Reflections of World War I

*Directions:*

1. First, ***skim all the selections*** from *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque.
2. **Choose three quotations** that you want to write about. The readings are divided into categories (easy, moderate, advanced). Use **at least one advanced reading**.
3. Under the quote, **analyze the language and the message**. How do these words reflect on the nature of war or, more broadly, on the nature of mankind? What emotions or reactions is the author trying to evoke? What do you think the purpose of this selection is?
4. Each of your three short paragraphs is worth 33 points, and this assignment is expected to take about 45-60 minutes. Be thorough. Write thoughtfully. I know it’s tempting to cheat. Don’t. Don’t go online and use eNotes or Schmoop. I’ve already read all of those anyway; and if you plagiarize, you’ll get a zero. *I’m much more interested in* *your own words, thoughts, and ideas.* *Your own work is always better*. Do your best work.
5. If you want to make it easy to grade, delete all the quotes that you’re **not** using. Save the document as YOUR NAME WW1 and put in the drop box or email to jparnell01@kibsd.org.

Easiest Readings

Selection 1

“No soldier outlives a thousand chances.” 

Selection 2

“A hospital alone shows what war is.” 

Selection 3

“I stand there and wonder whether, when I am twenty, I shall have experienced the bewildering emotions of love.”

Selection 4

“We were eighteen and had begun to love life and the world; and we had to shoot it to pieces.”

Selection 5

“What use is it to him now that he was such a good mathematician at school?” 

Moderate Level Readings

Selection 6

“Kat and Kropp get in an argument over the war as they rest from an hour’s worth of drill (occasioned by Tjaden’s not saluting a major properly). Kat believes the war would be over if leaders gave all the participants “the same grub and the same pay,” as he says in a rhyme. Kropp believes the leaders of each country should fight each other in an arena to settle the war; the “wrong” people currently do the fighting.” 

Selection 7

“The days, the weeks, the years out here shall come back again, and our dead comrades shall then stand up again and march with us, our heads shall be clear, we shall have a purpose, and so we shall march, our dead comrades beside us, the years at the Front behind us - against whom, against whom?” 

Selection 8

“And in the night you realize, when you wake out of a dream, overcome and captivated by the enchantment of visions that crowd in on each other, just how fragile a handhold, how tenuous a boundary separates us from darkness - we are little flames, inadequately sheltered by thin walls from the tempest of dissolution and insensibility in which we flicker and are often all but extinguished. Then the muted sounds of battle surround us, and we creep into ourselves and stare wide-eyed into the night.” 

Selection 9

“When I see them here, in their rooms, in their offices, about their occupations, I feel an irresistible attraction in it, I would like to be here too and forget the war; but it repels me, it is so narrow, how can that fill a man’s life, he ought to smash it to bits; how can they do it, while out at the front the splinters are whining over the shell-holes and the star-shells go up, the wounded are carried back on waterproof sheets and comrades crouch in the trenches. – They are different men here, men I cannot properly understand, whom I envy and despise.” 

Selection 10

From the earth, from the air, sustaining forces pour into us--mostly from the earth. To no man does the earth mean so much as to the soldier. When he presses himself down upon her long and powerfully, when he buries his face and his limbs deep in her from the fear of death by shell-fire, then she is his only friend, his brother, his mother; he stifles his terror and his cries in her silence and her security; she shelters him and releases him for ten seconds to live, to run, ten seconds of life; receives him again and often forever.” 

Selection 11

“This book is to be neither an accusation nor a confession, and least of all an adventure, for death is not an adventure to those who stand face to face with it. It will try simply to tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.” 

Advanced Level Readings

Selection 12

“It is too dangerous for me to put these things into words. I am afraid they might then become gigantic and I be no longer able to master them.” 

Selection 13

“The coffin, it shall protect me, though Death himself lies in it” 

Selection 14

“I tell you this: it is the most despicable thing of all to drag animals into a war.”

Selection 15

“To-day we would pass through the scenes of our youth like travellers. We are burnt up by hard facts; like tradesmen we understand distinctions, and like butchers, necessities. We are no longer untroubled—we are indifferent. We might exist there; but should we really live there? We are forlorn like children, and experienced like old men, we are crude and sorrowful and superficial—I believe we are lost.”

“And men will not understand us—for the generation that grew up before us, though it has passed these years with us already had a home and a calling; now it will return to its old occupations, and the war will be forgotten—and the generation that has grown up after us will be strange to us and push us aside. We will be superfluous even to ourselves, we will grow older, a few will adapt themselves, some others will merely submit, and most will be bewildered; —the years will pass by and in the end we shall fall into ruin.” 

