

**UIL Literary Criticism
Tie-Breaking Essay
Invitational B 2009**

Read Walt Whitman's "Reconciliation" and Thomas Hardy's "The Man He Killed" (both found below) and offer an analytical discussion of the shared theme.

Reconciliation

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be utterly lost;
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again,
 and ever again, this soiled world;
For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I draw near,
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

**Walt Whitman
1865-66**

The Man He Killed

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have set us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin! a small cup of beer

But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him as he at me,
And killed him in his place.

I shot him dead because—
Because he was my foe,
Just so: my foe of course he was;
That's clear enough; although

He thought he'd 'list, perhaps, enlist in the military
Off-hand like—just as I—
Was out of work—had sold his traps—
No other reason why.

Yes; quaint and curious war is!
You shoot a fellow down
You'd treat, if met where any bar is,
Or help to half a crown.

**Thomas Hardy
1902**

Critical Notes on Whitman's "Reconciliation" and Hardy's "The Man He Killed"

Literary concepts that **MIGHT** be used by the contestant in a discussion of these poems include

alliteration,
diction (word choice),
imagery,
irony,
personification,
simile, and
tone (word choice).

The prompt asks the contestant to address the poems' common theme, which involves a recognition that the person who has been declared "enemy" in the circumstances ascribed to wartime might be someone with whom the personae (the speakers in the poems) might have otherwise viewed quite differently were the declared "enemy" or the hapchance "foe" to have been met in other circumstances.

The contestant's approach might be a simplistic comparison of the poems as vehicles to carry the theme, or the approach might recognize the emotive power of each persona's personal involvement in the moment of counterfactual recognition: it could be, perhaps, should have been otherwise.

Additionally, a more sophisticated contrast might be drawn between the very personal closeness that characterizes Whitman's poem (his persona's moment of reconciliation with someone as "divine" as himself) and the philosophical distance that characterizes Hardy's poem (his persona's shift from "I shot him" to anyone's shooting of any other "fellow" in wartime).