

Trail Walkers

By Holly Dunlea

He walks in shadows through the night,
a ghost who wears his welcome thin,
a breeze caught in a storm of might
tamed by the mountain's discipline.
5 His foes stroll in and out to fight
as people dressed in pseudonyms.

He walks across the corpse-strewn hill;
his stride weighed down by red-lined loads.
With vigilance—he knows the drill—
10 he will maintain offensive mode;
his generals demand his skills,
from lessons learned upon this road.

He walks as steel in object d'art,
his bravery, an expose
15 for those who were our bête-noire,
from northern climes during the fray.
His smile remains within memoirs,
this field is for his protégées.

“Trail Walkers” and the Korean War: lessons

Literary Questions:

1. Find a picture of the Korean War Memorial on the Internet. Do you think the poem is about a soldier or the memorial?
2. What does “walking in shadows” in line one mean to you?
3. Read “The Far and the Near” by Thomas Wolfe. Discuss the consequence of judging something from a distance. What is a possible far and near in “Trail Walkers?”
4. What is the rhythm and meter for this poem? What is the rhyme scheme?
5. This poem mimics “She Walks in Beauty” by Lord Byron. Read “She Walks in Beauty” and discuss the use of Byron’s poem for “Trail Walkers.” Find a classic poem that you like and mimic the style but not the topic or words while writing your own poem.

Further Discussion and Activities:

1. Who were the commanding generals during the Korean Conflict?
2. In a group, map out a timeline of significant events during the Korean Conflict.
3. What did MacArthur mean by his statement: “Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.”
4. Explain the following terms used during the conflict: “the gauntlet,” “the big bug-out,” “Stand or Die,” “red-lined” and “police action.”
5. In an essay, compare and contrast General MacArthur and General Ridgeway.
6. Why do you think there are so many French terms in this poem?
7. Read the short story “Journey” by Joyce Carol Oates. What journey did the armed forces take during the Korean War? What was the highway, the country road, the dirt road, the foot path? When did night fall during the war? Discuss your thoughts.
8. Read and annotate the Truman Doctrine. Write a response to the following question: How does the Truman Doctrine preface U.S. military intervention in the world?

Vocabulary: foe, pseudonym, red-lined, vigilance, mode, object d’art, expose, bête-noire, fray, memoir, protégée

Literary Devices: foreshadowing, symbolism, rhythm, meter, enjambment

“Trail Walkers” and the Korean War: answers

Literary Questions:

1. The poem is about both. Stanza 1 refers to the memorial and the soldiers who fought in general. Stanza 2 refers to the foot soldier. Stanza 3 is about the memorial.
2. The shadows can be several things: the fame of General MacArthur, the success of some North Korean offensives, the Chinese government; plus, being under cover, being behind those he follows, walking with stealth.
4. The poem is iambic tetrameter in ababab, cdcdcd, efefef rhyme scheme.
5. It is ironic to use Byron’s poem to depict soldiers during the Korean War. The characters both walk, one with elegance and the other with stealth. Perhaps elegance and stealth may have been repeated if Byron had not admired his subject so much.

Further Discussion and Activities:

1. The commanding generals during the Korean Conflict were: Douglas MacArthur, Matthew Ridgeway, O.P. Smith, John Church, William Dean, Walton Walker, Ned Almond.
2. Material can be found in school books or on the Internet.
3. “Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.” The soldier is praised during the war and honored after the war, but he is forgotten once the ceremonies are over. People won’t think about the individual soldiers but will remember the conflict.
4. “The gauntlet”- The Gauntlet is when you walk between rows of hostile enemies who beat you as you pass through. The Chinese took advantage of a road-clogged retreat and used hand-to-hand combat.
“the big bug-out”- name given to the US forces by North Korean soldiers as the US soldiers rapidly retreated toward the coast.
“Stand or Die”- General Walker’s refusal to retreat after others had done so. This action changed the course of the war in favor of the US for a period of time.
“Red-lined”- weapons that were supposed to be repaired before going to the front, but were sent to the soldiers without being fixed.
“Police action”- war was not declared when MacArthur started bringing troops to Korea. The U.S. never declared war against North Korea.
6. French forces were attached to the 23rd Infantry during the Korean War.
7. Answers will vary.
8. Answers will vary.