



Knowledge
Organiser
Year 9 English
Journey's End



Enquiry Question:

Journey's End

Big Questions

1. What are the key historical factors that are important to our understanding of the play?
2. How does Sherriff establish setting and atmosphere in the exposition of the play?
3. Who are the key characters in the play?
4. How does Sherriff explore theme of social class in the play?
5. How does Sherriff present trench warfare?
6. How are psychological effects of war presented in the play?
7. How do Osborne and Raleigh react towards the raid?
8. How is the theme of heroism explored in the play?
9. Is Stanhope a hero?

Key Vocabulary

Journey's End

Key Vocabulary for 'Journey's End

1. Allusion– an indirect reference to another work of literature (often biblical or mythology references).
2. Futility– pointless or useless.
3. Inner conflict- A character struggles with him or herself, and tries to escape a way of behaving or frame of mind.
4. Pun– a joke that exploits different possible meanings of a word.
5. Exposition– The section of plot at the start of the play which provides essential information about the characters, their situation and relationships.
6. Stage Directions– Instructions given by the playwright about how the play should be staged, how actors should move and enter and exit, and how lines should be said.
7. Realism– In the theatre this describes the decision to give the audience an accurate description of the real world rather than a stylised interpretation.
8. Symbolism– when an object or stage craft (sound or light) is used to represent an abstract idea or emotion.
9. Irony– expressing meaning through language that often means the complete opposite.
10. Catharsis– a cleansing of emotions which occurs at the end of the play– usually through fear or pit.
11. Tragedy– an event causing great suffering.
13. Tragic Hero- the protagonist who must be brought from happiness to misery and is of a high status of power.
14. Motif- a repeated image, object or idea in a work of literature or art.
15. Shell Shock- psychological disturbance that is caused by prolonged active warfare.
16. Metaphor– a figurative expression in which a word or phrase is applied to an object, but it is not literal.
17. Propaganda– information that is biased or misleading, often used to promote a political view.
18. Trench humour-soldiers often turned to humour to alleviate the stress of life in the trenches. Soldiers used slang, puns, and satire that would not be understood by people outside of the soldier's group.

Year 9- Knowledge Organiser- Journey's End

Journey's End is a play set during the First World War, which concerns the lives of a group of British officers on the front line in France.

