Naming of Parts

SUMMARY

The speaker announces to a group of soldiers that they will be reviewing the parts of a rifle, reminding them that the previous day's lesson was about how to clean the rifles and that tomorrow morning's lesson will be about what to do after actually shooting them. All of this information aside, the speaker reiterates that today the group will go through and name the various parts of the rifle. The poem then shifts suddenly to focus on the way a certain kind of camellia flower is speckled throughout the nearby gardens— an observation that doesn't change the fact that today the group of soldiers will be learning the names of different rifle parts.

The speaker identifies the rifle's lower mounting piece—where a strap will be connected—and then the upper mounting piece, which the soldiers will use once they receive straps for their rifles. The speaker also points out another bracket that makes it possible to stack multiple guns on top of each other, but then notes that the soldiers in the group don't actually have this part on their rifles. After this explanation, the poem once more brings in naturalistic imagery, this time of the nearby gardens' tree branches, which move quietly and gracefully. Unlike these branches, the soldiers lack such grace.

Returning to the rifle lesson, the speaker locates the safety, saying that the soldiers should be able to turn it off with their thumbs. Pausing here, the speaker warns the soldiers against using any of their other fingers to release the safety, insisting that anybody with even the smallest amount of strength should be able to use their thumbs. The poem then centers again upon nature, observing delicate flowers that are perfectly still in the gardens. Even these dainty flowers are strong enough to release the safety of a rifle with their thumbs.

Next, the speaker identifies the rifle's bolt, explaining that the bolt opens the breech, which is the part of the gun into which the soldiers will load ammunition. The soldiers can move the bolt back and forth in the breech, a practice called "easing the spring." Similarly, the bees in the gardens move back and forth very quickly as they buzz around the flowers—a process they call "easing the Spring."

The speaker repeats that the bees call their movement around the flowers "easing the Spring," then repeats that something—it's no longer clear what, exactly—should be easy for anyone with even the smallest amount of strength in their thumbs. This is the case when it comes to moving the bolt in the breech, as well as for operating the mechanism that cocks and readies the rifle for shooting. Soldiers with strength in their thumbs should also find it easy to find the rifle's balance point, which is the spot where the gun will rest level in the shooter's hand. However, the speaker says that the group of soldiers lacks this balance point. The attention of the poem then shifts to newly-blossomed almond trees, which stand quietly in the nearby gardens as bees fly through their flowering branches. And all the while, the soldiers learn about their rifles and what each part is called.

THEMES

NATURE'S INDIFFERENCE TO HUMAN STRUGGLE

"Naming of Parts" showcases the ways in which the natural world is largely uninfluenced by the harsh realities of human existence. While the poem's primary speaker delivers a lesson about the various parts of a rifle, the nearby gardens teem with beauty and the freshness of spring. This juxtaposition of rote wartime procedures and the unbothered beauty of the surrounding world suggests human insignificance in the face of nature. Although a lesson about the parts of a rifle might seem important in the context of human warfare, the reality is that such concerns are trivial in the grand scheme of the world at large, which will continue to progress from season to season regardless of human activity.

Guns in the military serve an explicitly violent purpose, since they are used not for hunting or sport, but to kill an enemy. Although the speaker never explicitly talks about the violent implications of using a rifle during wartime, the fact remains that the soldiers are expected to use their weapons to kill other human beings. As they struggle with this grim reality, though, nature goes along like normal in the nearby gardens, infusing the overall scene with a kind of beauty that feels out of step with the sorrows of war.

Each stanza's concluding lines focus on nature, emphasizing the extent to which the outside world contrasts with the unglamorous, foreboding atmosphere of the military during wartime. Some readers interpret these lines as a point-of-view shift from the perspective of the military lecturer to the perspective of one of the soldiers listening to the lesson. Under this interpretation, the observations of the surrounding gardens are the result of a young soldier's inability to focus, preferring to think about nature's beauty rather than how to use a violent weapon. In this way, then, nature proves itself capable of interfering with human thought, but human thought has seemingly no influence on nature itself.

