire of Europe was at war.

[00:03:57] Young British men filled with [patriotic](#)<sup>9</sup> [ideals](#)<sup>10</sup>, signed up to support the war effort and the general [consensus](#)<sup>11</sup>, the general feeling, was that the war would be over by Christmas.

[00:04:14] The poetry that came from the start of this period [echoes](#)<sup>12</sup> this sort of feeling.

[00:04:22] Here's an extract from a poem called The Soldier by Rupert Brooke.

[00:04:29]

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<sup>7</sup> (of actions) having no effect or achieving nothing

<sup>8</sup> does, achieves

<sup>9</sup> showing love for your country and being proud of it

<sup>10</sup> a principle or a way of behaving that is of a very high standard

<sup>11</sup> a generally accepted opinion or decision among a group of people

<sup>12</sup> to express or think what someone else has said or thought



The Poets of World War I

[00:04:29] *If I should die, think only this of me,*

[00:04:33] *That there's some corner of a foreign field*

[00:04:36] *That is forever England. There shall be*

[00:04:40] *In that rich earth, a richer [dust<sup>13</sup>](#) concealed.*

[00:04:47]

[00:04:47] So it's completely [idealistic<sup>14</sup>](#), promoting the idea that men should be happy to give their lives for the higher concept of England, that nothing should be more glorious than to give your life in service of your country.

[00:05:03] Now we'll never know whether Brooke, the, the poet would have turned a little more [cynical<sup>15</sup>](#) after he saw the real horrors of war.

[00:05:14] He died of an infected mosquito bite in 1915 at the [ripe old age<sup>16</sup>](#) of 27, just three weeks after the newspaper, The Times, had published that poem.

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<sup>13</sup> dry dirt in the form of powder that covers surfaces inside a building, or very small dry pieces of earth, sand, or other substances

<sup>14</sup> see 'ideals'

<sup>15</sup> believing that people are only interested in themselves and are not sincere

<sup>16</sup> (used here sarcastically) the condition of being very old; used especially to talk about someone who has a long healthy life



## The Poets of World War I

[00:05:30] The true horror of the war soon became [apparent<sup>17</sup>](#), and while at the start of the war, the poems had focused on these [sentimental<sup>18</sup> ideals](#) of dying for one's country, of the glory of England, as the war continued, the poets wrote more about the [futility<sup>19</sup>](#) of war, of the human tragedy, and of the disappointment of an entire generation of young men.

[00:05:56] It's [notable<sup>20</sup>](#), it's worth remembering, that the enemy in the vast majority of these poems isn't the Germans, the enemy on the battlefield.

[00:06:08] There are two main enemies.

[00:06:12] Firstly, the [generals<sup>21</sup>](#), the [superiors<sup>22</sup>](#), the politicians who were sending young men in their millions to their deaths.

[00:06:22] And secondly, the concept of war itself.

[00:06:26] War was the enemy.

[00:06:28] War was what was destroying the youth on both sides of the battlefield.

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<sup>17</sup> able to be seen or understood

<sup>18</sup> giving too much importance to emotions, especially love or sadness

<sup>19</sup> (of actions) having no effect or achieving nothing

<sup>20</sup> worth remembering

<sup>21</sup> military officers of the highest rank

<sup>22</sup> higher in rank or social position than others



## The Poets of World War I

[00:06:35] Let's take a look first at an example of a poem that talks about the [generals](#) as the enemy.

[00:06:44] This poem is called The [General](#), and it's by Siegfried Sassoon.

[00:06:51] "Good morning, good morning!" the [general](#) said

[00:06:54] When we met him last week on our way to the [line](#)<sup>23</sup>.

[00:06:58] Now the soldiers, he smiled at are most of ['em](#)<sup>24</sup> dead

[00:07:03] And we're [cursing](#)<sup>25</sup> his staff for [incompetent](#)<sup>26</sup> [swine](#)<sup>27</sup>.

[00:07:08] "He's a cheery old [card](#)<sup>28</sup>," [grunted](#)<sup>29</sup> Harry to Jack

[00:07:12] As they [slogged](#)<sup>30</sup> up to Arras with rifle and [pack](#)<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> the line', in the context of World War One, was where the two sides fought against each other

<sup>24</sup> short version of 'them'

<sup>25</sup> using a word or an expression that is not polite and shows that you are very angry

<sup>26</sup> not having the ability to do something as it should be done

<sup>27</sup> a person who you consider to be extremely unpleasant and unkind

<sup>28</sup> (old fashioned) a funny or strange person

<sup>29</sup> (of a pig) to make a low, rough noise

<sup>30</sup> to travel or move with difficulty, for example through wet, sticky soil or snow, or when you are very tired

<sup>31</sup> rucksack



## The Poets of World War I

[00:07:17] But [he did for them](#)<sup>32</sup> both by his plan of attack.