Context				Characters			
<p>During the First World War (1914–1918), trench warfare became common along the Western Front. In this area of Belgium and Northern France, the Allied forces of France, Britain, Canada, and eventually the United States were engaged in prolonged military standoffs with German forces. To take shelter from machine-gun fire and artillery, soldiers on each side dug long ditches at the front lines in which they lived for weeks at a time.</p> <p>Battles and raids required going over the top of the trench and crossing the area of land between enemy trenches known as no man's land, where soldiers might run into mines, barbed wire, or the decomposing bodies of their fellow troops. Due to the likelihood of being targeted by enemy machine guns, rifles, and grenades, both sides suffered an immense number of casualties. In the particularly gruesome Battle of Somme, British forces suffered 60,000 deaths on the first day of fighting.</p> <p>Compounding the brutality of combat missions, life in the trenches was famously hellish. Disease spread easily due to the unsanitary conditions of the dugouts, and many soldiers experienced post-traumatic stress disorder (known at the time as shell shock) from living under constant bombardment.</p>				<p>Stanhope- is the protagonist of the play. After joining the war straight out of school at eighteen, he has served three years by the time the play begins, having risen to the position of Commanding Officer of C Company. Stanhope drinks heavily to deaden his nerves in order to cope with the brutal reality of war. Though his temper fluctuates wildly, he is liked and respected by his men.</p>			
<p>R.C. Sheriff (1896-1975) English playwright and screenwriter, remembered for his <i>Journey's End</i> (1928), a WW1 play that won wide critical acclaim. After attending grammar school at Kingston on Thames, Sheriff worked in his father's insurance business until he entered the army in World War I, serving as a captain in the East Surrey Regiment. After the war he worked for several years as a claims adjuster and began to write. He drew on his war experiences in the writing of <i>Journey's End</i>.</p> <p>Sheriff also wrote a number of successful film scripts, including <i>The Invisible Man</i> (1933), <i>Goodbye, Mr Chips</i> (1939), <i>Odd Man Out</i> (1947), and <i>The Dam Busters</i> (1955). His autobiography <i>No Leading Lady</i>, was published in 1968.</p>				<p>Trotter- is a second lieutenant and third in line of command of C Company. He is middle-aged, short and fat. He enjoys his food and bulges out of his uniform. He tries to make the most of life in the trenches.</p>			
<p>Raleigh- is a fresh-faced eighteen-year-old second lieutenant straight out of school. Raleigh shares a past with Captain Stanhope; they went to school together, and their fathers were friends. Raleigh looks up to Stanhope.</p>				<p>Mason- is an enlisted soldier taken from one of the platoons among C Company. He is currently assigned as the cook and servant aide to the officers. He often apologizes for the compromised quality of the food rations he has to work with.</p>			
Plot- The entire timeframe of the play is over four days leading up to the battle of St Quentin in March 1918							
<p>Act 1: The play begins in media res in a dugout in the British trenches at St Quentin on Monday 18 March 1918. Osborne is taking over from Hardy and in this exchange the audience learn about characters, mood, relationships and the 'big German attack' that is coming. We learn that Stanhope is a heavy drinker, but well respected amongst the other officers. Young Raleigh arrives in the dugout and the audience learns of his connections with Stanhope and that he had asked to be placed in Stanhope's regiment. While Raleigh is excited to see his hero, Stanhope is shocked and is very suspicious of how and why Raleigh has turned up in his trenches. The audience is also introduced to the character of Hibbert and learn of his 'neuralgia' and how unsympathetic Stanhope is of his medical conditions. At the end of Act 1, Stanhope is drinking whisky and confides in Osborne about is feelings concerning Raleigh's arrival.</p> <p>Act 2: This Tuesday morning scene begins with another dreadful meal being served by Mason and Trotter attacking the quality of the bacon. The audience learn a lot about the pre-war lives of the characters. Stanhope demands that Raleigh give him a letter that he has written to his sister(whom Stanhope has been in a relationship with). Raleigh is taken aback by Stanhope's anger, but gives the letter to him. Osborne reads the letter aloud as Stanhope cannot bring himself to do it and they discover that Raleigh has written a glowing report of Stanhope. The Colonel arrives with orders for a dangerous raid and Osborne and Raleigh are the chosen officers. Stanhope's next challenge is to deal with Hibbert, who he believes is malingering. In a surprise twist Stanhope confides to Hibbert that he is fearful too. In the end Stanhope seems to succeed with bring Hibbert back on-side. The scene ends with Osborne, Trotter and Raleigh finding out about the forthcoming raid.</p>				<p>Act 3 The raid takes place off stage, but the audience learn that while the raid was 'successful' we see the shock in Raleigh and learn of Osborne's death. Stanhope is overcome with grief and rage at the loss of Osborne and this culminates in an argument with Raleigh. The Act ends on Thursday at dawn and is the day of the big German attack. All of the men are following their usual routines and head out into the trenches. Raleigh is carried down to the dugout and Stanhope is their to comfort him. Stanhope must leave the dugout and resume his duties as captain and leader. The play ends with the stage going dark and sounds of explosions which cause the dugout to cave in.</p>			
Themes							
Heroism, Futility of War, Duty, Masculinity, Hysteria and Repression, Friendship, Reality of War							
Key vocabulary							
Freytag's Pyramid	Realism	PTSD- shell shock	Futility	Heroism	Motif	Symbolism	Situational Irony
							Trench warfare
							Hierarchy
							ominous

Homework:

The tasks below represent only part of what you can do to enhance and develop your understanding of the text. You are preparing for an exam on a challenging text.

Knowledge is power, so the more you know, the more secure you will be in your learning.

Homework Number	Task
1	Learn and revise the meaning and spellings of the key vocabulary for 'Journey's End' in preparation for a quiz.
2	Revise key contextual factors from 'Journey's End' and WW1 and be ready for a test in that subject area. Use articles in this knowledge organiser. Recall what you have learnt in class. Revise online using the following website http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/0/ww1/
3	Learn and revise key characters, plot and themes in preparation of a quiz on the play. Use the summary of the play on page 4 in your KO Recall what you have learnt in class

If you have “no homework” (a likely story!) or you have finished the above, try these tasks on a weekly basis to ensure your understanding of the stories is secure.

