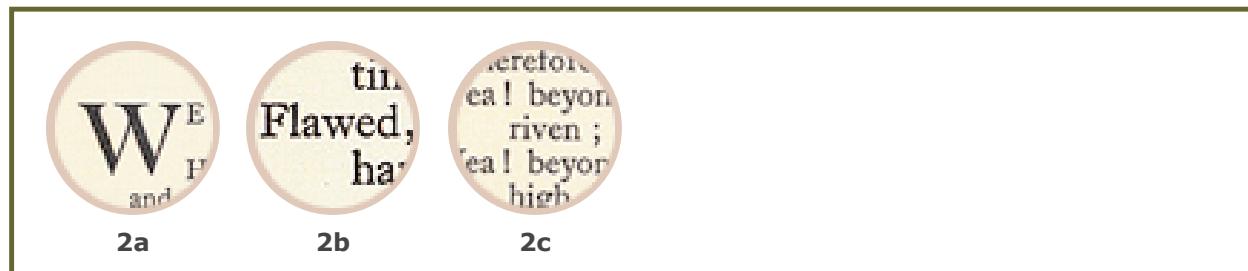




Source 2

Poem written by Gilbert Frankau called 'The Voice of the Guns', 1916

The Poetical Works of Gilbert Frankau Volume 1 (1901-1916), published by Chatto and Windus, 1923, by permission of A.P. Watt Ltd on behalf of Timothy D'Arch Smith)



How to use this source:

Study this source carefully. It contains information that could be useful in your presentation on life in the trenches. As you study the source, ask yourself:

- Do you think the author of this poem has direct experience of the guns?
- What five words could best be used to sum up this poem? Possible words might be: descriptive, frightening, bitter, accepting, proud, excited, loyal, committed.
- What does the poem tell you about the impact of the guns on soldiers?
- Is this impression backed up by sources 1a-c?
- Most historians believe that artillery was by far the most important weapon in the Great War. Does this poem support that view?
- Would you say the intention of this poem was to criticise the fact that Britain is at war or simply to describe what war is like?
- Which aspects of trench warfare does this source provide information on?
- How could this source be used in your final presentation?



Source 2a

THE VOICE OF THE GUNS

WE are the guns, and your masters ! Saw ye our
flashes ?
Heard ye the scream of our shells in the night,
and the shuddering crashes ?
Saw ye our work by the roadside, the shrouded things
lying,
Moaning to God that He made them—the maimed and
the dying ?

Husbands or sons,
Fathers or lovers, we break them. We are the guns !

We are the guns and ye serve us. Dare ye grow weary,
Steadfast at night-time, at noon-time ; or waking, when
dawn winds blow dreary
Over the fields and the flats and the reeds of the barrier-
water,
To wait on the hour of our choosing, the minute decided
for slaughter ?

Swift, the clock runs ;
Yea, to the ultimate second. *Stand to your guns !*

We are the guns, and we need you ; here, in the timbered
Pits that are screened by the crest, and the copse where
at dusk ye unlimbered ;
Pits that one found us—and, finding, gave life (Did he
flinch from the giving ?) ;
Labour'd by moonlight when wraith of the dead brooded
yet o'er the living ;

Ere, with the sun's
Rising, the sorrowful spirit abandoned its guns.



Source 2b

Who but the guns shall avenge him? *Battery—Action!*
Load us and lay to the centremost hair of the dial's
refraction;
Set your quick hands to our levers to compass the sped
soul's assoiling;
Brace your taut limbs to the shock when the thrust of the
barrel recoiling
Deafens and stuns!
Vengeance is ours for our servants: trust ye the guns!

Least of our bond-slaves or greatest, grudge ye the burden?
Hard, is this service of ours which has only our service
for guerdon:
Grow the limbs lax, and unsteady the hands, which afore-
time we trusted;
Flawed, the clear crystal of sight; and the clean steel of
hardihood rusted?
Dominant ones,
Are we not tried serfs and proven—true to our guns?

*Ye are the guns! Are we worthy? Shall not these speak
for us,
Out of the woods where the tree-trunks are slashed with the
vain bolts that seek for us,
Thunder of batteries firing in unison, swish of shell fighting,
Hissing that rushes to silence and breaks to the thud of alight-
ing;
Death that outruns
Horseman and foot? Are we justified? Answer, O guns!*



Source 2c

Yea ! by your works are ye justified—toil unrelievéd ;
Manifold labours, co-ordinate each to the sending
 achievéd ;
Discipline, not of the feet but the soul, unremitting,
 unfeignéd ;
Tortures unholy by flame and by maiming, known, faced,
 and disdainéd ;
 Courage that shuns
Only foolhardiness ; even by these, are ye worthy your
 guns.

Wherefore,—and unto ye only—power hath been given ;
Yea ! beyond man, over men, over desolate cities and
 riven ;
Yea ! beyond space, over earth and the seas and the sky's
 high dominions ;
Yea ! beyond time, over Hell and the fiends and the Death-
 angel's pinions.
 Vigilant ones,
Loose them, and shatter, and spare not. We are the guns !