To that end, even if these lines don't actually belong to a distracted soldier, they still make it clear that nature creeps into the rifle lesson and ultimately overshadows it. Whereas the

rifle lesson centers—albeit implicitly—around violence and destruction, this naturalistic imagery conveys a sense of growth and vitality. And it is this vitality that continues to flourish despite the emotionless, lifeless drone of the rifle lesson, effectively suggesting that even the most pressing human concerns are insignificant in the context nature and the world at large.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 4-6
- Lines 10-12
- Lines 16-18
- Lines 22-24
- Lines 28-30

VIOLENCE AND MUNDANITY

"Naming of Parts" is a poem about violence and warfare, but this isn't immediately apparent because of the primary speaker's procedural, unemotional attitude. To that end, the speaker hardly even acknowledges that the soldiers will eventually have to shoot their weapons. Indeed, this military instructor focuses on technical matters instead of addressing the violent implications of using a rifle during battle. In this way, violence manifests itself in the poem not as a harrowing or tragic act, but as a mundane procedure. In turn, the lesson distances the soldiers from the otherwise visceral and traumatic elements of violent warfare.

Throughout the poem, the speaker fixates on the process of naming, breaking down the military-issued rifle into discernible parts. This onslaught of terminology adds to the poem's feeling of clinical mundanity, as the speaker offers up jargony terms like "the lower sling swivel," "the safety-catch," and "the bolt," to cite just a few. Directing the soldiers' attention to the names of these individual parts, the speaker fails to address the real impact of war and violence, which will clearly not have the same kind of emotional detachment as this lecture.

Ironically, then, the very lecture that is supposed to prepare the soldiers for war completely fails to do so; instead of focusing on what it's like to experience violent combat, the lesson fixates on trivial matters like technical rifle terminology, turning the entire idea of violence into little more than a mindless, boring procedure.

Of course, this mundane approach to violence doesn't necessarily mean that the speaker is fully unaware of the greater implications of using a rifle against an enemy. This is evident in the first stanza, when the speaker says, "And tomorrow morning / We shall have what to do after firing." By saying this, the speaker subtly acknowledges that the soldiers will eventually have to learn how to deal with the aftermath of actually shooting at others. But instead of dwelling on this idea, the speaker immediately follows this phrase by saying, "But today, / Today we have naming of parts."

In turn, it becomes clear that the speaker actively wants—at least for now—to focus exclusively on the small, seemingly ordinary details that crop up during wartime. As a result, the mundane process of naming rifle parts overshadows the disturbing reality of violence, approaching the traumatic experience of warfare with a surprisingly detached mindset.

Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Lines 7-10
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 19-22
- Lines 25-28

LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

LINES 1-4

Today we have ...
... naming of parts.

In the poem's opening, the speaker uses apostrophe to address an unidentified group. Because of the use of the word "we" in the opening line ("Today we have naming of parts"), readers understand right away that this group also includes the speaker.

Going on, the speaker asserts in line 3 that there will be a lecture the following day about "what to do after firing"—a statement that, along with the use of the word "we," indicates that the speaker is addressing a group of soldiers and, more generally, that the speaker is (like the soldiers) in the military too. In this way, the use of apostrophe in the opening stanza helps readers put together the poem's overall setting, making it easy to infer that the speaker is a military official giving a lecture about weaponry to a group of new soldiers.

More specifically, the references to "daily cleaning" and "what to do after firing" suggest that the speaker will be teaching the soldiers about their military-issued rifles. At this point, the soldiers have already learned how to clean their guns, and now they will learn the technical names of the various parts.

It's worth noting that the speaker repeats the phrase, "Today we have naming of parts" in lines 1 and 4. This repetition instills a sense of order in the poem, and this ultimately reflects the militaristic environment and the speaker's commitment to procedure. This persistent desire to focus closely on the technical aspects of handling a weapon is also a way for the speaker to put off considering the broader implications of using a gun during wartime. After all, a military rifle lesson carries obviously violent connotations, since teaching soldiers about their weapons is a stepping stone toward teaching them how to

use these weapons, which in turn is a stepping stone toward killing enemies.

In keeping with this, the speaker says, "And tomorrow morning, / We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day, / Today we have naming of parts." By saying this, the speaker acknowledges that the soldiers will eventually have to come to terms with the idea of actually firing their weapons. Even if the speaker is only thinking about this in technical terms (perhaps suggesting that the soldiers will have to do certain maintenance-related things after shooting their rifles), it's clear that these lines contain a recognition of the fact that there's more to being a soldier than simply naming the parts of a rifle.