Selection 16

“I am young, I am twenty years old; yet I know nothing of life but despair, death, fear, and fatuous superficiality cast over an abyss of sorrow. I see how peoples are set against one another, and in silence, unknowingly, foolishly, obediently, innocently slay one another. I see that the keenest brains of the world invent weapons and words to make it yet more refined and enduring. And all men of my age, here and over there, throughout the whole world see these things; all my generation is experiencing these things with me. What would our fathers do if we suddenly stood up and came before them and proffered our account? What do they expect of us if a time ever comes when the war is over? Through the years our business has been killing;—it was our first calling in life. Our knowledge of life is limited to death. What will happen afterwards? And what shall come out of us?” 

Selection 17

“And in the night you realize, when you wake out of a dream, overcome and captivated by the enchantment of visions that crowd in on each other, just how fragile a handhold, how tenuous a boundary separates us from darkness - we are little flames, inadequately sheltered by thin walls from the tempest of dissolution and insensibility in which we flicker and are often all but extinguished. Then the muted sounds of battle surround us, and we creep into ourselves and stare wide-eyed into the night.” 

Selection 18

“If you train a dog so that it only eats potatoes, and then after a while you offer it a chunk of meat, it’ll still grab it because it’s in its nature. And if you offer a man a bit of power, the same thing happens; he’ll grab it. It’s instinctive, because when it comes down to it, a man is basically a beast, and it’s only later that a bit of decency gets smeared on top, the way you can spread dripping on your bread.”

Selection 19

“Now we would wander around like strangers in those landscapes of our youth. We have been consumed in the fires of reality, we perceive differences only in the way tradesmen do, and we see necessities like butchers. We are free of care no longer – we are terrifying indifferent. We might be present in that world, but would we be alive in it? We are like children who have been abandoned and we are as experienced as old men, we are coarse, unhappy and superficial – I think that we are lost.”

Selection 20

“They were supposed to be the ones who would help us eighteen-year-olds to make the transition, who would guide us into adult life, into a world of work, of responsibilities, of civilized behaviour and progress – into the future. Quite often we ridiculed them and played tricks on them, but basically we believed in them. In our minds the idea of authority – which is what they represented – implied deeper insights and a more humane wisdom. But the first dead man that we saw shattered this conviction. We were forced to recognize that our generation was more honourable than theirs; they only had the advantage of us in phrase-making and in cleverness. Our first experience of heavy artillery fire showed us our mistake, and the view of life that their teaching had given us fell to pieces under that bombardment. While they went on writing and making speeches, we saw field hospitals and men dying: while they preached the service of the state as the greatest thing, we already knew that the fear of death is even greater. This didn’t make us into rebels or deserters, or turn us into cowards – and they were more than ready to use all of those words – because we loved our country just as much as they did, and so we went bravely into every attack. But now we were able to distinguish things clearly, all at once our eyes had been opened. And we saw that there was nothing left of their world. We were all at one terribly alone; and alone we must see it through.”

Selection 21

“…The silence spreads. I talk and must talk. So I speak to him and say to him: "Comrade, I did not want to kill you. If you jumped in here again, I would not do it, if you would be sensible too. But you are only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth an appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are just poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying, and the same agony — Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy? If we threw away these rifles and this uniform you could be my brother just like Kat and Albert. Take twenty years of my life, comrade, and stand up — take more, for I do not know what I can even attempt to do with it now.” 

Selection 22

“We have become wild beasts. We do not fight, we defend ourselves against annihilation. It is not against men that we fling our bombs, what do we know of men in this moment when Death is hunting us down—now, for the first time in three days we can see his face, now for the first time in three days we can oppose him; we feel a mad anger. No longer do we lie helpless, waiting on the scaffold, we can destroy and kill, to save ourselves, to save ourselves and to be revenged. We crouch behind every corner, behind every barrier of barbed wire, and hurl heaps of explosives at the feet of the advancing enemy before we run. The blast of the hand-grenades impinges powerfully on our arms and legs; crouching like cats we run on, overwhelmed by this wave that bears us along, that fills us with ferocity, turns us into thugs, into murderers, into God only knows what devils; this wave that multiplies our strength with fear and madness and greed of life, seeking and fighting for nothing but our deliverance.” 

