

A critical reading of a landmark modernist poem

The Waste Land, first published in 1922, is the most important poem of the twentieth century. Written by T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land has given rise to such critical analysis and scholarly interpretation that critics and readers are still arguing over what it means.

The Waste Land will be introduced and analysed in terms of its key themes and features. The individual five sections of the poem will be more closely analysed in separate parts.

To begin to understand the cultural impact of Eliot's poem, we need to analyse The Waste Land in its literary context. The most popular poetry in England in the second decade of the twentieth century was 'Georgian' poetry (a group of poets who named themselves after King George V, who came to the throne in 1910). In terms of subject matter as well as poetic form, Georgian poets were working largely in a tradition inherited from the Victorians. Georgian poetry was mostly focused on nature imagery and rural settings and largely concerned with birdsong, fields and village life. (for example: Rupert Brooke's 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester'.)

The problem people like Eliot had with such poetry was that it wasn't saying anything particularly new. Once something has been said in poetry, why say it again? Images and metaphors, when overused, lose their force and vividness. So how could Eliot find out how to move poetry forward? He would soon find his answer, when he encountered the work of a number of nineteenth-century French poets, chiefly Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue. Baudelaire's influence in particular can be seen in The Waste Land: rather than writing about the rural world of villages, Baudelaire (1821-1867) had often written about the modern city, the urban world of the metropolis. In the city a poet could find a whole host of new images, a completely new language for poetry. Somebody like Baudelaire found poetry in the everyday world of the city-dweller. (Baudelaire is quoted by Eliot in the closing line of 'The Burial of the Dead', the first part of The Waste Land.) The other thing that French poetry showed Eliot was that it didn't have to conform to a strict rhyme scheme or metre: poetry could be 'free verse' or, as the French had it, vers libre. Eliot uses free verse in the fifth and final section of The Waste Land, in particular.

<https://interestingliterature.com/2016/10/06/a-very-short-analysis-of-t-s-eliot-the-waste-land/>

**Difficult words with definitions:**

	<b>Difficult word/ phrase</b>	<b>Easier replacement</b>
1	landmark	(easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
2	scholarly	intelligent
3	interpretation	(understanding/ explanation)
4	critics	people (who say bad things or give opinions)
5	impact	hit/effect
6	literary	book-related/writing-related
7	context	big picture
8	decade	ten years
9	throne	(seat of power of a king or queen)
10	largely	mostly
11	inherited from	received from
12	imagery	(putting pictures into your mind)
13	rural	(away from cities)
14	particularly	especially
15	metaphors	(physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
16	vivid	colorful
17	he encountered	he met
18	a number of	some
19	chiefly	mostly
20	urban	city-based
21	metropolis	big city
22	dweller	resident
23	to conform	to obey (social) rules
24	scheme	big plan/layout/dishonest plan

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25	free verse	(poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
26	in particular	especially

**Name:**

**Matching: For each difficult word or phrase, write the number of the matching definition.**

Difficult word or phrase	Definition
_____urban	<b>1:</b> (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
_____to conform	<b>2:</b> intelligent
_____a number of	<b>3:</b> (understanding/ explanation)
_____he encountered	<b>4:</b> people (who say bad things or give opinions)
_____context	<b>5:</b> hit/effect
_____largely	<b>6:</b> book-related/writing-related
_____literary	<b>7:</b> big picture
_____critics	<b>8:</b> ten years
_____landmark	<b>9:</b> (seat of power of a king or queen)
_____throne	<b>10:</b> mostly
_____inherited from	<b>11:</b> received from
_____metaphors	<b>12:</b> (putting pictures into your mind)
_____scholarly	<b>13:</b> (away from cities)
_____imagery	<b>14:</b> especially
_____rural	<b>15:</b> (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
_____interpretation	<b>16:</b> colorful
_____free verse	<b>17:</b> he met
_____vivid	<b>18:</b> some
_____scheme	<b>19:</b> mostly
_____in particular	<b>20:</b> city-based

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_____ impact	<b>21:</b> big city
_____ particularly	<b>22:</b> resident
_____ dweller	<b>23:</b> to obey (social) rules
_____ metropolis	<b>24:</b> big plan/layout/dishonest plan
_____ chiefly	<b>25:</b> (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
_____ decade	<b>26:</b> especially

# KEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Matching:** For each difficult word or phrase, write the number of the matching definition.

Difficult word or phrase	Definition
12_____ imagery	<b>1:</b> (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
6_____ literary	<b>2:</b> intelligent
14_____ particularly	<b>3:</b> (understanding/ explanation)
18_____ a number of	<b>4:</b> people (who say bad things or give opinions)
20_____ urban	<b>5:</b> hit/effect
11_____ inherited from	<b>6:</b> book-related/writing-related
17_____ he encountered	<b>7:</b> big picture
3_____ interpretation	<b>8:</b> ten years
19_____ chiefly	<b>9:</b> (seat of power of a king or queen)
1_____ landmark	<b>10:</b> mostly
13_____ rural	<b>11:</b> received from

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4_____critics	12: (putting pictures into your mind)
22_____dweller	13: (away from cities)
24_____scheme	14: especially
16_____vivid	15: (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
8_____decade	16: colorful
23_____to conform	17: he met
10_____largely	18: some
25_____free verse	19: mostly
9_____throne	20: city-based
2_____scholarly	21: big city
7_____context	22: resident
5_____impact	23: to obey (social) rules
15_____metaphors	24: big plan/layout/dishonest plan
26_____in particular	25: (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
21_____metropolis	26: especially

**Quiz: For each difficult word or phrase, circle the correct definition.**

1. **landmark:**

- A) (away from cities)
- B) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
- C) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- D) received from

