

# Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

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**KEY CONCEPT:** Patriotism, Pacifism



# Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?

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## 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:

Opinion	Conflicting opinion
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 <i>yourself</i> 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 county 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:

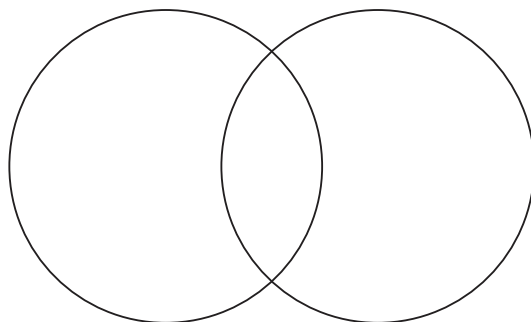
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#### Activity 1: Venn Diagram

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.

patriotism

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.

Evidence to show that Wilfred Owen was a patriot.	Evidence to show that Wilfred Owen was a pacifist.	Evidence that is not relevant.

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:

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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?

### **Ideas 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.



ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-1



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-4



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-7



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-2



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-5



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-8



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-3



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-6



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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-9



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'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

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'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

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'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

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Support for one's country.

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Loyalty to one's country.

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The belief that war and violence are unjustifiable.

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Love of peace.

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Religion

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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?  
1-22

‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-23

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

*Dulce Et Decorum Est*  
Wilfred Owen  
1917-1918

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-24

‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-25

‘The soldier chucked  
his rifle in the dust, And  
slipped his pack, and  
wiped his neck, and said --  
“O Christ Almighty, stop  
this bleeding fight!”’

*Christ and the Soldier*  
Siegfried Sassoon  
1916

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-26

‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-27

“‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-28

‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-29

‘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

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ACTIVITY:  
Was Wilfred Owen a patriot or a pacifist?  
1-30

‘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

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'What passing-bells for these who die as cattle? Only the monstrous anger of the guns.'

*Anthem for Doomed Youth*  
1917

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'I, too, saw God through mud—'

*Apologia Pro Poemate Meo*  
1917

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'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

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

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'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 mori.'

*Dulce et Decorum Est*  
1918

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'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

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

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'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

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Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born on 18 March 1893, in Oswestry, on the Welsh border of Shropshire.

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‘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

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‘War brought more  
glory to their eyes  
than blood...’

*Apologia Pro Poemate Meo*  
1917

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‘I know I shall be  
killed. But it’s the  
only place I can  
make my protest  
from.’

Letter to his brother.  
1918

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‘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

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

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‘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

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

*Exposure*  
1917

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‘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.’

*Strange Meeting*  
1918

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

*Dulce et Decorum Est*  
1918

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

*Exposure*  
1917

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'We dredged him  
up, for killed, until  
he whined "O sir,  
my eyes - I'm blind  
- I'm blind, I'm  
blind!"'

*The Sentry*  
1917-1918

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

Letter to his mother:  
1918

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

S.I.W. (self inflicted wound)  
1917

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

Letter to his mother:  
1917

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

Unfinished preface for  
his book of poetry.  
1918

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

S.I.W. (self inflicted wound)  
1917

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

Letter to his mother:  
1918

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'Through the dense  
din, I say, we heard  
him shout  
"I see your lights!"  
But ours had long  
died out.'

*The Sentry*  
1917-1918

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'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

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## patriotism

noun

The quality of being  
patriotic; vigorous support  
for one's country.  
"A highly decorated officer  
of unquestionable integrity  
and patriotism".

OED

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

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'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

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## pacifism

noun

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

OED

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'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)

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'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

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

Miners  
1918

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