

The Drum

John Scott



Apple Inc.

1st Edition

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Pre-Reading Questions:

Watch this video featuring the Scots Guards. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cP0MvRbWrN4&feature=related>

Military bands like this have existed for hundreds of years, and still exist today.

What do you think is the role of military bands like this?

How did you feel listening to this band? What did it represent to you?

Note - please note that in this PDF contextual information and the poet's biography is **after** the poem. This is because I want to see what you are able to interpret from simply looking at the poem itself.

The Drum

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To thoughtless youth it pleasure yields,
And lures from cities and from fields,
To sell their liberty for charms
Of tawdry lace and glitt'ring arms;
And when Ambition's voice commands,
To march, and fight, and fall, in foreign lands.

Discordant - out of tune, jarring

Lures - entices, persuades

Tawdry - cheap, tacky.

I hate that drum's discordant sound,
Parading round, and round, and round:
To me it talks of ravaged plains,
And burning towns and ruined swains,
And mangled limbs, and dying groans,
And widows' tears, and orphans' moans,
And all that Misery's hand bestows,
To fill the catalogue of human woes.

Ravaged - damaged, destroyed

Swain - an old, poetic word for a young man,

Bestows - gives, brings

John Scott

Initial Activity

Read the poem out loud to yourself. Can you hear a rhythm? If so, what does this rhythm remind you of?

Count the syllables on each line. Can you hear a beat in the poem?

How does John Scott feel about the military drum? What does it represent to him?

Context

John Scott

John Scott (often also known as “Scott of Amwell” - use this if you look him up as there are many other “John Scotts” of note) was born in 1731 and died in 1783. He was a relatively wealthy English gentleman who lived in the village of Amwell, Hertfordshire. As well as poetry, he wrote about the problem of poverty in England. ‘The Drum,’ which was published after his death in 1791, was his most famous poem.

The key thing to know about him is that John Scott was a **Quaker**. The Quakers are a Christian group who first appeared in the 17th century, founded by a man named George Fox. The Quakers (also known as the Society of Friends) stress equality between believers, and are **pacifists who do not believe in war**. Although the Quakers were persecuted in the 17th century, by the time that John Scott was born they were accepted in England and allowed to worship freely. During the First World War many Quakers became **conscientious objectors** and refused to fight. Some were sent to prison if they refused to perform alternative service.

Want to know more?

Find out about the Quakers and their beliefs at http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/subdivisions/quakers_1.shtml

S.M.I.L.E. Analysis

Remember, to analyse a poem we need to look at:

- Structure
- Meaning
- Imagery (similes, metaphors, personification)
- Language
- Effect on the reader



Meaning

“Meaning” is a good place to start when thinking about a poem, as here you can discuss the principal theme(s) of the poem and why you think the poet has written it.

Meaning - Key points:

- In this poem, Scott conveys his hatred of the military bands that performed in the eighteenth century. To him, the supposedly celebratory and triumphant sound of the military drum represented all of the lives that were ended and ruined by war.
- He accuses the military drum of luring naive and ambitious young men to their deaths - they trade their freedom and their lives in hope of glory and decoration (the “tawdry lace and glitt’ring arms”).
- In the second stanza, he conveys his hatred of the wider physical and emotional damage that war causes to humanity - e.g. “mangled limbs,” “ravaged plains,” “widow’s tears.”

Exploration - Meaning

How does Scott feel about the young men who are convinced by the military drum to go to war?

Why do you think Scott chose to focus in this poem upon the military drum, rather than on war in general?

Structure

Structure refers to the way a poem is set out and organised. Here, you write about things like rhyme scheme, length, repetition and the flow of ideas throughout the poem.

Structure - Key Points

- The poem contains two stanzas of eight lines each.

- Scott uses **rhyming couplets** i.e. AA BB CC DD

- “I hate that drum’s discordant **sound**, **A**
Parading round, and round and **round**, **A**
To thoughtless youth it pleasure **yields**, **B**
And lures from cities and from **fields**, **B**
To sell their liberty for **charms**, **C**
Of tawdry lace, and glitt’ring **arms**; **C**
And when Ambition’s voice **commands**, **D**
To march, and fight, and fall in foreign **lands**. **D**

- If you read the poem out to yourself, you will see that there are **eight syllables** on each line, apart from in the last lines of each stanza, which each have **ten syllables**.

- This eight syllable line structure is called **iambic tetrameter** (don’t be scared, see below).