[00:07:22] So if you hadn't got that, this is the story of a [general](#) who gets two young soldiers killed despite having smiled at them the week before.

[00:07:33] It's pretty [telling](#)<sup>33</sup> that the anger here isn't directed against the battlefield enemy.

[00:07:40] The young men writing these poems know that their [opponents](#)<sup>34</sup> across [no man's land](#)<sup>35</sup> are in an equally hopeless position, pushed by their own [superiors](#) to get up [over the top](#)<sup>36</sup> and be [slaughtered](#)<sup>37</sup> in exactly the same way.

[00:08:00] They, in fact have a shared enemy - the [generals](#), the superiors, the politicians who are pushing them forward in this hopeless war.

[00:08:11] And then this brings us to war itself as the true enemy.

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<sup>32</sup> he caused their death

<sup>33</sup> showing the truth about a situation or showing what someone really thinks

<sup>34</sup> a person you are competing against

<sup>35</sup> the land between the two sides in World War One

<sup>36</sup> (of World War One) to be sent towards the enemy

<sup>37</sup> killed cruelly and unfairly, especially in a war



## The Poets of World War I

[00:08:17] There are many poems we could choose from here now, but I think one of the most powerful is called Suicide In The [Trenches](#)<sup>38</sup> by probably the most famous war poet Siegfried Sasson, the same poet who wrote The [General](#).

[00:08:34] The vocabulary in this one is a little bit more complicated, but it's such a beautiful, moving one that I think it's worth sharing.

[00:08:44] So this is called Suicide In The [Trenches](#).

[00:08:49] *I knew a simple soldier boy*

[00:08:52] *Who [grinned](#)<sup>39</sup> at life in empty joy,*

[00:08:56] *Slept [soundly](#)<sup>40</sup> through the [lonesome](#)<sup>41</sup> dark,*

[00:08:59] *And [whistled](#)<sup>42</sup> early with the [lark](#)<sup>43</sup>.*

[00:09:03] *In winter [trenches](#), [cowed](#)<sup>44</sup> and [glum](#)<sup>45</sup>,*

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<sup>38</sup> a deep hole dug by soldiers and used as a place from which they can attack the enemy while being hidden

<sup>39</sup> to smile a wide smile

<sup>40</sup> completely

<sup>41</sup> lonely

<sup>42</sup> to make a high sound by forcing air through the lips

<sup>43</sup> a small, brown bird that is known for its beautiful singing

<sup>44</sup> frightened



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[00:09:07] With [crumps<sup>46</sup>](#) and [lice<sup>47</sup>](#) and lack of [rum<sup>48</sup>](#).

[00:09:11] He put a bullet through his brain.

[00:09:14] No one spoke of him again.

[00:09:17] You [smug<sup>49</sup>](#) faced [cowards<sup>50</sup>](#) with [kindling<sup>51</sup>](#) eye

[00:09:20] Who cheer when soldier lads [march<sup>52</sup>](#) by,

[00:09:25] [Sneak<sup>53</sup>](#) home and pray you'll never know

[00:09:28] The hell where youth and laughter go.

[00:09:33] I know some of those words may be a little bit unfamiliar, but I hope you get the [gist<sup>54</sup>](#).

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<sup>45</sup> disappointed or unhappy, and quiet

<sup>46</sup> the falling of shells from artillery

<sup>47</sup> a very small insect that lives on the bodies or in the hair of people and animals

<sup>48</sup> a strong alcoholic drink made from the juice of the sugar cane plant

<sup>49</sup> too pleased or satisfied about something you have achieved or something you know

<sup>50</sup> opposite of brave

<sup>51</sup> small dry sticks or other materials used to start a fire

<sup>52</sup> walk

<sup>53</sup> to go somewhere secretly, or to take someone or something somewhere secretly

<sup>54</sup> the most important pieces of information about something, or general information without details



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[00:09:40] Sassoon, the poet, is an example of someone who started out with these [patriotic](#) ideals, [enlisting](#)<sup>55</sup> in the army at the [outbreak](#)<sup>56</sup> of war in 1914 but then became one of the war's greatest [critics](#)<sup>57</sup>.

[00:09:56] It's also worth pointing out that not all war poetry went this way.

[00:10:01] There was plenty that continued the [patriotic](#) themes talking about the glory of dying for one's country, of the [camaraderie](#)<sup>58</sup> of the [front line](#)<sup>59</sup> and of the fact that staying at home was the [coward's](#) thing to do and brave [patriotic](#) men should be going to the [front](#).

[00:10:22] But it's certainly the anti-war war poetry that has captivated our imaginations and that most people now associate with the First World War.

[00:10:35] Why is this?

[00:10:36] Well, there's little debate that the anti-war poetry was accurate in its descriptions of life on the [front](#)<sup>60</sup>.