However, the speaker is intent on focusing exclusively on this naming process, as evidenced by the repetition in lines 3 and 4: "But to-day," the speaker says after briefly mentioning the act of actually shooting the rifles, "Today we have naming of parts." By repeating the word "today," the speaker implies a desire to only think about the present, not wanting to consider the harsh realities of war, which will require the soldiers to use the rifles for violence. Instead of dwelling on this, the speaker becomes preoccupied with the mundane practice of cataloging the different rifle parts, effectively approaching the weapon not as a means of violence, but as an arbitrary, meaningless machine to be analyzed with a technical—not emotional—perspective.

LINES 4-6

Japonica ...
... naming of parts.

These lines mark a shift in tone and possibly even perspective. Whereas the first three and a half lines of the poem ("Today we have ... naming of parts") are procedural and clinical, this observation of the Japonica plant swerves away from the instructor's otherwise dutiful and militaristic attitude. At this moment, then, a sharp juxtaposition emerges between the emotionless world of the military and the beautiful world of nature, which is apparently on full display in the nearby gardens.

It's worth noting that many readers attribute these lines not to the military instructor, but to a daydreaming soldier who can't stay focused on the rifle lesson. Under this interpretation, a second speaker appears here; nature's beauty creeps into this unidentified soldier's mind even as the instructor drones on about how the group will be reviewing the terminological names for each part of their military-issued rifles.

This conveys a feeling of progress and continuation in the world at large, even if the soldiers themselves are stuck in a boring lecture about a violent weapon. Indeed, the surrounding environment continues to blossom and "glisten" with flowers, an image that starkly contrasts with the soldiers' current wartime reality, which is weighted down by the impending promise of violence and destruction.

The alliteration, consonance, and euphony in these lines also emphasizes the difference between the boring, emotionless rifle lesson and the beautiful wonder of the nearby gardens. For instance, the /l/, /r/, /k/, and /g/ sounds all repeat several times, creating pleasing and musical instances of alliteration as well as a feeling of consonance that mimics the soldier's appreciation of nature's beauty:

> ... Japonica
> Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens

The consonant clusters in this phrase create a feeling of easy beauty, as does the alliteration of the /l/ sound, which gives line 5 ("Glistens ... gardens") a lilting, sculpted quality. All in all, this makes this phrase about the nearby gardens quite euphonic, and it is this satisfying aspect that ultimately emphasizes the vast discrepancy between nature's unbothered splendor and the military's rigidity.

Furthermore, the attention paid to the gardens subtly grounds readers in the poem's historical context, since the Japonica plant is native to Japan. Of course, the poem should be read on its own terms, but it's notable that Henry Reed served as a Japanese translator during World War II, when the United Kingdom was in conflict with Japan. Although this is a relevant detail, what's most important to grasp is the sharp contrast in the poem between military life and the natural world.

LINES 7-10

This is the ...
... have not got.

These lines employ a significant amount of repetition, as the instructor draws attention to three separate "swivels," or metal brackets on the rifle. The "lower sling swivel" is where one end of a strap (or a "sling") attaches to the rifle, and the "upper sling swivel" is where the other end of the strap attaches.

This level of detail might seem unnecessary or even trivial, but this just shows the instructor's tireless commitment to precision and the desire to present an exhaustive catalog of even the smallest, most obvious rifle parts. In keeping with this, the words "sling" and "swivel" appear several times throughout this passage, ultimately accentuating the instructor's procedural, organized approach to weaponry.

Furthermore, sibilance—along with alliteration and consonance—creates a somewhat lulling, sleepy sound, as if the instructor's words might coax the soldiers to sleep. Whereas other instances of sibilance and alliteration in the poem reflect the beauty of the natural world, in this passage they have a sleepy effect that underlines the instructor's boring, emotionless delivery. For instance, observe how the /s/ and /z/ sounds operate in lines 7 through 9:

> 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

This sibilant hissing sound is pleasing, but it's also somewhat hypnotizing, creating a soft sound that runs throughout these three lines. (It's worth noting here that some people don't consider the /z/ to be sibilant—even so, the /s/ repeats so much in these phrases that there is still quite a bit of sibilance.)

To complement this sibilance, there is also the consonance that arises with the repetition of the /l/ sound and the /w/ sound, as in the phrase "lower sling swivel." On the whole, these lulling poetic devices make it perfectly clear why the soldiers—or perhaps even the speaker—might get distracted and focus on nature instead of the rifle lesson.

