

COMMON CORE

RL 4 Analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone. **RI 2** Determine two or more central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of a text. **RI 4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text.

Why Soldiers Won't Talk

Essay by John Steinbeck

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner

Poem by Randall Jarrell

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML11-1170A

Meet the Authors

John Steinbeck

1902–1968



John Steinbeck created many memorable characters, from the downtrodden but dogged Joads in *The Grapes of Wrath* to George and Lennie in *Of Mice and Men*. Many of Steinbeck's characters convey his belief that people must fit into their surroundings—especially their natural surroundings—in order to find peace.

Childhood on the Land John Steinbeck grew up in the agricultural community of Salinas, California. The land profoundly influenced Steinbeck, who set many of his best works in these childhood scenes. He began to write early, encouraged by a high school teacher's praise.

Blending Life and Art While studying at Stanford University, Steinbeck worked in a factory and on road crews. Portraying people who lived by their hands became another key focus of Steinbeck's life and work. *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) received a Pulitzer Prize for portraying down-and-out Oklahoma farmers during the Great Depression. Exhausted from writing the novel, Steinbeck moved in new directions. In 1943 he spent six months as a World War II correspondent, producing such writings as the following essay about the response of soldiers to combat. In 1962, he received the Nobel Prize in Literature “for his realistic as well as his imaginative writings.”

Randall Jarrell

1914–1965



Respected as a literary critic, Randall Jarrell is nonetheless best known for his searing poetry about World War II, notably a “stark five-line lyric . . . the ultimate poem of war.” That poem is “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner.”

On the Road Again Born in Nashville, Tennessee, Jarrell moved often during his childhood. One important move took the family to a ranch in California. Later, Jarrell returned to California to live with his grandparents during his parents' divorce. Memories of this time filtered

into one of Jarrell's best poems, “The Lost World,” and childhood is a frequent, haunting topic throughout his work.

Making a Name With the help of a wealthy uncle, Jarrell went to college and began a lifelong career teaching literature in universities. At the same time, he worked at his own poetry. In 1942, he enlisted in the service, where he trained pilots and wrote poems capturing the horror and dreariness of military life.

Authors Online

Go to thinkcentral.com.

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● TEXT ANALYSIS: TONE AND IMAGERY

A writer sometimes conveys **tone**, his or her attitude toward a subject, through imagery. **Imagery** consists of the descriptive words and phrases used to re-create sensory experiences. One of the interesting aspects of John Steinbeck’s essay is the contrast between his clinical, detached, almost scientific tone and his use of sensory-rich imagery to support his conclusions on war. Jarrell’s poem also uses vivid imagery to convey an attitude about that same subject. As you read each text, think about the relationship between tone and imagery. Decide what each of these elements adds to the experience of reading.

● READING STRATEGY: ADJUST READING STRATEGIES

As you read “Why Soldiers Won’t Talk,” you need to apply reading strategies appropriate to an essay. First, identify the author’s **main ideas**. Then, examine the pattern of reasoning the author uses to express these ideas.

In this essay, look for **deductive reasoning**. Deductive reasoning is arriving at a conclusion by applying a general principle to a specific situation. An example of a general principle is that people want to help themselves. Given a specific situation in which individuals face a choice between working for an income and relying on someone else for support, deductive reasoning would lead you to conclude that these individuals would choose work.

A poem such as “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner” requires dramatically different reading strategies from those used when reading essays. The poem you will read is short and full of **images**; however, it does not explain itself. Use the illustration on page 1175 to help you picture the ball turret of a warplane. Then, read the poem several times—aloud, if possible. Picture the images and pay attention to language that expresses tone.

As you read these two texts, make use of these strategies and any others that work for you. Take notes about the essay’s main ideas and its pattern of reasoning. Then, note the poem’s imagery and tone.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

When is SILENCE louder than words?

People who have suffered greatly—fighting in a war, losing a loved one, witnessing tragedy—sometimes find it hard to communicate with others. Perhaps they cannot put their experiences and emotions into words. Perhaps they believe no one will understand. Others find silence and watchfulness more comfortable than talk and social engagement. Consider what silence can signify in a person’s behavior, especially a soldier’s in wartime.

QUICKWRITE Think of friends, family, peers, or even a character in a film or book. Identify someone you think of as more silent than talkative. Write a brief character description of this person. Read your description aloud, then share your ideas about why your subject is silent.



Why Soldiers Won't Talk

John Steinbeck

BACKGROUND Randall Jarrell's experience training pilots for the U.S. Army Air Force gained him firsthand knowledge of planes and gunners, including the view from the ball turret of a bomber. From this plexiglas bubble on the underside of the plane, gunners—totally exposed from below—fired at the enemy. During Steinbeck's time as a war correspondent, he too learned about bomber crews, as well as soldiers in the infantry.