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<sup>55</sup> to join the army

<sup>56</sup> the start of

<sup>57</sup> someone who says that they do not approve of someone or something

<sup>58</sup> a feeling of friendliness towards people that you work or share an experience with

<sup>59</sup> a place where opposing armies face each other in war and where fighting happens

<sup>60</sup> shortened version of 'front line'



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[00:10:45] It was obviously horrific and there is nothing romantic about being filled with [machine gun](#)<sup>61</sup> [bullets](#)<sup>62</sup> or killed by [nerve gas](#)<sup>63</sup> in a cold, muddy field.

[00:10:57] An entire generation was destroyed.

[00:11:00] Those who died on the battlefield didn't return, of course, and those who did return were in many cases, [mutilated](#)<sup>64</sup>, damaged, both physically and mentally from their experiences.

[00:11:16] The [cynic](#)<sup>65</sup> might say that the fact that the anti-war poets are now the voice of the First World War is just because that [aligns](#)<sup>66</sup> with the post-war view of wars being a negative thing, and because the anti war poems were much more beautifully written and captivating of our imagination than the [patriotic](#) stuff.

[00:11:43] But to those people, I'd definitely say that it's no bad thing that we are constantly reminded of the horrors of war, of the human cost, and of the scale of the tragedy so that we can do everything we possibly can to avoid it happening again.

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<sup>61</sup> an automatic gun that can fire a lot of bullets one after the other very quickly

<sup>62</sup> a small, metal object that is shot from a gun

<sup>63</sup> a poisonous gas, often used as a weapon, that damages the nerves

<sup>64</sup> severely damaged

<sup>65</sup> people who believe that people are only interested in themselves and are not sincere

<sup>66</sup> is similar to



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[00:12:02] Nobody really wants to go to war if it's not necessary, and the words of these young men just remind us quite the horrors that were faced when people had to do so.

[00:12:16] Well, I hope that this has at least been an interesting look into the world of the British war poets.

[00:12:23] I know this might have been not the most [upbeat<sup>67</sup>](#), the most joyous, of our episodes, but the words of these poets are just so powerful.

[00:12:33] I also know that poetry in a foreign language is something that's particularly difficult, but I hope that if you have the transcript and key vocabulary in front of you, this has been a bit easier than it might have been otherwise.

[00:12:49] Let me just finish by reading what is perhaps the most famous war poem, and that's one that's read every November the 11th, [Armistice Day<sup>68</sup>](#), as a way of remembering the loss of life suffered by these young men and women.

[00:13:04] It's called "In [Flanders<sup>69</sup>](#) Fields", and it's written by John McCrae.

[00:13:10] *In [Flanders](#) fields the [poppies<sup>70</sup>](#) blow*

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<sup>67</sup> full of hope, happiness, and good feelings

<sup>68</sup> November 11th, when the end of The First World War is celebrated

<sup>69</sup> a region in the south-western part of the Low Countries, now divided between Belgium (where it forms the provinces of East and West Flanders), France, and the Netherlands. It was a powerful medieval principality and the scene of prolonged fighting during the First World War

<sup>70</sup> a plant with large, delicate flowers that are typically red and have small, black seeds



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[00:13:14] *Between the [crosses](#)<sup>71</sup> row on row,*

[00:13:16] *That Mark our place; and in the sky,*

[00:13:20] *The [larks](#), still bravely singing, fly*

[00:13:23] *Scarce heard [amid](#)<sup>72</sup> the guns below.*

[00:13:27] *We are the Dead. Short days ago*

[00:13:30] *We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,*

[00:13:35] *Loved and were loved, and now we lie*

[00:13:39] *In Flanders fields.*

[00:13:42] *Take up our [quarrel](#)<sup>73</sup> with the [foe](#)<sup>74</sup>:*

[00:13:44] *To you from failing hands we throw*

[00:13:47] *The torch; be yours to hold it high.*

[00:13:51] *If ye break faith with us who die,*

[00:13:54] *We shall not sleep, though [poppies](#) grow*

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<sup>71</sup> the object that marks where soldiers were buried

<sup>72</sup> between

<sup>73</sup> an angry disagreement between two or more people or groups

<sup>74</sup> enemy



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[00:13:57] *In Flanders fields.*

[00:14:00] Quite something, right?

[00:14:03]

[00:14:03] Again, this was a little bit of a test, this podcast.

[00:14:07] I know that today's one might've been quite a bit harder than usual, but I hope you have enjoyed it and found it interesting.

[00:14:15] We'll have another members-only podcast for you in a couple of weeks, and I promise that this will be a lot less [niche](#).

[00:14:24] Let me know though.

[00:14:25] I'd love to know what you thought of this one.

[00:14:28] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English.

