



St Mary's School  
CAMBRIDGE

# **Entrance Assessment 2018**

**Lower Sixth English Literature**

**Time allowed: 1 hour**

*The poem below was written about the experiences of soldiers in the First World War. They are resting in a field before being ordered to charge towards enemy trenches.*

*Read the poem carefully and then answer the essay question that follows.*

### Spring Offensive

Halted against the shade of a last hill,  
They fed, and, lying easy, were at ease  
And, finding comfortable chests and knees  
Carelessly slept.

But many there stood still  
To face the stark, blank sky beyond the ridge,  
Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.  
Marvelling they stood, and watched the long grass swirled  
By the May breeze, murmurous with wasp and midge,  
For though the summer oozed into their veins  
Like the injected drug for their bones' pains,  
Sharp on their souls hung the imminent line of grass,  
Fearfully flashed the sky's mysterious glass.

Hour after hour they ponder the warm field—  
And the far valley behind, where the buttercups  
Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up,  
Where even the little brambles would not yield,  
But clutched and clung to them like sorrowing hands;  
They breathe like trees unstirred.  
Till like a cold gust thrilled the little word  
At which each body and its soul begird  
And tighten them for battle. No alarms  
Of bugles, no high flags, no clamorous haste—  
Only a lift and flare of eyes that faced  
The sun, like a friend with whom their love is done.  
O larger shone that smile against the sun,—  
Mightier than his whose bounty these have spurned.

So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together  
Over an open stretch of herb and heather

Exposed. And instantly the whole sky burned  
With fury against them; and soft sudden cups  
Opened in thousands for their blood; and the green slopes  
Chasmed and steepened sheer to infinite space.

Of them who running on that last high place  
Leapt to swift unseen bullets, or went up  
On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge,  
Or plunged and fell away past this world's verge,  
Some say God caught them even before they fell.  
But what say such as from existence' brink  
Ventured but drave too swift to sink.  
The few who rushed in the body to enter hell,  
And there out-fiending all its fiends and flames  
With superhuman inhumanities,  
Long-famous glories, immemorial shames—  
And crawling slowly back, have by degrees  
Regained cool peaceful air in wonder—  
Why speak they not of comrades that went under?

*Wilfred Owen*

**'How does Owen contrast the peaceful tranquillity of the soldiers' rest with the horror of the final charge?'**

In your response you could:

- consider the contrasts that exist within the poem and how Owen explores these
- evaluate how Owen uses language and structure to convey meaning
- support your ideas with close reference to the text