***All Quite on the Western Front* Reading Activity**

**Part 1: Fear and Anticipation**

“A shell crashes. Almost immediately two others. And then it begins in earnest. A bombardment. Machine-guns rattle. Now there is nothing for it but to stay lying low. Apparently an attack is coming. Everywhere the rockets shoot up. Unceasing…. I lie motionless;- somewhere something clanks, it stamps and stumbles nearer- all my nerves become taut and icy. It clatters over me and away, the first wave has passed. I have but this one shattering thought: What will you do if someone jumps into your shell-hole? Swiftly I pull out my little dagger, grasp it fast, and bury it in hand once again under the mud. If anyone jumps in here I will go for him. It hammers in my forehead; at once, stab him clean through the throat, so that he cannot call out; that’s the only way; he will be just as frightened as I am; when in terror we fall upon one another, then I must be first.”

Question 1: As you sit in the trench, what do you fear?

Question2: How are you preparing yourself – both physically and mentally – to face these fears?

**Part 2: First Bombardment**

“One lands behind us. Some recruits jump up terrified. A couple of minutes later another comes over, nearer this time… Then it begins in earnest. We crawl away as well as we can in our haste. The next lands fair amongst us. Two fellows cry out. Green rockets shoot up on the skyline. Barrage. The mud flies high, fragments whiz past. The crack of the guns I hear long after the roar of the explosion… It’s got someone pretty badly. Cries are heard between the explosions. At last it grows quiet. The fire has lifted over us and is now dropping on the reserves. We risk a look. Red rockets shoot up to the sky. Apparently there is an attack coming. Where we are is still quiet. I sit up and shake the recruit by the shoulder. “All over, kid! It’s all right this time.” He looks around him dazedly. ‘You’ll get used to it soon,’ I tell him.”

Question 3: What destruction do you expect to see around you the next morning? Describe it?

Question 4: What do you think the enemy hopes to gain from this constant shelling?

**Part 3: Surviving a Gas Attack**

“The dull thud of the gas-shells mingles with the crashes of the light explosives. A bell sounds between the explosions, gongs, and metal clappers warning everyone-Gas-Gas-Gas. These first minutes with the mask decide between life and death: is it airtight? I remember the awful sights in the hospital: the gas patients who lay in daylong suffocation cough up their burnt lungs in clots. Cautiously, the mouth applied to the valve, I breathe. The gas still creeps over the ground… like a big, soft jellyfish… inside the gas mask my head booms and roars-it is nigh bursting. My lungs are tight, they breathe always the same hot, used up air, and the veins on my temple are swollen. I feel I am suffocating.”

Question 5: Your gas mask irritates the skin on your face. What can you do to comfort yourself without exposing yourself to the poisonous gas?

Question 6: A soldier next to you can’t find his mask and dies. What thoughts go through your mind?

**Part 4: Daily Life**

“We must look out for our bread. The rats have been much more numerous lately because the trenches are no longer in good condition… the rats here are particularly repulsive, they are so fat… with long, nude tails. They seem mighty hungry. Almost every man has had his bread gnawed. Kropp wrapped his in his waterproof sheet and put it under his head, but he cannot sleep because they run over his face to get at it. Deterring meant to outwit them: he fastened a thin wire to the roof and suspended his bread from it. During the night when he switched on his pocket-torch he saw the wire swinging to and fro. On the bread was riding a fat rat. At last we put a stop to it. We cannot afford to throw the bread away, because then we should have nothing left to eat in the morning, so we carefully cut of f the bits of bread that the animals have gnawed. The slices we cut off are heaped together in the middle of the floor. Each man takes out his spade and lies down prepared to strike. Deterring Kropp and Kat hold their pocket-torches ready. After a few minutes we hear the first shuffling and tugging. It grows, now it is the sound of many little feet. Then the torches switch on, and every man strikes at the heap, which scatters with a rush. The result is good. We toss the bits of rats over the parapet and again lie in wait. Several times we repeat the process. At last the beasts get wise to it, or perhaps they have scented the blood. They return no more. Nevertheless, before morning the remainder of the bread on the floor has been carried off.”

Question 7: Your ration for the day is a tin of ham and a piece of bread. How will you make this last the entire day?

Question 8: Your meat is spoiled and after eating it you feel very sick. You develop diarrhea; what problems will this cause in the trenches?

**Part 5: Morale**

“A bomb or something lands close besides me. I have not heard it coming and am terrified. At the same moment a senseless fear takes hold of me. Here I am alone and almost helpless in the dark-perhaps two other eyes have been watching me for a long while from another shell-hole in front of me, and a bomb lies ready to blow me to pieces. I try to pull myself together. It is not my first patrol and not a particularly risky one. But it is the first since my leave and besides, the tie of the land is still rather strange to me. I tell myself that my alarm is absurd, that there is probably nothing at all there in the darkness watching me, otherwise they would not be firing so low. It is in vain. In whirling confusion my thoughts hum in my brain- I hear the warning voice of my mother… I still continue to lie in the shallow bowl. I look at the time; only a few minutes have passed. My forehead is wet, the sockets of my eyes are damp, my hands tremble, and I am panting softly. It is nothing but an awful spasm of fear, a simple animal fear of poking out my head and crawling on farther.”

Question 9: How does the constant fear you feel affect your morale?

Question 10: As the captain, it is your job to reassure your men. How will you inspire confidence in your troops so that they keep fighting?