

Excitement of War - Critical Reading

This text is from the autobiography of Stefan Zweig, an Austrian writer who captured the celebration of war in Vienna in 1914.



- Main Idea:** The next morning I was in Austria. In every station placards had been put up announcing general mobilization. The trains were filled with fresh recruits, banners were flying, music sounded, and in Vienna I found the entire city in a tumult... There were parades in the street, flags, ribbons, and music burst forth everywhere, young recruits were marching triumphantly, their faces lighting up at the cheering...
- Main Idea:** And to be truthful, I must acknowledge that there was a majestic, rapturous, and even seductive something in this first outbreak of the people from which one could escape only with difficulty. And in spite of all my hatred and aversion for war, I should not like to have missed the memory of those days. As never before, thousands and hundreds of thousands felt what they should have felt in peace time that they belonged together. A city of two million, a country of nearly 50 million, in that hour felt that they were participating in world history, in a moment which would never recur, and that each one was called upon to cast his infinitesimal self into the glowing mass, there to be purified of all selfishness. All differences of class, rank, and language were flooded over at that moment by the rushing feeling of fraternity. Strangers spoke to one another in the streets, people who had avoided each other for years shook hands, and everywhere one saw excited faces. Each individual experienced an exaltation of his ego, he was no longer the isolated person of former times, he had been incorporated into the mass, he was part of the people, and his person, his hitherto unnoticed person, had been given meaning...
- Main Idea:** What did the great mass know of war in 1914, after nearly half a century of peace? They didn't know war, they had hardly given it a thought. It had become legendary, and distance had made it seem romantic and heroic. They still saw it in the perspective of their school readers and of paintings in museums; brilliant cavalry attacks in glittering uniforms, the fatal shot always straight through the heart, the entire campaign a resounding march of victory—"We'll be home at Christmas," the recruits shouted laughingly to their mothers in August of 1914... A rapid excursion into the romantic, a wild, manly adventure—that is how the war of 1914 was painted in the imagination of the simple man, and the younger people were honestly afraid that they might miss this most wonderful and exciting experience of their lives; that is why they hurried and thronged to the colors, and that is why they shouted and sang in the trains that carried them to the slaughter; wildly and feverishly the red wave of blood coursed through the veins of the entire nation.

Reality of War - Critical Reading

This text is from the most famous novel of WWI, Erich Maria Remarque's 'All Quiet on the Western Front', written in 1929.



Sec. 1: The mood created in this section is...

We wake up in the middle of the night. The earth booms. Heavy fire is falling on us. We crouch into corners. Shells of every calibre fall.

Each man lays hold of his things and looks again every minute to reassure himself that they are still there. The dug-out heaves, the night roars and flashes. We look at each other in the momentary flashes of light, and with pale faces and pressed lips shake our heads.

Every man is aware of the heavy shells tearing down the parapet, rooting up the embankment and demolishing the upper layers of concrete... Already by morning a few of the recruits are green and vomiting. They are too inexperienced.

Sec. 2: The men probably can't speak because...

The bombardment does not diminish. It is falling in the rear too. As far as one can see spout fountains of mud and iron. A wide belt is being raked.

The attack does not come, but the bombardment continues. We are gradually benumbed. Hardly a man speaks. We cannot make ourselves understood.

Sec. 3: I imagine the thing that soldiers feared most was...

Our trench is almost gone. At many places it is only eighteen inches high, it is broken by holes, and craters, and mountains of earth. A shell lands square in front of our post. At once it is dark. We are buried and must dig ourselves out...

Towards morning, while it is still dark, there is some excitement. Through the entrance rushes in a swarm of fleeing rats that try to storm the walls. Torches light up the confusion. Everyone yells and curses and slaughters. The madness and despair of many hours unloads itself in this outburst... Faces are distorted, arms strike out, the beasts scream; we just stop in time to avoid attacking one another.

Suddenly it howls and flashes terrifically, the dug-out cracks in all its joints under a direct hit, fortunately only a light one that the concrete blocks are able to withstand. It rings metallically, the walls reel, rifles, helmets, earth, mud, and dust fly everywhere. Sulphur fumes pour in... The recruit starts to rave again and two others follow suit. One jumps up and rushes out, we have trouble with the other two. I start after the one who escapes and wonder whether to shoot him in the leg--then it shrieks again, I fling myself down and when I stand up the wall of the trench is plastered with smoking splinters, lumps of flesh, and bits of uniform. I scramble back.

Sec. 4: The best explanation for the young recruit going insane is...