To that end, this lesson is so detailed that the instructor even mentions parts that the soldiers don't actually have on their rifles, like the "piling swivel," which is a mechanism a shooter can use to stack multiple guns on top of each other. That the instructor's rifle seems to have a "piling swivel" but the soldiers' don't implies a certain lack, as if the soldiers have been given insufficient weapons but are still expected to know how to handle more advanced rifles.

This only reinforces the idea that the instructor's lesson is mindlessly detailed and even out of touch with practical reality. Indeed, the lesson is so thorough that it covers parts of the rifle the soldiers don't even *have*. And yet, despite this thoroughness, the instructor fails to address what actually matters most—namely, that the soldiers will soon have to use these guns in battle, putting them to violent use. With this in mind, the mention of the "piling swivel" feels even *more* trivial and useless, as if the instructor's procedural approach to violence has prioritized pointless details over everything else.

LINES 10-12

> *The branches ...*
> *... have not got.*

Once again, the tone of the poem shifts to acknowledge the outside world, focusing this time on the branches in the nearby gardens. Notably, these diversions always appear in the fourth line of each stanza, directly following a caesura that marks the division between the rifle lecture and the new concentration on nature:

> Which in your case you have not got. The branches

This, however, is not to say that these lines about nature are completely disconnected from the rest of the poem. After all, elements of the rifle lecture begin to slowly work their way into the diversions about the gardens.

For instance, the speaker now thinks about the "silent, eloquent gestures" of the tree branches, and this serves as a nice counterpoint to the military world's rigid mannerisms. To further emphasize this, the speaker specifically notes in line 12 ("Which in our case we have not got") that the soldiers don't have the same "eloquent gestures" as the trees. This lack of "eloquence" is perhaps an acknowledgment of the fact that handling weapons is an inherently graceless process. Indeed, at least in the context of the rifle lesson, using guns is a highly mechanical, technical endeavor, one that is nothing like the gentle movement of the tree branches.

This assertion that the soldiers don't have the same "eloquent gestures" as the tree branches is an acknowledgment of the highly procedural quality of military life, but it's also a sign that whoever is saying this—whether it's the instructor or a daydreaming soldier—is still incorporating certain elements of the lesson into these observations about nature.

This is made evident by the fact that the phrase "Which in our case we have not got" is a repetition of something the instructor says in line 10 when pointing out that there is no "piling swivel" on the soldiers' rifles. There are, however, two key differences in the way this phrase is used. First, the possessive pronoun changes from "your" in line 10 ("Which in your case ...") to "our" in line 12 ("Which in our case ..."), signaling a shift in perspective.

Furthermore, this second occurrence of the phrase is tied to the observations about *nature*, not to the rifle lecture. In turn, the fact that the same phrase repeats in both contexts proves that the two worlds (that of nature and that of the military) aren't completely separate from one another, even if there is an acute sense of juxtaposition between them.

In other words, whoever is speaking in this moment allows thoughts about nature to mingle with thoughts about military life, and vice versa. Needless to say, this daydream doesn't have any influence on nature itself, as the branches continue to wave elegantly regardless of whether the speaker pays attention to them. On the other hand, though, the speaker's focus on the surrounding world detracts from the rifle lesson, thereby suggesting that although nature is indifferent to human experience, human experience isn't necessarily uninfluenced by nature.

LINES 13-16

> *This is the ...*
> *... in your thumb.*

In this section, the instructor identifies the rifle's safety, which—when engaged—prevents the user from pulling the trigger. According to the instructor, it should be easy for any of the soldiers to turn the safety off by simply "flick[ing]" their thumb against it.

In fact, the instructor thinks this is so easy that it would be somehow disgraceful for any of the soldiers to use one of their

other fingers to turn off the safety, since anybody with "any strength" at all should be able to do this with their thumb. By saying this, the instructor voices an expectation that the soldiers should all be strong and capable—qualities that once again clash with the gentle and graceful naturalistic imagery that keeps creeping into the poem at the end of each stanza.

Interestingly enough, though, the instructor's comments about the safety are perhaps the only useful or practical instructions in the entire lesson. Until this point, the lesson has focused exclusively on terminology and procedure, not on anything that would actually help the soldiers operate the rifles. Needless to say, it will someday be important that the soldiers understand how to turn off the safety on their rifles, since they would otherwise be unable to shoot.