- 1) Complete further research on WW1 and the effects of the war on soldiers.
- 2) Complete a timeline of the main events in the play, with the correct days included and a key quote to signify each event .
- 3) Complete further research on some of the propaganda posters used by the British government during WW1. What messages do the posters send out?
- 4) Complete a search of images from the Western Front. Choose an image that you think matches a verbal description offered by one of the characters in the play.

Example Essay

How does Sherriff explore the theme of heroism in 'Journey's End'?

In R.C Sherriff's *Journey's End*, the theme of heroism is mainly presented through the characters of Raleigh and Stanhope in addition to their relationship with one another. Despite the fact that Stanhope is much a changed man now he has been exposed to over three years on the frontline, Raleigh still maintains his strong sense of worship towards him and admires Stanhope regardless of his signs of possible weakness and mental deterioration. Stanhope's heroism is still presented as fake to a certain extent, as his real cowardice lies beneath his honourable disguise. It may be argued that the dominant theme of hero-worship is due to the fact that Sherriff wanted to stress the importance of hierarchy in the war, as this appears central to the theme of heroism in the play (especially as it's evident that all those lower than Stanhope in the hierarchical system continue to view him as a great hero).

The presentation of hero-worship between Raleigh and Stanhope in the play suggests that it is permanent and limitless – therefore creating a rather magical, boundless view of heroism from when viewing Raleigh's attitude towards Stanhope. Even before Raleigh meets him after years of separation, Osborne warns him that he shouldn't 'expect to find him – quite the same'. When Raleigh is finally reunited with Stanhope he still overlooks the rather apparent flaws in his nature which have been triggered by the constant strain of war. Stanhope's aggression towards Raleigh is not enough to reduce his admiration for the man, as the audience learns that Raleigh still truly values Stanhope as a great man when Osborne reads out his letter home. Unlike Stanhope's own pathetic perception of himself, Raleigh truly understands the hardship he has undergone and realises that he simply 'works so frightfully hard'. Raleigh goes on to describe Stanhope as the 'finest officer in the battalion' which reinforces the idea of his admiration being infinite, as the superlative 'finest' stresses the superiority of Stanhope and emphasises his high view of the commander. The presentation of Stanhope being a hero figure is further demonstrated as Raleigh states that he is 'awfully proud' to think that Stanhope is his friend. The numerous compliments throughout Raleigh's letter epitomise his sheer idolisation for Stanhope; to the point of which he cannot even mention a single negative aspect of his character. It's could be viewed that this presentation of Raleigh as nothing more than a 'boy' is a representation of how naïve young soldiers were upon entering the war – hence his blind fixation on Stanhope. The romanticised view that Raleigh carries is soon to be destroyed by the events of the German Raid, meaning his faith in this ideal of heroism is reduced, nevertheless, this doesn't mean that his hero-worshipping of Stanhope diminishes.

Nevertheless, this theory could be challenged when considering the opinions of Osborne, of whom maintains faith in heroism – perhaps not in the same sense as young Raleigh, but he still believes that ‘it goes on all through life’. This idea of hero-worship being present throughout life is a more romanticised view of matters, but similarly, R.C. Sherriff may have adopted this tone for Osborne in order to highlight his more hopeful attitude in comparison to Stanhope’s generally pessimistic view of life. This idea is supported by Osborne’s conversation with Raleigh, as he reveals that one ‘must always think’ of war ‘as romantic’ because ‘it helps’. It could be interpreted that Sherriff wanted to emphasise the similarity in characters of Raleigh and Osborne – despite the fact that they are furthest apart in terms of age. This reinstates the contrast in ideologies between that of Raleigh and Osborne, who maintain this idealized view of the war and carry the belief of heroism, and Stanhope who has lost all faith in justice and physically cannot allow himself to think romantically.