2. **scholarly:**

- A) he met
- B) especially
- C) intelligent
- D) (seat of power of a king or queen)

3. **interpretation:**

- A) (understanding/ explanation)
- B) mostly
- C) colorful

D) big picture

4. **critics:**

- A) (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
- B) especially
- C) colorful
- D) people (who say bad things or give opinions)

5. **impact:**

- A) hit/effect
- B) book-related/writing-related
- C) to obey (social) rules
- D) colorful

6. **literary:**

- A) book-related/writing-related
- B) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- C) (understanding/ explanation)
- D) (away from cities)

7. **context:**

- A) big picture
- B) (putting pictures into your mind)
- C) big city
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

8. **decade:**

- A) big picture
- B) book-related/writing-related
- C) (away from cities)
- D) ten years

9. **throne:**

- A) city-based
- B) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- C) received from
- D) (seat of power of a king or queen)

10. **largely:**

- A) (putting pictures into your mind)
- B) mostly
- C) city-based

D) especially

**11. inherited from:**

- A) city-based
- B) big city
- C) mostly
- D) received from

**12. imagery:**

- A) received from
- B) (putting pictures into your mind)
- C) (away from cities)
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

**13. rural:**

- A) people (who say bad things or give opinions)
- B) (away from cities)
- C) some
- D) (seat of power of a king or queen)

**14. particularly:**

- A) especially
- B) hit/effect
- C) mostly
- D) some

**15. metaphors:**

- A) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- B) especially
- C) big picture
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

**16. vivid:**

- A) colorful
- B) intelligent
- C) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- D) (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)

**17. he encountered:**

- A) (seat of power of a king or queen)
- B) he met
- C) (putting pictures into your mind)

D) big picture

18. **a number of:**

- A) ten years
- B) he met
- C) (understanding/ explanation)
- D) some

19. **chiefly:**

- A) mostly
- B) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- C) especially
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

20. **urban:**

- A) resident
- B) some
- C) city-based
- D) big picture

21. **metropolis:**

- A) big city
- B) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- C) received from
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

22. **dweller:**

- A) received from
- B) especially
- C) resident
- D) hit/effect

23. **to conform:**

- A) he met
- B) book-related/writing-related
- C) to obey (social) rules
- D) city-based

24. **scheme:**

- A) book-related/writing-related
- B) big picture
- C) big plan/layout/dishonest plan



D) some

25. **free verse:**

- A) big city
- B) hit/effect
- C) (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
- D) (away from cities)

26. **in particular:**

- A) especially
- B) big picture
- C) (away from cities)
- D) colorful

# KEY

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Quiz: For each difficult word or phrase, circle the correct definition.**

1. **landmark:**

- A) ten years
- B) ==> (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- C) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
- D) resident

2. **scholarly:**

- A) ==> intelligent
- B) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- C) big picture
- D) resident

3. **interpretation:**

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- A) mostly
- B) some
- C) ==> (understanding/ explanation)
- D) big picture

4. **critics:**

- A) ==> people (who say bad things or give opinions)
- B) city-based
- C) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- D) big city

5. **impact:**

- A) city-based
- B) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- C) some
- D) ==> hit/effect

6. **literary:**

- A) ==> book-related/writing-related
- B) ten years
- C) people (who say bad things or give opinions)
- D) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)

7. **context:**

- A) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- B) ==> big picture
- C) he met
- D) intelligent

8. **decade:**

- A) ==> ten years
- B) especially
- C) mostly
- D) (understanding/ explanation)

9. **throne:**

- A) ==> (seat of power of a king or queen)
- B) (putting pictures into your mind)
- C) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- D) (away from cities)

10. **largely:**

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- A) he met
- B) ==> mostly
- C) big picture
- D) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)

11. **inherited from:**

- A) mostly
- B) big city
- C) to obey (social) rules
- D) ==> received from

12. **imagery:**

- A) ==> (putting pictures into your mind)
- B) colorful
- C) he met
- D) book-related/writing-related

13. **rural:**

- A) resident
- B) ==> (away from cities)
- C) especially
- D) (putting pictures into your mind)

14. **particularly:**

- A) ==> especially
- B) big city
- C) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- D) hit/effect

15. **metaphors:**

- A) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- B) mostly
- C) big picture
- D) ==> (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

16. **vivid:**

- A) resident
- B) ==> colorful
- C) (away from cities)
- D) city-based

17. **he encountered:**

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- A) (easily-seen, famous object/very important event)
- B) (understanding/ explanation)
- C) especially
- D) ==> he met

18. **a number of:**

- A) people (who say bad things or give opinions)
- B) ==> some
- C) (putting pictures into your mind)
- D) colorful

19. **chiefly:**

- A) (seat of power of a king or queen)
- B) big city
- C) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)
- D) ==> mostly

20. **urban:**

- A) ==> city-based
- B) intelligent
- C) to obey (social) rules
- D) (physical things that refer to ideas or emotions)

21. **metropolis:**

- A) to obey (social) rules
- B) ==> big city
- C) (understanding/ explanation)
- D) hit/effect

22. **dweller:**

- A) ten years
- B) intelligent
- C) big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- D) ==> resident

23. **to conform:**

- A) ==> to obey (social) rules
- B) ten years
- C) big picture
- D) city-based

24. **scheme:**

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- A) ==> big plan/layout/dishonest plan
- B) city-based
- C) hit/effect
- D) (seat of power of a king or queen)

25. **free verse:**

- A) ==> (poetry that doesn't rhyme or have a pattern)
- B) ten years
- C) city-based
- D) he met

26. **in particular:**

- A) people (who say bad things or give opinions)
- B) ==> especially
- C) (away from cities)
- D) big city