



Wilfred Owen in 1916

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## 'DISABLED' WILFRED OWEN

### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Wilfred Owen is the best known of the English poets who wrote about their experiences of the First World War (1914–1918). These experiences had deep effects on the writers, and cost many of them their lives. Owen was strongly influenced by another officer and poet called Siegfried Sassoon. They met at Craiglockhart Hospital where they had both been sent to recover from shell-shock. Owen twice said that his theme was 'war and the pity of war'. Having returned to his regiment after his time in hospital, he died in battle in November 1918, just seven days before the armistice brought the war to an end on 11th November 1918.

### BEFORE YOU START READING

- 1 You can find out more about Wilfred Owen and his poetry from reference books or on the internet. You could read some more of his poems, which will help you to understand his attitudes to war and how he wrote about it.
- 2 How would you feel about living with a physical disability such as the loss of a limb? What attitudes to people with disabilities do you find in your society?
- 3 What can you find out about the kinds of injuries that soldiers suffered in the First World War and the way in which they were treated when they returned from the front?

### ▼ 'DISABLED' BY WILFRED OWEN

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,  
And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,  
Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park  
Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,  
Voices of play and pleasure after day,  
Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay  
When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,  
And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim –  
In the old times, before he threw away his knees.  
Now he will never feel again how slim