Stanhope’s own view of heroism is that it’s pointless and unrealistic as he says that it’s simply a concept of which ‘small boys at school’ dream about. This highlights the contrasting ideologies of Stanhope and Raleigh, and their overall differences in character. It could be that Sherriff incorporates this idea of heroism in order to stress the impacts that war has on young men – as initially, Stanhope entered the war as a young, hopeful boy having ‘just come out of school’ and, like Raleigh he wanted to be a hero. It’s possible that Sherriff himself was a disbeliever of heroism, hence the bitterness reflected in Stanhope’s character – as the war forces him to realise that there are no heroes, only survivors. The gradual deterioration of Raleigh’s faith in heroism is symbolic of the belief that there are no heroes in war, and this ties into Stanhope’s own perception of hero-worship being childish. It may be interpreted that Stanhope and Raleigh both entered the war as young hopeful men – practically boys (as did 250,000 under 18 year olds by 1918) , carrying this romanticised belief that fighting in the war will make them heroes. However, throughout the play the audience learns that this idea of heroism is insignificant – as does Raleigh, as he appears to lose faith in the promises of valour and honour. This potentially marks the transition of childhood into adulthood – as Raleigh’s youthful dreams of gallantry are crushed by the harsh reality of war, meaning he no longer carries his childish ideals of heroism, and becomes more like Stanhope in the sense that he no longer fantasises over a perfect, noble future following the war.

Nevertheless, despite Stanhope’s lack of belief in heroism, he is desperate to maintain his pristine, courageous image for the sake of Raleigh’s sister who is ‘waiting’ for him back at home. It could be viewed that Stanhope’s insistence on appearing heroic is a defence mechanism to the true horrors of war, which at least allows his dream of heroism to live on as the other officers still look up to him as a brave leader. His dependence on whisky is a way to mask his cowardice, as he is unable to face battle on the front line without numbing himself with alcohol. He himself admits that he can’t bear being ‘fully conscious all the time’. Stanhope’s inner conflict between his desire to present himself as a hero, and his overwhelming fear of the frontline highlights the mental strain that is produced as a result of the romanticised ideals of heroism. Consequently, R.C Sherriff hints that in reality these dreams cannot be fulfilled. This obsession with appearing heroic ties into the fact that before WW1, Ireland was denied the right to fight in the war therefore meaning the soldiers were unable to follow their ideals of honour by fighting for their country.

The Daily Life of Soldiers

With focus on the routines of work, rest and recreation, Senior Curator Paul

Cornish describes the typical daily life experienced by soldiers in World War

For the soldiers of the First World War fighting was an exceptional circumstance, rather than the norm. For many, life consisted of toiling to keep those at the front supplied. But the frontline troops themselves were rotated to ensure that time spent facing the enemy was balanced by periods of rest and, occasionally, home-leave. The determination of soldiers to keep fighting could be strongly influenced by the regularity of this rotation. Some armies were more efficient than others in this respect. Russian and Turkish soldiers, often fighting at huge distances from home, in regions poorly served by railways, were less able than others to find respite from the hardships of the front. This encouraged war-weariness and desertion. Poor leave arrangements also featured among the grievances of mutinying French soldiers in 1917. When armies were hard-pressed by their enemy – as was the case in the German army in the autumn of 1918 – repeated exposure to the stress of combat could lead to a collapse of morale.

Work while ‘at rest’

Even when supposedly at ‘rest’ soldiers could find themselves engaged in exhausting work. There was always a shortage of labour at the front, with fighting men having to provide working parties to make good the lack. Officers were exempt from tiring manual labour, but faced different claims upon their time out of the line – chiefly never-ending paperwork. In addition to dealing with general military bureaucracy, they were expected to master an ever-growing body of tactical and technical instruc-

Keeping clean, eating and smoking

However, time spent out of the line at least offered the opportunity for the frontline soldier to get clean. Communal baths would be set up and lice-infested clothing steam-cleaned. The chance to be clean was another essential prop to morale. Even more important to soldiers was the food that they ate. If supplies failed, or the quality was poor, the effects could be serious. Germany and Austria-Hungary – with food supplies hit by the Allied naval blockade – made immense efforts to keep their soldiers fed; even if this increased the hunger being felt by their citizens at home. But starvation eventually played a key role in the collapse of the latter's army in 1918. French soldiers disdainfully referred to the meat provided for them as ‘monkey’. In attempting to restore their morale after the mutinies of 1917, their commander, Pétain, ensured that their food was improved. British soldiers had plenty of grumbles about the monotony (if not the quantity) of their food but, like other men fighting on the Western Front, they were able to supplement their rations with food sent from home, or bought locally. They could also visit canteens run by organisations such as the YMCA, or the local Estaminets. At the latter they could spend their wages on another essential ‘comfort’: wine and beer. Tobacco was also central to the lives of most European soldiers. Pipes or cigarettes offered a pleasure that could be enjoyed in almost any circumstance.

