

Weekly Read week 9A. This is part of a letter written in 1917 by the First World War poet, Wilfred Owen. He has arrived in Calais, France after sailing from Folkestone, England and is describing his feelings about the French Base where he is staying with his regiment. Wilfred Owen enlisted in 1915 as second lieutenant and platoon leader in the Manchester Regiment. On 4th November 1918 he was killed in action, just seven days before the end of the war. He was 25 years old.

4 January 1917

Address. 2nd Manchester Regt. B.E.F.

My own dear Mother,

I have joined the Regiment, who are just at the end of six weeks' rest.

I will not describe the awful vicissitudes¹ of the journey here. I arrived at Folkestone, and put up at the best hotel. It was a place of luxury — inconceivable now — carpets as deep as the mud here — golden flunkeys²; pages who must have been melted into their clothes, and expanded since; even the porters³ had clean hands. Even the dogs that licked up the crumbs had clean teeth.

Since I set foot on Calais quays I have not had dry feet.

No one knew anything about us on this side, and we might have taken weeks to get here, and *must* have, but for fighting our way here.

I spent something like a pound in getting my baggage carried from trains to trains.

At the Base, as I said, it was not so bad. We were in the camp of Sir Percy Cunynghame, who had bagged for his Mess⁴ the Luke of Connaught's chef.

After those two days, we were let down, gently, into the real thing, Mud.

It has penetrated now into that Sanctuary my sleeping bag, and that holy of holies my pyjamas. For I sleep on a stone floor and the servant squashed mud on all my belongings; I suppose by way of baptism. We are 3 officers in this 'Room', the rest of the house is occupied by servants and the band; the roughest set of knaves I have ever been herded with. Even now their vile language is shaking the flimsy door between the rooms.

I chose a servant for myself yesterday, not for his profile, nor yet his clean hands, but for his excellence in bayonet⁵ work. For the servant is always at the side of his officers in the charge and is therefore worth a dozen nurses. Alas, he of the Bayonet is in the Bombing Section and it is against Regulations to employ such as a servant. I makeshift with another.

Everything is makeshift. The English seem to have fallen into the French unhappy-go-lucky non-system. There are scarcely any houses here. The men lie in Barns.

Our Mess Room is also an Ante and Orderly Room. We eat & drink out of old tins, some of which show traces of ancient enamel. We are never dry, and never 'off duty'.

¹ vicissitudes: unpleasant changes

² flunkey: a footman/manservant

³ porter: someone employed to carry the bags of the hotel guests

⁴ Mess: a place in the army barracks where the officers would eat and relax

⁵ bayonet: a sword-like weapon that is attached to a gun

The badge of the Regt. is some red tabs on the shoulder thus . I scarcely know any of the officers. The senior are old regulars. The younger are, several, Artists! In my room is an Artist of the same school as I passed. He is also a fine water-colour sketcher. I may *have* time to write again tomorrow. I have not of course had anything from you.

I am perfectly well and strong, but unthinkably dirty and squalid.
I scarcely dare to wash.

Pass on as much of this happy news as may interest people.
The favourite song of the men is

**'The Roses round the door
Makes me love Mother more.'**

They sing this everlastingly.
I don't disagree.

Your very own W.E.O. x

- Shade **4** statements below which are **TRUE**.
 - In the hotel in Folkestone the carpets were muddy.
 - Wilfred Owen has wet feet.
 - The servants in the army base use bad language.
 - Wilfred Owen's servant is skilled at bayonet work.
 - Wilfred Owen is impressed by the organisation of the French.
 - Wilfred Owen shares a room with an artist.
- Read the paragraph beginning 'It has penetrated now...' How does Wilfred Owen use **language** to describe his feelings about his experience? Comment on the effects of **at least 3** specific examples. You might consider use of different **word classes** like verbs and adjectives, different **sentence forms**, the use of **figurative devices** like metaphors, or any other features of language you notice.
- Find **three examples**, from anywhere in the letter, where Owen uses **sentence structure** to show his feelings about how **unpleasant** his situation is, and explain why each one is effective.
- List **four things** you learn about the hotel in Folkestone.