It is perhaps because the soldiers will have to be able to do this as quickly as possible during combat that the instructor forbids them from using their other fingers, which would presumably take longer. In this way, the instructor's concentration on the proper operation of the safety is the only useful thing in the entire lecture, since it acknowledges that the soldiers will eventually have to use the rifles in battle.

Furthermore, the idea of not being strong enough to turn off the safety on a rifle is meaningful, since it subtly implies that violence requires a certain amount of strength. Under this interpretation, some people might not have what it takes to engage in combat. And yet, the instructor also admonishes the idea that any of the soldiers might lack the strength necessary to be violent. "And please do not let me / See anyone using his finger," the instructor says, indicating that all the soldiers should have no trouble at all demonstrating their ability to engage in violent behavior.

In fact, the instructor even repeats the word "easy," thereby implying that it should be perfectly natural for a soldier to take the necessary steps toward violence. All it takes to embrace violent behavior, it seems, is a bit of brute strength—something that serves as yet another reminder of all the ways in which the harshness of military life is different from the easy, gracefulness of nature.

LINES 16-18

The blossoms ...
... using their finger.

In yet another shift in focus, the poem once more turns to nature and the surrounding gardens. Again, the speaker juxtaposes the natural world with the atmosphere of the rifle lecture, this time calling attention to the fact that the blossoms in the gardens are "fragile and motionless."

This stands in stark contrast to the instructor's previous discussion about how the soldiers should be able to turn off the safety on their rifles if they have enough strength. Unlike the delicate and still flowers in the nearby gardens, the soldiers are expected to move their thumbs in forceful ways in order to release the safety. Consequently, readers are reminded of the many ways in which the qualities of military life are different from the eloquence and peace that defines nature in the surrounding world.

Despite this juxtaposition, these lines also use personification to subtly merge these observations of nature with the rifle lesson. Indeed, when the speaker personifies the blossoms by upholding that they would never let "anyone see / Any of them using their finger," it becomes clear that the two worlds—that of the military and that of the gardens—have begun to mingle, at least in the speaker's mind.

Of course, it's worth remembering that it's not perfectly clear whether these lines belong to the instructor or to a second speaker. If they belong to a distracted soldier, then the instructor's words are apparently working their way into the daydream about nature. If, on the other hand, they belong to the instructor, then it seems as though the instructor can't even stay concentrated on the boring, logistical details of the rifle lesson. Either way, nature triumphs over the dull procedures of military life and, in turn, over violence.

LINES 19-22

And this you ...
... Easing the spring.

Continuing the rifle lesson, the instructor points out the "bolt," which is a metal shaft with a handle that gun users can pull in order to move it through the "breech," or the hollow barrel. This, in turn, activates a spring in the rifle that pushes the ammunition into the breech. For this reason, working the bolt back and forth is known as "easing the spring."

Like many moments throughout "Naming of Parts," these lines are quite technical and literal, as the instructor straightforwardly delivers the rifle lesson. As if to emphasize this rigidity, there is a particularly staccato rhythm to these lines, since there are several caesuras dividing each phrase from the next:

> 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. ||

Mapped out like this, it's easy to observe the rigid structure of these four lines. To that end, each line is broken up by a caesura, which is followed by the beginning of a new phrase that runs to the end of the line before carrying over into the next. This combination of prominent caesuras and enjambment creates a stop-and-start, push-and-pull cadence that perfectly exemplifies the instructor's almost robotic delivery of the rifle lesson.

Consequently, the flowing lines about nature that follow feel

even more sharply juxtaposed because they don't have so many pauses. What's more, this passage is also full of dull terminology and military jargon, which undoubtedly only makes it harder for the daydreaming soldier (or even the instructor) to pay attention to the lecture instead of thinking about nature.

LINES 22-24

And rapidly backwards ...
... easing the Spring.

These lines feature yet another shift from the rifle lesson to a focus on nature. However, this shift is not quite as abrupt as the others. This is because the speaker repeats the phrase "rapidly backwards and forwards," which appears first in line 21 as part of the rifle lesson and then reappears in line 22 as part of the daydreaming speaker's observations of the surrounding world.

