NAMING OF PARTS

By Henry Reed

To-day we have naming of parts. Yesterday, We had daily cleaning. And to-morrow morning, We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day, To-day we have naming of parts. Japonica
Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens, And to-day we have naming of parts.

This is the lower sling swivel. And this 
Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see, When you are given your slings. And this is the piling swivel, Which in your case you have not got. The branches
Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures, Which in our case we have not got.

This is the safety-catch, which is always released
With an easy flick of the thumb. And please do not let me
See anyone using his finger. You can do it quite easy
If you have any strength in your thumb. The blossoms
Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see
Any of them using their finger.

And this you can see is the bolt. The purpose of this
Is to open the breech, as you see. We can slide it
Rapidly backwards and forwards: we call this
Easing the spring. And rapidly backwards and forwards
The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:
They call it easing the Spring.

They call it easing the Spring: it is perfectly easy
If you have any strength in your thumb: like the bolt,
And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance,
Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom
Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards,
For to-day we have naming of parts.

Henry Reed, "Naming of Parts"

1. Who is the speaker (or who are the speakers) in the poem, and what is the situation?
2. What basic contrasts are represented by the trainees and by the gardens?
3. What is it that the trainees "have not got" (28)?
   How many meanings have the phrases "easing the Spring" (22) and "point of balance" (27)?
4. What differences in language and rhythm do you find between the lines that involve the "naming of parts" and those that describe the gardens?
5. Does the repetition of certain phrases throughout the poem have any special function or does it merely create a kind of refrain?

What statement does the poem make about war as it affects men and their lives?
The Man He Killed

By Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Had he and I but met
By some old ancient inn,
We should have sat us down to wet
Right many a nipperkin!
But ranged as infantry,
And staring face to face,
I shot at him and 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,
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.
QUESTIONS – “The Man He Killed”

1. In informational prose the repetition of a word like “because” (9-10) would be an error. What purpose does the repetition serve here? Why does the speaker repeat to himself his “clear” reason for killing a man (10-11)? The word “although” (12) gets more emphasis than it ordinarily would because it comes not only at the end of a line but at the end of a stanza. What purpose does this emphasis serve? Can the redundancy of “old ancient” (2) be poetically justified?

2. Someone has defined poetry as “the expression of elevated thought in elevated language.” Comment on the adequacy of this definition in the light of Hardy’s poem.
Excerpt from On The Way to Khe Sanh

Viet Nam, Quang Tri Province, 1968

Our strung-out column hacks the jungle for days.
Us little guys walk point, at the front of the line.
Maybe your gut steers a route past harm’s way.
I move like a teenager seeking his first dance.
My squad leader is anxious to score before dark.
He brushes me aside,
barrels into a burst from an AK.
He goes home early.
I walk point for the duration.
Slip dense tangles, smooth and quiet.
Listen for a click, a rustle, a cough.
Watch for a glint, see a blade move;
toes flex to feel any wire.
Muzzles flash, rounds crack near;
swing right, swing left,
front guys return fire.
Back guys hug the ground.

Viet Nam War Memorial, 2001

Now the ranks are tight,
every line spaced even.
Troops form columns in chronological order.
Each troop marks time;
each troop holds position;
each troop stays rigid.
I look for names
in the gleam
of chiseled granite.

The Spinner

We bake slowly at 120 degrees
humping the Truong Son Mountains.
Under flack jackets, we zizzle
like meat on a spit.
We don’t know where we are.
We know the fight is pointless.
We are an infantry of zombies on the march.

Miller and White are killed by friendly fire.
Better them than me, I tell myself.
The column struggles up and up.
The skinny new guy pitches onto his face.
His helmet bounces,
Then settles in the elephant grass.
What do their names mean?

Phoung means tiny.
Manh means strong.
Tuyet means snow.
Lanh Loi means clever.

The children giggle at my hairy skin.
Sister and her little brother still hang back.
I show them my arm.

“Em, khong so; lam on lai dai, em ten gi?” I say.
Child, don’t worry; come here, what is your name?

She glides near, touches my forearm.
Her brother tucks deeper into her hip.
She whispers her name, "Hoa Binh."
It means peace.

Questions for Reflection: “Excerpt from On The Way to Khe Sanh”

The “Excerpts from On the Way to Khe Sanh” are a series of vignettes. Each sets a tone. Each occurs in a different place.