Letters to and from home

In the Western and Central European armies, where a high proportion of soldiers were literate, communication with home made a vital contribution to the maintenance of morale. Letters from friends and family kept soldiers in touch with the life that they had left behind. Writing home could also be therapeutic. The scale of this correspondence is shown by the fact that the British Army Postal Service alone despatched two billion letters and 114 million parcels over four years.

The Daily Life of Soldiers

Games and sports

Soldiers of all armies grasped any opportunity for recreation when out of the line. The most universal activity came in the form of card games, such as the German soldier's favourite *Skat*, or gambling games like 'Crown and Anchor'; officially forbidden, but widely played by British Tommies. British soldiers had an additional passion – football. Even dog-tired men would start kicking a ball about given the opportunity. Football and other sports could also be played on a more organised level, with units and formations holding their own competitions featuring team sports, boxing or tests of horsemanship. Some of these competitions aimed to improve a unit's *esprit de corps*, others to sharpen military skills. The British Tank Corps even held tank races.

Souvenirs and trench art

Souvenir hunting became a mania for many soldiers. This was especially true in the British Army, whose citizen-soldiers were eager to acquire mementos of what was, for most, a once in a lifetime adventure. Trophies captured directly from the enemy were the most sought-after. Until its issue ceased in mid-1916, the German spiked helmet, the *Pickelhaube*, was the most prized among Allied soldiers. But humble battlefield debris like shell fragments and nose-caps were also collected.

Some soldiers even found an opportunity for creativity – re-working battlefield debris into what we now know as 'trench art'. They turned shell cases into flower vases or tobacco jars. Copper driving-bands – which ensured that a shell fitted tightly into a gun's barrel – became paper knives. Some musically inclined French soldiers even formed 'trench orchestras'; making instruments from battlefield debris. The natural environment also provided inspiration. Leaves could be cut and embroidered into souvenirs. Soldiers on the Eastern Front sent home postcards made from the bark and wood of the abundant local trees. For those unable to make their own, similar types of handicraft could also be purchased from local people, who adapted traditional skills in metal-working or lace making to meet this new market for souvenirs.

Sex

When soldiers were at 'rest', the question of sex came to the fore. Some commanders sought to impose strict controls – the Italian commander-in-chief Luigi Cadorna asserted that the only women who could legitimately be seen with a uniformed soldier were the man's mother or his wife! In reality, the presence of vast numbers of men behind the lines supported a flourishing sex industry on most fronts. Armies could ill-afford to ignore this aspect of soldiers' lives; venereal diseases had the potential to add hugely to the numbers of men going sick. Most armies therefore became involved in the running or supervision of brothels.

Written by Paul Cornish

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How did soldiers cope with war?

Curator Dr Matthew Shaw, explores notions of patriotism, social cohesion, routine and propaganda, to ask how soldiers of World War One were able to psychologically cope with the realities of combat.

Given our understanding of the horrors of war, it is often difficult to understand how men coped with life at the Front during the First World War. Many, of course, did not: it is during this period that shell shock and what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder were first described and diagnosed. Hundreds, across all the armies involved in the war, deserted, and both sides faced large mutinies – among the French in 1917 and by the German navy in 1918, as well the Russian Revolution in 1917. But these aside, the majority of those serving followed orders and often acted with enormous courage and bravery, as well as killing their fellow men. What allowed them to do this? Ideology

The ability for both sides to place so many men in the field for so long is testament not just to the power and control the military could exert but also to the strength of belief of those involved in the fighting. It is impossible to understand how men volunteered, accepted conscription and continued to fight without taking into account their beliefs about the war.

While individuals varied greatly, there are some common themes that run through soldiers' diaries and letters and point to how they saw the call to arms and the nature of battle. The military was also especially interested in morale, and took pains to measure what the troops were feeling and thinking.