The difference, of course, is that the first instance of this phrase has to do with the act of pulling the rifle's bolt back and forth through the breech, whereas the second instance has to do with the way that the bees fly around and into the flowers in the nearby gardens. In this way, the phrase "rapidly backwards and forwards" takes on new meaning, ultimately leaving behind the brute, mechanical movements of military life in favor of the excited and natural movements of bees in the budding of spring. To reflect this, the phrase "easing the Spring" repeats in line 24, but this time it doesn't refer to an actual spring in the rifle, but instead to springtime, suggesting that the swarming bees signal a gradual seasonal transition.

It's worth noting here that there are certain sexual undertones in this section of the poem, especially if readers interpret these lines as issuing from a distracted young soldier. According to this viewpoint, the young soldier's youth is wasted because he is stuck listening to a lecture about weapons and violence instead of actually enjoying his life as a young adult. (The speaker's gender can be assumed because the instructor has previously used masculine pronouns to refer to the soldiers.)

For this reason, the soldier fixates on the back and forth motion of the bolt—a kind of movement that is charged with sexual meaning. Similarly, the soldier focuses on the bees pollinating the flowers, perhaps feeling that everyone else in the world (including the bees) is leading a rich life full of sex and vitality. Meanwhile, he and his fellow soldiers must stand at attention and listen to a dull lesson about weaponry, and this is only exacerbated by the fact that the surrounding springtime is a constant reminder of what they're missing out on.

LINES 25-28

They call it ...
... have not got;

This section begins with anadiplosis, as the speaker repeats the line that appears at the end of the previous stanza ("They call it easing the Spring") as a way of beginning this new stanza.

This, of course, is the *third* repetition of this line, which first appeared in line 22 ("Easing ... forwards") when the instructor explained that this is a term to describe the act of moving the rifle's bolt back and forth through the breech. Then, in line 24, the phrase repeats, only this time it has to do with the nearby bees, their frantic movement throughout the gardens, and the oncoming of springtime. By the time the phrase repeats in this line, then, it has undergone a shift in meaning that ultimately makes it difficult to say what, exactly, it means in the context of the final stanza, which seems to concentrate simultaneously on the rifle lesson *and* the surrounding gardens.

Having said this, it's worth considering that the word "Spring" is capitalized in line 25, suggesting that the phrase "easing the Spring" still has to do with seasonal transition, not with weapons. And yet, the following phrase repeats the instructor's previous comment about turning off the safety: "it is perfectly easy / If you have any strength in your thumb." In this way, the speaker's consideration of springtime reverts to the rifle lesson, making it unclear whether the speaker is focusing on nature or military life.

Consequently, this is the first time throughout the entire poem that the first few lines of a given stanza aren't clearly demarcated from the last few lines, since the rest of the stanzas are split between the instructor's lesson and unstructured thoughts about nature. Here, on the other hand, everything runs together: thoughts about springtime and thoughts about turning off the safety blend together in indiscernible ways.

On the whole, the first four lines of this final stanza simply recycle images and phrases that have already occurred in the poem, and it's not terribly clear how they fit together or what they're actually saying in a larger sense. For instance, the speaker mentions the "bolt" and the "breech," both of which appear in the previous stanza. But the phrase that now contains these two words doesn't fully connect to anything, except possibly to the idea that the bolt and the breech are both "perfectly easy" to operate—but even this isn't exactly clear.

What's more, line 27 ("And the breech ... balance") uses polysyndeton to bring in new terms relating to rifle, ultimately associating them with the bolt and the breech by stringing them together with the coordinating conjunction "and." However, the speaker doesn't actually say anything useful about the "cocking-piece" or the "point of balance," instead simply listing them one after the other. Indeed, the only thing the speaker actually says about these terms is that the soldiers don't *have* a point of balance—an idea that once more conveys a lack of grace on behalf of the soldiers, framing their military lives as unbalanced.

In the midst of these jumbled, recycled images and ideas, what's most important to take away from this section is that it purposefully dislocates readers from the tangible narrative of the poem. In doing so, it puts readers in the same position as

the distracted speaker (or speakers), effectively demonstrating nature's influence on humans, since the beautiful gardens have apparently rendered the otherwise procedural rifle lesson rather incoherent in this final stanza.

LINES 28-30

and the almond-blossom ...
... naming of parts.