- An **iamb** is simply a pair of syllables in which the second syllable is always stressed (e.g. da - DUM). ‘**Iambic tetrameter**’ simply means that there are four of these two syllable pairs in each line (e.g. da-DUM da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM) e.g.

‘I **hate** that **drum’s** discordant **sound**.’

When you read the poem, you will find that the syllables in bold are the ones that you naturally stress.

- Scott uses repetition of key lines and ideas e.g. “I hate that drum’s discordant sound” is repeated. There is also repetition in “parading round, and round and round.”

Exploration - Structure

What does the **beat** of the poem (created by this use of iambic tetrameter) remind you of? (Hint - think about the subject of the poem!)
What mood does this beat create?

The use of iambic tetrameter and rhyming couplets create a regular rhythm that is reminiscent of a military drum.

What point might Scott have been trying to make by mixing such a dogmatic, drum-like rhythm with words such as “mangled limbs” and “ravaged plains?” (Hint - look back at the meaning of the poem).

Why do you think the last line of each stanza has a different number of syllables to the other lines (ten syllables rather than eight)? What is the effect of this choice? (Hint - could you relate it back to the ‘discordant’ nature of the drum and to Scott’s feelings about war?)

What is the effect of repetition in the poem?

Imagery

This is where you look at techniques such as similes, metaphors and personification. What pictures has the poet tried to create in your head?

Imagery - Key Points

- Personification is used twice to describe abstract emotions.
 - “And when **Ambition’s voice commands**”
 - “And all that **Misery’s hand bestows.**”

The use of capital letters for these abstract concepts heightens our sense that he is comparing them to people.

- He also uses personification to describe the drum, saying it “**talks** of ravaged plains.....”

Exploration - Imagery

What kind of person does Scott personify “Ambition” as? What kind of characteristics does he attach to “Ambition?”

What kind of person does Scott personify “Misery” as?

Language

This is where you comment on the language the poet uses. What choices has he/she made, and why?

Key Points - Language

- In the second stanza of the poem, Scott uses very emotive language to convey the damage that war causes:
 - “ravaged plains”
 - “burning towns”
 - “ruin’d swains”
 - “mangled limbs”
 - “dying groans”
 - “widows’ tears”
 - “orphans’ moans”

In the exam, you could take two or three of these quotes and analyse in detail the effect on the reader of words such as “mangled,” “ravaged” and “ruin’d.”

- Alliteration is used in the final line of the first stanza - “to march, and **f**ight and **f**all in **f**oreign lands.”
- An interesting word to focus in on in detail would be “discordant.” Why is the drum discordant? What could this represent?

Exploration - Language

What is the effect of the emotive language that Scott uses to describe the reality of war?

What is the effect of the alliteration in the final line of the first stanza? Is this effect heightened by the fact that this line has more syllables than the others?

What does the word “discordant” suggest about the drum (and by implication, about war in general?)

Effect on the reader

Did you think this poem was effective in conveying opposition to war?
Why / why not?

Which poem(s) in the anthology collection does this most remind you
of?

In this poem, Scott is talking about abstract concepts (e.g. “war,” “Misery,” “Ambition”). Did you feel that this made the poem different from one such as “Exposure” or “Invasion” where a poet is writing about their own personal experience of war? If so, how?

Sample Exam Question Part A

3. a) “Explore how the writer presents his ideas about the morality of war in “The Drum.”

Use examples of the language from the poem to support your answer. (15 marks).

NB - In the exam, you would have about 30 minutes to complete this question.

Write an answer to this question and email it to me.

Comparison

Possible poems you could compare this to include:

- O What is that Sound?
- Conscientious Objector

Look at the PDF guides that focus on these poems. When you have chosen one, fill in the table below looking at the meaning of each poem and the techniques that the writer has used.

	<i>John Scott - "The Drum"</i>	<i>Poem 2</i>
Meaning		
Structure		
Imagery		
Language		
Effect		

Sample Exam Question - Part B

Answer EITHER 3(b)i OR 3(b)ii

3 b) (i) Compare how the writers of “The Drum” and “Conscientious Objector” present their moral opposition to war.

3 b) (ii) Compare how the writers of “The Drum” and one other poem of your choice from the Clashes and Collisions collection present their views about conflict in any setting. (15 marks)

Use examples from the language of **both** poems to support your answer.

NB - In the exam, you would have about 30 minutes to complete this question.

Write an answer to this question and email it to me.