[00:14:33] I'm Alastair Budge and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



## Key vocabulary

<b>Word</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Iconic</b>	very famous or popular, especially being considered to represent particular opinions or a particular time
<b>Niche</b>	interesting to, aimed at, or affecting only a small number of people
<b>Worth a shot</b>	worth trying
<b>Lump</b>	put together in the same category
<b>Sentiment</b>	a thought, opinion, or idea based on a feeling about a situation, or a way of thinking about something
<b>Intangible</b>	impossible to touch, to describe exactly, or to give an exact value
<b>Futile</b>	(of actions) having no effect or achieving nothing
<b>Serves to</b>	does, achieves
<b>Patriotic</b>	showing love for your country and being proud of it
<b>Ideals</b>	a principle or a way of behaving that is of a very high



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standard

**Consensus**

a generally accepted opinion or decision among a group of people

**Echoes**

to express or think what someone else has said or thought

**Dust**

dry dirt in the form of powder that covers surfaces inside a building, or very small dry pieces of earth, sand, or other substances

**Idealistic**

see 'ideals'

**Cynical**

believing that people are only interested in themselves and are not sincere

**Ripe old age**

(used here sarcastically) the condition of being very old; used especially to talk about someone who has a long healthy life

**Apparent**

able to be seen or understood

**Sentimental**

giving too much importance to emotions, especially love or sadness

**Futility**

(of actions) having no effect or achieving nothing

**Notable**

worth remembering



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<b>Generals</b>	military officers of the highest rank
<b>Superiors</b>	higher in rank or social position than others
<b>Line</b>	the line', in the context of World War One, was where the two sides fought against each other
<b>'em</b>	short version of 'them'
<b>Cursing</b>	using a word or an expression that is not polite and shows that you are very angry
<b>Incompetent</b>	not having the ability to do something as it should be done
<b>Swine</b>	a person who you consider to be extremely unpleasant and unkind
<b>Card</b>	(old fashioned) a funny or strange person
<b>Grunted</b>	(of a pig) to make a low, rough noise
<b>Slogged</b>	to travel or move with difficulty, for example through wet, sticky soil or snow, or when you are very tired
<b>Pack</b>	rucksack
<b>He did for them</b>	he caused their death
<b>Telling</b>	showing the truth about a situation or showing what



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someone really thinks

**Opponents**

a person you are competing against

**No man's land**

the land between the two sides in World War One

**Over the top**

(of World War One) to be sent towards the enemy

**Slaughtered**

killed cruelly and unfairly, especially in a war

**Trenches**

a deep hole dug by soldiers and used as a place from which they can attack the enemy while being hidden

**Grinned**

to smile a wide smile

**Soundly**

completely

**Lonesome**

lonely

**Whistled**

to make a high sound by forcing air through the lips

**Lark**

a small, brown bird that is known for its beautiful singing

**Cowed**

frightened

**Glum**

disappointed or unhappy, and quiet

**Crumps**

the falling of shells from artillery

**Lice**

a very small insect that lives on the bodies or in the hair of



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people and animals

**Rum**

a strong alcoholic drink made from the juice of the sugar  
cane plant

**Smug**

too pleased or satisfied about something you have achieved  
or something you know

**Cowards**

opposite of brave

**Kindling**

small dry sticks or other materials used to start a fire

**March**

walk

**Sneak**

to go somewhere secretly, or to take someone or something  
somewhere secretly

**Gist**

the most important pieces of information about something,  
or general information without details

**Enlisting**

to join the army

**Outbreak**

the start of

**Critics**

someone who says that they do not approve of someone or  
something

**Camaraderie**

a feeling of friendliness towards people that you work or



## The Poets of World War I

share an experience with

### Front line

a place where opposing armies face each other in war and where fighting happens

### Front

shortened version of 'front line'

### Machine gun

an automatic gun that can fire a lot of bullets one after the other very quickly

### Bullets

a small, metal object that is shot from a gun

### Nerve gas

a poisonous gas, often used as a weapon, that damages the nerves

### Mutilated

severely damaged

### Cynic

people who believe that people are only interested in themselves and are not sincere

### Aligns

is similar to

### Upbeat

full of hope, happiness, and good feelings

### Armistice day

November 11th, when the end of The First World War is celebrated

### Flanders

a region in the south-western part of the Low Countries, now divided between Belgium (where it forms the provinces



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of East and West Flanders), France, and the Netherlands. It was a powerful medieval principality and the scene of prolonged fighting during the First World War

### Poppies

a plant with large, delicate flowers that are typically red and have small, black seeds

### Crosses

the object that marks where soldiers were buried

### Amid

between

### Quarrel

an angry disagreement between two or more people or groups

### Foe

enemy

*We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.*

*What did you like? What could we do better?*

*What did you struggle to understand?*

*You can email us at [hi@leonardoenglish.com](mailto:hi@leonardoenglish.com).*