During the years between the last war and this one, I was always puzzled by the reticence of ex-soldiers about their experiences in battle. If they had been reticent men it would have been different, but some of them were talkers and some were even boasters. They would discuss their experiences right up to the time of battle and then suddenly they wouldn't talk any more. This was considered heroic in them. It was thought that what they had seen or done was so horrible that they didn't want to bring it back to haunt them or their listeners. But many of these men had no such consideration in any other field.

Only recently have I found what seems to be a reasonable explanation, and the answer is simple. They did not and do not remember—and the worse the battle was, the less they remember. **A**

In all kinds of combat the whole body is battered by emotion. The ductless glands¹ pour their fluids into the system to make it able to stand up to the great demand on it. Fear and ferocity are products of the same fluid. Fatigue toxins² poison the system. Hunger followed by wolfed food distorts the metabolic pattern already distorted by the adrenaline³ and fatigue. The body and the mind so disturbed are really ill and fevered. But in addition to these ills, which come from the inside of a man and are given him so that he can temporarily withstand pressures beyond his ordinary ability, there is the further stress of explosion.

Under extended bombardment or bombing the nerve ends are literally beaten. The eardrums are tortured by blast and the eyes ache from the constant hammering.

This is how you feel after a few days of constant firing. Your skin feels thick and insensitive. There is a salty taste in your mouth. A hard, painful knot is in your stomach where the food is undigested. Your eyes do not pick up much detail and the sharp outlines of objects are slightly blurred. Everything looks a little unreal. When

A ADJUST READING STRATEGIES

Reread lines 1–11. What puzzles Steinbeck about soldiers, and what **main idea** provides the solution to his puzzlement? Write down the main idea and label it as the **conclusion** to a pattern of deductive reasoning you will examine on the essay's second page.

Analyze Visuals ►

How would you describe the look on this soldier's face? Explain what features convey this look.

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1. **ductless glands:** glands, such as the thyroid or the pituitary gland, that secrete directly into the bloodstream.
 2. **toxins:** poisons produced by the body that are capable of causing disease.
 3. **adrenaline** (ə-drĕn'ə-lĭn): a substance secreted by the adrenal gland in response to stress.



you walk, your feet hardly seem to touch the ground and there is a floaty feeling all over your body. Even the time sense seems to be changed. Men who are really moving at a normal pace seem to take forever to pass a given point. And when you move it seems to you that you are very much slowed down, although actually you
30 are probably moving more quickly than you normally do. **B**

Under the blast your eyeballs are so beaten that the earth and the air seem to shudder. At first your ears hurt, but then they become dull and all your other senses become dull, too. There are exceptions, of course. Some men cannot protect themselves this way and they break, and they are probably the ones we call shell-shock cases.⁴

In the dullness all kinds of emphases change. Even the instinct for self-preservation is dulled so that a man may do things which are called heroic when actually his whole fabric of reaction is changed. The whole world becomes unreal. You laugh at things which are not ordinarily funny and you become enraged at trifles. During this time
40 a kind man is capable of great cruelties and a timid man of great bravery, and nearly all men have resistance to stresses beyond their ordinary ability.

Then sleep can come without warning and like a drug. Gradually your whole body seems to be packed in cotton. All the main nerve trunks are deadened, and out of the battered cortex⁵ curious dreamlike thoughts emerge. It is at this time that many men see visions. The eyes fasten on a cloud and the tired brain makes a face of it, or an angel or a demon. And out of the hammered brain strange memories are jolted loose, scenes and words and people forgotten, but stored in the back of the brain. These may not be important things, but they come back with startling clarity into the awareness that is turning away from reality. And these memories are almost visions. **C**

And then it is over. You can't hear, but there is a rushing sound in your ears. And you want sleep more than anything, but when you do sleep you are dream-ridden, your mind is uneasy and crowded with figures. The anesthesia your body has given you to protect you is beginning to wear off, and, as with most anesthesia, it is a little painful.

And when you wake up and think back to the things that happened they are already becoming dreamlike. Then it is not unusual that you are frightened and ill. You try to remember what it was like, and you can't quite manage it. The outlines in your memory are vague. The next day the memory slips farther, until very little is left at all. A woman is said to feel the same way when she tries to remember what
60 childbirth was like. And fever leaves this same kind of vagueness on the mind.

Perhaps all experience which is beyond bearing is that way. The system provides the shield and then removes the memory, so that a woman can have another child and a man can go into combat again. **D**

It slips away so fast. Unless you made notes on the spot you could not remember how you felt or the way things looked. Men in prolonged battle are not normal men. And when afterward they seem to be reticent—perhaps they don't remember very well. 

B TONE AND IMAGERY

Reread lines 22–30, and note Steinbeck's use of **sensory detail**. What does this scene reveal about the soldier's mental state?

C GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 42–47. Notice how Steinbeck establishes his voice partly by using descriptions that contain realistic sensory **adjectives** and **verbs**, such as *battered*, *hammered*, and *jolted*.

D ADJUST READING STRATEGIES

Reread lines 55–63. This paragraph suggests the **premise** in a pattern of **deductive reasoning**. The premise is that acute stress induces a shock that causes the person under stress to forget the painful details of the experience. From this premise, Steinbeck uses an **analogy**, or a comparison, to suggest that both childbirth and combat are acutely stressful. In your own words, explain the **conclusion** to this line of reasoning for combat soldiers and women who have given birth.

4. **shell-shock cases**: soldiers with a psychological disturbance as a result of prolonged exposure to active warfare.

5. **cortex**: part of the brain that plays an active role in consciousness.

The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner

RANDALL JARRELL

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak¹ and the nightmare fighters.
5 When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose. **E**

E TONE AND IMAGERY
What does the imagery of the last line suggest about the speaker's attitude toward death?

1. **flak:** the fire of anti-aircraft guns.



Comprehension

- 1. Recall** According to Steinbeck, why don't soldiers talk about combat?
- 2. Summarize** What physical changes does Steinbeck say happen during combat?
- 3. Summarize** In Jarrell's poem, what happens to the speaker?

Text Analysis

- 4. Examine Author's Purpose** Steinbeck uses the second-person *you* in his recounting of the physical effects of combat. Why do you think he chose this **stylistic device**?
- 5. Interpret the Poem** In reference to his poem, Jarrell wrote that the gunner, who sat hunched up and revolved with the turret, looked like a fetus in the womb. Based on this information, how would you interpret the first four lines of the poem?
- 6. Analyze Tone and Imagery** Skim the two texts, and make a list of notable images found in each work. Based on these images, what would you say is Jarrell's attitude toward the ball turret gunner and his predicament? What is Steinbeck's attitude toward combat and its effect on soldiers? Describe the overall tone of each work.
- 7. Compare Texts** Jarrell and Steinbeck address the topic of war from different angles and through different genres. Do you think the two authors offer consistent or conflicting accounts of what combat feels like? Support your opinion with details from each text.
- 8. Evaluate Reading Strategies** Look back at the notes you took as you read the essay and poem. For each work, which strategy was most useful in helping you understand the ideas and images presented? What helped you understand how Steinbeck structured both his claims and his evidence? What strategy helped you make sense of Jarrell's use of imagery or his tone? How did these strategies differ? How were they similar?

Text Criticism

- 9. Critical Interpretations** In discussing "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," one critic stated, "In the combination of death and consciousness is the awakening and final recognition on the part of the gunner that he exists only to be a victim." Do you agree with this interpretation? Explain.

When is **SILENCE** louder than words?

Explain how this question applies to the silence of combat soldiers in "Why Soldiers Won't Talk." Cite evidence from the essay to support your answer.

COMMON CORE

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Language

◆ GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Establish Voice

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 1174. Voice is the unique way a writer uses **word choice**, **sentence structure**, and **tone** to express his or her personality or vision. Steinbeck's voice reflects his personal experience with war. It flows from his short sentences, straightforward tone, and sensory language.

The eardrums are tortured by blast and the eyes ache from the constant hammering. (line 21)

This is how you feel after a few days of constant firing. Your skin feels thick and insensitive. There is a salty taste in your mouth. A hard, painful knot is in your stomach where the food is undigested. (lines 22–24)

These examples include percussive-sounding words that reflect the pain of combat. The sentences imply that all information is essential and honest.

PRACTICE In the following sentences, revise the sentence structure and word choice to match Steinbeck's voice. Note how the revisions made to the example help to capture Steinbeck's voice.

EXAMPLE

Like a jackhammer pounding at solid concrete, the TV announcer gabs on and on, creating perpetual background noise that pollutes our homes.
The TV announcer talks on, creating a persistent, polluting noise.

1. The announcer chooses a topic, pushing it and pushing it as if it were bread dough, then kneading it into yet a new shape.
2. Must we sit there like zombies and put up with this endless chatter as though there were no alternative?

READING-WRITING CONNECTION



Expand your understanding of the effects of war by responding to this prompt. Then, use the **revising tips** to improve your essay.

WRITING PROMPT

PERSUASIVE ESSAY Think about the adjustments veterans must make when they return from combat. What does society do to help ease their transition back into civilian life? Write a **three- to five-paragraph essay** on the importance of supporting veterans during this time of transition. Include specific suggestions of ways this might be effectively achieved.

REVISING TIPS

- Contact a local veterans organization, and ask what can be done for veterans.
- Use the Internet to research for innovative treatment and support programs for veterans.
- Integrate information you find to help strengthen your essay.

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L 3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading. **W 1** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. **W 8** Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas.

Interactive
Revision

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