The poem concludes with more observations of the surrounding gardens. By this point, the poem has become something of a running catalog of all the beautiful things one might see in nature, an observation of "almond-blossom[s]" and gardens teeming with bees and flowers. In this regard, nature has completely overtaken the rifle lesson—instead of listing rifle parts, the speaker has fixated on the surrounding environment.

To further emphasize the juxtaposition between the clinical rifle lesson and the ease of the natural world, the speaker employs alliteration and sibilance in a pleasing, musical way: "and the almond-blossom / Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards." The repetition of the /s/ and /z/ sounds in these lines mimics the soft sound of the bees as they fly gently through the newly budded flowers.

On top of this, the alliterated /b/ sound gives the phrase a rhythmic quality that is only *further* enhanced by the consonance that runs throughout, as the lines are packed with /l/, /r/, /m/, and /n/ sounds. Altogether, these devices create a satisfying sound that helps highlight the differences between the strict, emotionless world of the military and the free, beautiful world of nature.

What's more, the pleasing sound that arises when the speaker talks about nature in this section also demonstrates the extent to which the surrounding world is unbothered by human activity. At least in the realm of this poem, humans don't have much of an impact on nature, which is indifferent to things like war or the ins and outs of military procedure. Conversely, humans are apparently *quite* influenced by nature, as evidenced by the fact that the speaker (whether this is the instructor or a daydreaming soldier) can't even focus on the rifle lesson without letting thoughts about the gardens invade the matter at hand.

All the same, though, the speaker does try to return to the topic of the rifle lesson in the final line, once more repeating that the soldiers must learn the names of their rifle parts. However, it now seems possible that the speaker is more interested in naming the many "parts" that make up nature than identifying the mechanisms on the military-issued rifles, which perhaps have come to seem trivial and mundane in the face of the external world's vitality and splendor.

SYMBOLS

THE RIFLE

The instructor's emotionless focus on the different parts of a rifle is a perfect representation humankind's unfortunate tendency to approach even the most troubling topics in mundane, ordinary ways.

Rather than talking about how the soldiers should prepare themselves to face violence and carnage on the battlefield, the instructor fixates on terminology, as if the most important thing of all is that the soldiers know the term "piling swivel" even though they don't even *have* piling swivels on their weapons! In this way, the instructor's lesson is largely useless to the soldiers, at least insofar as the information they gain won't do anything to help them come to terms with the fact that they will soon be expected to kill people with the rifles.

And yet, the instructor continues to catalog the different parts of the rifle, thereby associating the weapon not with violence, but rather with mindless militaristic routines. In turn, the rifle itself comes to symbolize the human tendency to avoid thinking about difficult realities by obsessing over trivial matters.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-4
- Line 6
- Lines 7-10
- Lines 13-16
- Lines 19-22
- Lines 25-28

THE BEES AND FLOWERS

Because springtime is a time of rebirth, growth, and vitality, it comes to stand for all the ways in which the soldiers are missing out on their youth. More specifically, there is quite a bit of sexual innuendo in the poem, from the repetition of the phrase "rapidly backwards and forwards" to the bees and their clumsy "fumbling" of the newly budded flowers.

All of this serves as a reminder that the soldiers are unable to participate in the natural cycle of life because they're forced to focus on violent warfare, which is in stark opposition to the growth and sexuality that springtime represents. As a result, the fact that springtime flourishes all around them becomes somewhat torturous, taunting the soldiers by embodying all the natural, joyful, and sexual pleasures they're missing out on.

Where this symbol appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-5:** " Japonica / Glistens like coral in all of the

neighbouring gardens,"

- **Lines 10-11:** " The branches / Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,"
- **Lines 16-18:** " The blossoms / Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see / Any of them using their finger."
- **Lines 22-24:** " And rapidly backwards and forwards / The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers: / They call it easing the Spring."
- **Line 25:** "They call it easing the Spring:"
- **Lines 28-29:** " and the almond-blossom / Silent in all of the gardens and the bees going backwards and forwards,"

POETIC DEVICES

APOSTROPHE

"Naming of Parts" is a poem that relies heavily on apostrophe, featuring a speaker who addresses a group of soldiers to deliver a lesson about military-issued rifles. This, however, isn't apparent right away, since the first line doesn't necessarily clarify the setting of the poem or reveal who, exactly, the speaker is addressing. Rather, these details develop over the course of the poem, as the speaker uses words like "we" and "you" to make it clear that there are other people listening to this lecture. For instance, the following passage makes it obvious that the speaker's words are intended for an audience (and not just the readers):

> ... 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.