Many British volunteers, and later conscripts, saw the German threat as very real. Belgian soldiers were fighting for their homeland (although linguistic allegiances complicated their sympathies) and France knew it faced a repeat of the German invasion of 1870. For Austro-Hungarians, the Archduke had been assassinated, and Germans could believe that they were fighting for an equal place with the other European empires and were resisting Russian aggression. For soldiers, these patriotic notions were also mixed with other emotions, as well as a good dose of realism. Few really thought that the war would be over quickly, at least after the first few months had passed. Many served out of thought for their families and friends as much as through loyalty to their country. For others, the promise of regular pay and help for their families might have influenced their decision and motivation to serve. Later in the war, rumours of peace or victory repeatedly spread along the Fronts, giving men an illusion that the end of the conflict was near (the hope of leave also served a similar purpose).

Given the size of the army and the presence of a large number of either recent volunteers or conscripts, something about the nature of the society from which the men were drawn no doubt influenced attitudes towards military service. Britain's high-levels of industrialisation, and workers' adaptation to the rigours and boredom of often-harsh factory life, may have prepared men for the Front, while the social cohesion (and acceptance of paternalism) evident in British society was reflected in good officer-ranks relations. In contrast, the hierarchy and militarism of the German army and the 'war-enthusiasm' of many volunteers led to disillusionment and eventually radicalisation of the ranks.

Rest and recreation played some part in the resilience of British troops, who were able to enjoy some of the leisure activities they enjoyed in civilian life during regular times away from the Front: music hall, cinema and organised sports offered some form of respite. Despite the famous (but by no means ubiquitous) truces of the first winter of the war, hatred of the enemy – and even the desire to kill – fuelled many soldiers' ability to keep fighting. Revenge for friends and companions killed, and the experience of being shot at or bombarded, combined with pervasive propaganda and helped to instil national hatred as the war continued.

In parallel to these feelings, the military unit could provide an alternative set of communal bonds. Soldiers often wrote about their sense of comradeship and friendship with their fellow men. Many fought for each other as much as for remoter loyalties such as to king and country.

Coping with war

Men responded differently under fire. For many, the helplessness of suffering artillery bombardment was the hardest thing to deal with. Many could not stay hunkered down but could only cope with the noise and danger of death by walking around, thereby increasing their risk of becoming a casualty. Group panic could break out during an attack, as could more serious breaches of discipline, particularly when troops were especially exhausted or bore grievances against the officers. Those immediately thrown into heavy action tended to cope less well than novices who were gradually exposed to conflict.

As soldiers spent more time under fire, they tended to develop what among German troops was termed 'Dickfelligkeit' ('thick-skinnedness') and became hardened to the rigours of the Front. Veteran soldiers learned to pay attention to their environment, taking advantage of cover and working better under fire. In general, older hands did better with managing the intense feeling of terror that inflicted itself on those under fire.

Soldiers also had to cope with long stretches of anxious waiting, or even boredom, as well as responding to or participating in attacks. To counteract this, busy routines were put in place, ensuring that trenches were repaired, men supplied, and all was ready for the long, wakeful nights (daytime was usually too dangerous for major activity). Soldiers could also comfort themselves with the knowledge of the inefficiency of most First World War [weaponry](#). Men often resorted to black or gallows humour, as well as a bitter fatalism and superstition, as a means of dealing with everyday reality; doses of rum may also have played their part in steadying nerves.

Mental breakdown

Many, of course, did not cope with the stresses of the war. This manifested itself in a number of ways, including the reporting of physical ailments, such as trench foot, which, in the British army, was tracked as a marker of morale. Recognising that a rise in certain diseases was linked to problems with morale, the British army recorded the incidence of trench foot and asked officers to produce a report if the number rose. Others responded to the strains with what was called 'shirking', a general lassitude and lack of aggression in combat.

Medical opinion, and the rates of psychological breakdown after returning to the field, suggested that those who temporarily left their post (that is, were convicted of the charge of 'Absence without Leave') were suffering from the mental effects of war.

Suicide offered another way out. It was much underreported, as at least 3,828 German soldiers killed themselves; a figure that does not reflect the numbers who simply walked into enemy fire or whose death was ambiguous.