1. What is the overriding emotion felt by the poet in “Vietnam, Quang Tri Province”?
2. How is what the poet sees on the “Viet Nam War Memorial” similar to soldiers marching in formation? What might be Akins emotion as he sees the names? What might he be thinking?
3. What feelings are evident in “The Spinner?” What happens when two from your ranks are shot? What concern for the “new guy” is being shown? How does the soldier poet feel about where he is? About the conditions in which he is surrounded? About the sergeant?
4. How does the poem end?
5. How is the tone in all three sections of the poem similar? Different?
The American Dream Sells It Out

School, job, family -
Boys fight for their country.
At war I learn the truth:
Taboos are broken.
Kills gain nothing.
You cheapen your life.

A sniper kills a Marine.
Our artillery pounds the ville.
A mother holds her shredded baby in her lap.

Gettysburg, 1969

I look over undulating hills.
Smooth, clipped grass
Borders rows of white crosses.
Here the fallen are honored.

Weeks before, I fought
On jungle hillsides.
My dead are not honored.

I connect with ghosts here.
His head lolls back.
I sink into the underworld.

The dream sellers keep their distance
And wave flags.
Politicians claim the price of freedom
Is worth a few lives.
The men who know never the mother’s eyes.

I too, fought for my country.
I too, have lost -
No longer a believer.
Empty of dreams.

Questions for Reflection: “The American Dream Sells It Out” and “Gettysburg, 1969”

1. What is the poet saying about the “American Dream?” What is the dream? What is expected of youth to fulfill the dream?
2. How does the poet see a contradiction to the dream?
3. Who are the dream sellers? How does the poet feel about these people?
4. Relate this poem to current events in Afghanistan.
5. In the poem, “Gettysburg, 1969,” how does the poet relate to the fallen Civil War soldiers of Gettysburg?
6. What thoughts might be running through his mind as he views the rows of graves? What feelings might be evident in his heart?
7. What do you feel are the lessons learned by this warrior about war? What does the poet indirectly suggest we consider about war?

Body Count: The Dead At Tay Ninh

We had no place to put them
so we piled them, boots
pointed to the sky,
by the mess tent.

All day they kept coming.
I saw one man run from a swirl of dust,
and sit beside them, and his look
when he realized where he was.

By afternoon, the sick and lame
who’d missed the ships
came to gaze in disbelief.
Bodies so close together lies came easy.
They’d wake up when the war was over.
This was it for them.

Dusk, the last ones came from the Angel Plain;
the grass had caught on fire.
Their bodies black and crisp curled in the purple light.
Dawn, we flew them out in bags,
mopped up the mess for chow.

Questions for Reflection: Body Count: “The Dead At Tay Ninh”

1. What is the image you are left with after having read this poem? Does it make you think of any other events in your life time? If so, what?
2. What emotions are you left with after having read the poem? How do you think those who witnessed this scene are able to cope? How can they heal?
3. How would you explain the line, “Bodies so close together lies come easily?”
4. What does “The Dead at Tay Ninh” say about the fragility of life? What does it say about the daily events of being at war? What is the irony in this poem? What are the contradictions?
Blossom Time

April in Washington is pink and green.
The cherry trees blush beautifully and
the grass grows velvety.
And “dulce et decorum est” to see
our dead in their hallowed holes.

At Arlington our well slain sleep
well groomed as we less brave
honor them in springtime
by walking on their faces.
But we praise our unremembered
and guard our unknowns.

Oh, the dead grow funny flowers
that look like flattened towers.
The common folk sprout small ones
while the generals grow tall ones.

Exiled in America

We are the oil,
the precious pressured residue
squeezed out of history.
We are the ones who practice
life astride the knife.
We are numbed by sharp
indifference
as the blade turns slowly up.
We are the skinny dreams
that shred fat sleep.
We are the unseen stare raising
neck hair,
the wronged, the right.
We are the wind & rain that crack
rocks,
the pain that birth unlocks.
We are the oil, soothing
the slow flow of freedom,
moving the earth.

Questions for Reflection: “Blossom Time” and “Exiled in America”

1. Why is it “sweet” to see our “decorated” dead? Who are these people that Coleman refers to? What is the irony in this setting? Why might the poet associate paying tribute to warriors in Washington, D.C.?
2. What contradictions does Coleman put forth in the second stanza of “Blossom Time?”
3. What does the poet mean about different flowers grown by different people?
4. After reading the poem “Exiled in America,” explain what you think is meant by the notion of being exiled? Who are the exiled? For what reasons?
5. What significance does the notion of “oil” have in this poem?
6. How do you think we have been squeezed out of history? Give examples?
7. What is the “indifference” that Coleman refers to? How might you be indifferent to national and global happenings? Why does this indifference occur?