The first recruit seems actually to have gone insane. He butts his head against the wall like a goat. We must try to-night to take him to the rear. Meanwhile we bind him, but in such a way that in case of attack he can be released at once.

Suddenly the nearer explosions cease. The shelling continues but it has lifted and falls behind us, our trench is free. We seize the hand-grenades, pitch them out in front of the dug-out and jump after them. The bombardment has stopped and a heavy barrage now falls behind us. The attack has come.

No one would believe that in this howling waste there could still be men; but steel helmets now appear on all sides out of the trench, and fifty yards from us a machine-gun is already in position and barking.

Reality of War - Questions

1. Carry out a critical reading of the previous passage by completing the following steps. Be prepared to discuss the following.
 - a. Highlight or underline words or phrases that create a sense of dread, fear or extreme discomfort.
 - b. Re-read the passage and in the left margin complete the sentences using the information from that given section.
 - c. Create one discussion question from the passage that you would like to ask to the rest of the class in order to begin a conversation about the text.
 - i. A powerful discussion question seeks to look deeper into the text. For example, you may ask what other students think about an idea or excerpt from the text.

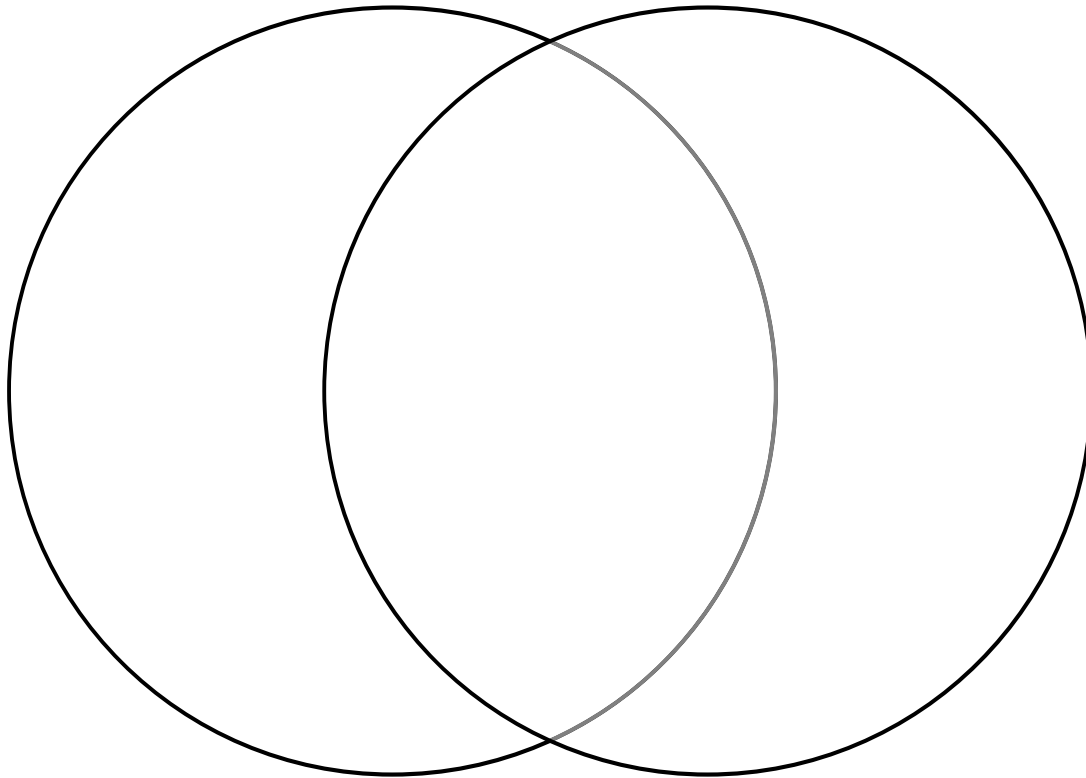
My Discussion Question:

Comparative - Critical Reading

1. The two critical readings (*The Excitement of War* and *The Reality of War*) provide us with insights into World War One and their overall experiences of the event.
 - a. Using the Venn Diagram below, compare and contrast the two readings. When completing the diagram, be sure to consider both the content **AND** the structure or nature of the documents. (What is the document saying? **AND** what type of document is it?)

Excitement of War

Reality of War



- b. Considering what you've learned about the changes in attitudes towards WWI, from the two documents, in what ways do you think the nature of the warfare during WWI affected attitudes in later years about war? Or even today?