Those that returned also had to readjust to civilian life, often during periods of great political and social upheaval. Millions also had to cope with physical trauma or the loss of family members and friends. Many men found it difficult to talk about their experiences, or found it hard to relate their sense of service with a society that increasingly came to lament the loss. The psychological consequences of the war continued to be felt for a generation or more

Written by [Matthew Shaw](#)

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<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/how-did-soldiers-cope-with-war>

Shell Shock

Recent estimates suggest that up to 325,000 British soldiers may have suffered from 'shell-shock' as a result of the First World War. Dr Tracey Loughran reflects on the encounters between Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen and W H R Rivers at Craiglockhart War Hospital, and how other doctors attempted to treat 'shell-shock'.

You're quiet and peaceful, summering safe at home;
You'd never think there was a bloody war on! ...
O yes, you would ... why, you can hear the guns.
Hark! Thud, thud, thud, – quite soft ... they never cease –
Those whispering guns – O Christ, I want to go out
And screech at them to stop – I'm going crazy;
I'm going stark, staring mad because of the guns.

– Siegfried Sassoon, 'Repression of War Experience' (1918)

In July 1917, Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) issued a statement of protest against the continuation of the war. He hoped that this act of 'wilful defiance of military authority' by a decorated soldier and well-known poet would spark a public debate about the legitimacy of the war and in this way hasten its end. His hopes were not to be realised. His friend, the officer and poet Robert Graves (1895–1985) intervened to convince the military authorities that Sassoon was suffering from 'shell-shock'. This explanation suited the military authorities: once he had been diagnosed with a mental illness, Sassoon's declaration could be dismissed as the ramblings of an unsound mind. Instead of facing court-martial, Sassoon was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh, a specialist institution for the treatment of officers. Sassoon's time at Craiglockhart proved a pivotal moment in his own life, and the lives of others. The editor of Craiglockhart's patient-produced magazine *The Hydra* quickly recruited Sassoon as a contributor. This editor, Wilfred Owen (1893–1918), was also an aspiring poet, and Sassoon helped him hone his poetical skills. The result was one of the most powerful poems of the First World War, Owen's 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.

How did doctors treat 'shell-shock' during the First World War?

Recent estimates suggest that up to 325,000 British soldiers may have suffered from 'shell-shock' as a result of the war. The term 'shell-shock', which is now often perceived as synonymous with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), incorporated diverse symptoms. These included headaches, nightmares, hallucinations, and distressing and intrusive memories – all symptoms we associate with war trauma today. But 'shell-shock' also included hysterical disorders, such as mutism and paralysis, amnesia, and even 'personality loss', as in the case of one man who seemed to develop an entirely new identity, including a different accent, after he had been hit by a shell. Victims of 'shell-shock' might have very little in common, except that they had been damaged in some way by the war.

Doctors struggled to understand what had caused 'shell-shock' and how best to treat it. They recognised very early on that the grief, fear and horror of war could cause men to break down. But they also wondered what effects high explosive artillery, never previously used in such quantities for prolonged periods, might have on the delicate human nervous system. Some medical men argued that the vibrations of shell explosions caused invisible, molecular damage to the brain. In more recent years, the memory loss, depression and anxiety of some troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan has been explained in a similar way, as a result of the mild traumatic brain injury (MTBI) caused by high velocity explosions. By the end of the First World War, many doctors believed that both psychological and physical injuries could be

Because doctors were not sure what caused 'shell-shock', it was difficult to find an appropriate cure. Sassoon was extremely lucky to be sent to a doctor like Rivers, who practised psychotherapy. Few institutions offered this form of treatment. In fact, the majority of men were treated by conservative methods such as rest, diet, massage and drugs. These treatments were unlikely to have effected permanent cures, but at least they did no active harm. The same cannot be said for the electrical 'treatment' offered by neurologist Lewis Yealland inflicted electric shocks on his patients at Queen Square, London. Yealland believed that hysterical patients had an unconscious resistance to treatment, and that the pain caused by electrical shocks could break down this resistance. The war also saw a vogue for dramatic 'cures' via hypnosis, as practised by Arthur Hurst at Seale Hayne in Devon. Yet while Hurst successfully removed visible hysterical symptoms, restoring movement to paralysed soldiers and speech to those who had been mute, such treatments did not tackle the root causes of these men's disorders. We have no way of knowing how many of these men subsequently broke down again.

