

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## Dreamers

By Siegfried Sassoon  
1918

*Siegfried Loraine Sassoon (1886-1967) was an English writer, poet, and soldier. "Dreamers" is inspired by Sassoon's own experiences in World War I, the conflict that launched the world into modern warfare and ended with a large amount casualties before unseen in European military history. As you read, take notes on the way Sassoon uses imagery and diction to describe the experience of being a soldier.*

- [1] Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land,  
Drawing no dividend<sup>1</sup> from time's to-morrows.  
In the great hour of destiny they stand,  
Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows.
- [5] Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win  
Some flaming, fatal climax<sup>2</sup> with their lives.  
Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin  
They think of firelit homes, clean beds and wives.



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- [10] I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats,  
And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain,  
Dreaming of things they did with balls and bats,  
And mocked by hopeless longing to regain  
Bank-holidays, and picture shows, and spats,<sup>3</sup>  
And going to the office in the train.

*Dreamers by Siegfried Sassoon is in the public domain.*

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1. **Dividend (noun):** regular payment or benefits
  2. **Climax (noun):** the most intense, exciting, or important point of something (typically a story, period, or event); a culmination
  3. The poet may be referring to a type of footwear that was popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They fell out of use in the 1920s, just after World War I. "Spats" may also be referring to small arguments or quarrels; in the heated conflict of WWI, the soldiers may have been longing for something so mundane as a disagreement.

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best describes a central theme of the text? [RL.2]
  - A. Peace requires a soldier's sacrifice.
  - B. Family is the only reason soldiers fight.
  - C. War is neither glorious nor pretty.
  - D. Death is not frightening but welcoming.
  
2. PART B: Which of the following quotes best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "Soldiers are citizens of death's grey land" (Line 1)
  - B. "In the great hour of destiny they stand, / Each with his feuds, and jealousies, and sorrows." (Lines 3-4)
  - C. "Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win / Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives." (Lines 5-6)
  - D. "I see them in foul dug-outs, gnawed by rats, / And in the ruined trenches, lashed with rain" (Lines 9-10)
  
3. PART A: What does the word "dividend" in line 2 most likely mean within the context of the poem? [RL.4]
  - A. It refers to the soldiers' payment from the military, which they are uncertain if they will receive because of their poor treatment.
  - B. It refers to the soldiers' anticipated military honors, which they are uncertain if they will receive because they may not earn any if they survive.
  - C. The poem uses "dividend" figuratively; the soldiers live under constant threat of death so they cannot necessarily expect to live out any tomorrows.
  - D. The use of "dividend" is used sarcastically to refer to the traumatic experiences of war.
  
4. PART B: Which of the following phrases best supports the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
  - A. "In the great hour of destiny they stand" (Line 3)
  - B. "Soldiers are sworn to action; they must win" (Line 5)
  - C. "Some flaming, fatal climax with their lives" (Line 6)
  - D. "And mocked by hopeless longing" (Line 12)

5. Sassoon chose to write his poem about soldiers rather than about himself, despite his personal experiences in WWI. What is the effect of that decision on the poem's point of view? [RL.6]

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## Discussion Questions

**Directions:** *Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.*

1. Based on the poem, what is Sassoon's likely perspective on war? Do you agree or disagree?

2. In the context of this poem, how are we changed by war? Cite evidence from this poem, other literature, and/or personal experience in your answer.