Selection 23

“This habit of getting used to things is the reason that we seem to forget so quickly. The day before yesterday we were still under fire, today we are fooling about, seeing what we can scrounge around here, tomorrow we’ll be back in the trenches. In fact we don’t really forget anything. All the time we are out here the days at the front sink into us like stones the moment they are over, because they are too much for us to think about right away. If we even tried, they would kill us. Because one thing has become clear to me: you can cope with all the horror as long as you simply duck thinking about it – but it will kill you if you try to come to terms with it.” 

Selection 24

“These memories of former times do not awaken desire so much as sorrow-- a vast, inapprehensible melancholy. Once we had such desires-- but they return not. They are past, they belong to another world that is gone from us. They are completely lost to us. They arise no more; we are dead and they stand remote on the horizon, they are a mysterious reflection, an apparition that haunts us, that we fear and love without hope. They are unattainable and we know it. And even if these scenes of our youth were given back to us, we would hardly know what to do. The tender, secret influence that passed from them into us could not rise again. We might remember and love them and be stirred by the sight of them. But it would be like gazing at the photograph of a dead comrade; those are his features, it is his face, and the days we spent together take on a mournful life in memory; but the man himself it is not.” 

Selection 25 (this one is quite long)

“But what I would like to know," says Albert, "is whether there would not have been a war if the Kaiser had said No."  
  
"I'm sure there would," I interject, "he was against it from the ﬁrst."  
  
"Well, if not him alone, then perhaps if twenty or thirty people in the world had said No."  
  
"That's probable," I agree, "but they damned well said Yes."  
  
"It's odd, when one thinks about it," goes on Kropp, "we are here to protect our fatherland. And the French are over there to protect their fatherland. Now who's in the right?"  
  
"Perhaps both," say I without believing it.  
  
"Yes, well now," pursues Albert, and I see that he means to drive me into a corner, "but our professors and parsons and newspapers say that we are the only ones that are right, and let's hope so;--but the French professors and parsons and newspapers say that the right is on their side, now what about that?"  
  
"That I don't know," I say, "but whichever way it is there's war all the same and every month more countries coming in."

Tjaden reappears. He is still quite excited and again joins the conversation, wondering just how a war gets started.  
  
"Mostly by one country badly offending another," answers Albert with a slight air of superiority.  
  
Then Tjaden pretends to be obtuse. "A country? I don't follow. A mountain in Germany cannot offend a mountain in France. Or a river, or a wood, or a ﬁeld of wheat."  
  
"Are you really as stupid as that, or are you just pulling my leg?" growls Kropp, "I don't mean that at all. One people offends the other--"  
"Then I haven't any business here at all," replies Tjaden, "I don't feel myself offended."  
  
"Well, let me tell you," says Albert sourly, "it doesn't apply to tramps like you."  
  
"Then I can be going home right away," retorts Tjaden, and we all laugh, "Ach, man! he means the people as a whole, the State--" exclaims Miller.

"State, State"--Tjaden snaps his ﬁngers contemptuously, "Gendarmes, police, taxes, that's your State;--if that's what you are talking about, no, thank you."  
  
"That's right," says Kat, "you've said something for once, Tjaden. State and home-country, there's a big difference."

"But they go together," insists Kropp, "without the State there wouldn't be any home-country."  
  
"True, but just you consider, almost all of us are simple folk. And in France, too, the majority of men are labourers, workmen, or poor clerks. Now just why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us? No, it is merely the rulers. I had never seen a Frenchman before I came here, and it will be just the same with the majority of Frenchmen as regards us. They weren't asked about it any more than we were."  
  
"Then what exactly is the war for?" asks Tjaden.  
  
Kat shrugs his shoulders. "There must be some people to whom the war is useful."  
  
"Well, I'm not one of them," grins Tjaden.  
  
"Not you, nor anybody else here."  
  
"Who are they then?" persists Tjaden.   
  
"It isn't any use to the Kaiser either. He has everything he can want already."  
  
"I'm not so sure about that," contradicts Kat, "he has not had a war up till now. And every full-grown emperor requires at least one war, otherwise he would not become famous. You look in your school books."  
  
"And generals too," adds Detering, "they become famous through war."  
  
"Even more famous than emperors," adds Kat.  
  
"There are other people back behind there who proﬁt by the war, that's certain," growls Detering.  
  
"I think it is more of a kind of fever," says Albert. "No one in particular wants it, and then all at once there it is. We didn't want the war, the others say the same thing--and yet half the world is in it all the same.” 