Nowadays, 'shell-shock' is part of the story of the First World War that students learn about in school, and that Remembrance Day memorialises every November. We are aware of the psychological costs of war. Between 1914 and 1918, many men painfully learnt those costs at first hand. In the aftermath of the war, they and their families struggled to cope, often with little support from governments that were keen to avoid paying out pensions for psychological damage. Indeed, the government was so keen to save money by cutting the pensions bill that in some cases, it created a very hostile environment for traumatised men who were unable to find or hold down employment, and could not pick up the threads of their pre-war lives. Some men had to repeatedly prove the extent of their disabilities, and make the case again and again that these disabilities were the result of their wartime experiences, in order to retain their pensions. Many lost this battle, and struggled to scrape by. Perhaps the best tribute to men who suffered 'shell-shock' in the First World War is to realise that we still do not know exactly what causes similar disorders, or how to cure them. While the suffering of soldiers like Owen and Sassoon speak to us powerfully through their writings, their lesson is not to complacently assume that people today know better. Rather, it is to confront honestly the horror and suffering that war still causes.

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<https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/shell-shock>

Key Historical contexts within the play

'Journey's End' belongs to the genre of the 'history play'. It was written in 1928 but set in 1918, the fourth year of the First World War. As serving soldiers, the war affects the characters at every moment. It is, after all, why they are in the dugout in the first place.

Britain declared war on Germany on the evening of 4 August 1914—ostensibly because of her obligation to uphold Belgian neutrality. The principal fighting in Europe took place in northern and eastern France across muddy patches of ground (No Man's Land). The events depicted in Journey's End take place on the battlefield in France known to the British as 'the Western Front'.

The war bore little resemblance to earlier ideas of warfare. Combatants were faced with new modern weapons: exploding shells, machine guns, tanks, poison gas etc. The numbers of men dying from injuries was huge: 740,000 British. The Somme offensive launched by Britain and France in July 1916 resulted in the biggest casualty list in a single day's fighting in British history: the British Army suffered 420,000 casualties including nearly 60,000 on the first day alone. The characters in Journey's End all know this. They are acutely aware that they face the prospect of adding their names to the lists of those killed.

Joining the army: a sign of manhood

British recruitment campaigns often drew on the idea that smaller countries like Belgium needed defending from German bullies, as did women and children of Britain. One image which became familiar was the recruiting poster showing the face of Lord Kitchener 'Your King and Country Need You!' For men, responding to Kitchener's call was a test of their manhood.

One of the ways in Journey's End engages with war-time attitudes is by drawing attention to these notions of manhood and duty. In Act Two, Scene Two, when Hibbert is trying to get himself sent to hospital, Stanhope makes this point clearly:

'If you went—and left Osborne and Trotter and Raleigh and all those men up there to do your work—could you ever look a man straight in the face again—in all your life?'

In this speech Sherriff reproduces some of the arguments which had been heard in 1914 and after. In the war's first months many men found it difficult to resist this kind of appeal; the pressure on young men to join was often relentless. The use of propaganda posters, along with emotional patriotic songs and poems such as 'Your King and Country Want You' (1914 Paul Rubens) and Jessie Pope's 'Who's for the Game' (1916) appealed to idealistic young men like Stanhope and Raleigh. Young men believed it was their duty to serve their country and also that the fighting would be like a game of cricket or rugby. Reading this texts with the benefit of hindsight we know that the war was not the 'awful big adventure'. There was comradeship and chivalry but there was also the very real likelihood of being blown up by a shell or shot by a sniper or gassed, your body never found.

Maunder, Andrew. 'Journey's End': Essential Guides for Exam Study. (2016)



Wider Reading List

Other novels or plays about WW1

'Birdsong'- Sebastian Faulks

'A Farewell to Arms'-Ernest Hemmingway

'War Horse'- Michael Morpurgo

'Five Children on the Western Front'- Kate Saunders

War Poetry

Selected poems by Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Rupert Brooke and Robert Graves

Non-Fiction Articles and websites

BBC First World War site: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/0/ww1/>

Imperial War Museum: <http://www.iwm.org.uk/history/first-world-war>

British Library: <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one#>

Films and video links

The British Pathe News website: <http://www.britishpathe.com/workspaces/britishPathe/shell-shock>

Journey's End 2018 film adaptation– Dir Saul Dibb

1917 Film(2019)- Dir Sam Mendes

Oh What a Lovely War: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mufPyc1L3hc>