When the speaker suggests that the listeners will understand the use of the "upper sling swivel" when they receive their "slings," readers sense that the speaker is not talking to them, but rather to a specific group of soldiers. As if to further underline this idea, the speaker adds that the soldiers do not have "piling swivel[s]" on their rifles, ultimately bringing in more specific details that emphasize the fact that the readers are not the speaker's intended audience. After all, it's very unlikely that the readers are in a similar situation as the soldiers while reading the poem, since they're surely not holding rifles, nor are they expecting to receive straps to connect to sling swivels.

At the same time, the overall effect of apostrophe is interesting in that it actually *does* invite readers to step into the world of the poem. Indeed, readers will perhaps feel like they are standing alongside the other soldiers and listening to the boring rifle lecture, since the instructor keeps using "you," therefore inviting readers to step into the soldiers' perspectives.

As a result, the lapses in apostrophe at the end of each stanza become even more noticeable. That is, whenever the poem shifts from addressing the soldiers to focusing on nature, readers feel a sudden and abrupt change, and many readers attribute these lines to a daydreaming soldier. This interpretation makes sense because it's an easy way to make sense of an otherwise startling interruption of the instructor's lecture.

Regardless of whether these thoughts really belong to a distracted soldier, though, one thing is certain: the lines of this poem are characterized by whether they make use of apostrophe, since the rifle lesson depends upon this device but the observations about nature do not. In this way, apostrophe significantly contributes to how readers make sense of the poem.

Where Apostrophe appears in the poem:

- **Lines 1-4:** "Today we have naming of parts. Yesterday, / We had daily cleaning. And tomorrow morning, / We shall have what to do after firing. But to-day, / Today we have naming of parts."
- **Lines 7-10:** "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."
- **Lines 13-16:** "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."
- **Lines 19-22:** "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."

ANAPHORA

The use of anaphora emphasizes the military instructor's rigid, procedural way of speaking. This is especially evident in the second stanza:

> 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

In this passage, every new sentence begins with some iteration of "This is the ..." This creates a monotonous, repetitive cadence that perfectly captures the speaker's dry, unexciting tone. To that end, this use of anaphora accentuates the list-like quality of the rifle lesson, as the instructor drones on and on while cataloging the various parts of the rifle.

In fact, this repetitive, formulaic way of speaking is evident in other places in the poem, too. For instance, although some readers might argue that the first stanza doesn't include a legitimate example of anaphora because the words don't perfectly match up with one another, it's worth noting that the speaker's first four sentences contain clear parallelism, all beginning in similar ways. Indeed, the first four consecutive sentences begin like this:

- "Today we have ..."
- "Yesterday, / we had ..."
- "And tomorrow morning, / We shall have ..."
- "But to-day, / Today we have ..."

Even though the words themselves aren't exactly the same, they are variations on the same sentence construction, plugging in "today," "yesterday," and "tomorrow" and then changing the tense of the verb "to have." As a result, the meaning remains largely the same, as does the syntactical structure. Consequently, the poem begins with this gesture toward anaphora, spotlighting the instructor's mundane, repetitious speaking habits, which ultimately contrast with the poetic observations about nature that appear at the end of each stanza.

Where Anaphora appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "This is the"
- **Lines 7-8:** "And this / Is the"
- **Line 9:** "And this is the"
- **Line 13:** "This is the"
- **Line 19:** "And this"

CONSONANCE

"Naming of Parts" is so packed with consonance that it would be difficult to enumerate every single instance of the device in the poem. This is especially the case because multiple different sounds often repeat within the same set of words, so that the consonance is very dense and concentrated in certain passages. Sometimes, this suggests the monotony and boredom of the instructor's lesson, as all the names slide into one another.

Other times the consonance has a more literary effect. For instance, the words in lines 4 through 6 contain repetitions of multiple consonant sounds, including /n/, /k/, /g/, and /l/:

> ... Japonica
> Glistens like coral in all of the neighbouring gardens,
> And today we have naming of parts.

In particular, the consonance threaded throughout lines 4 and 5 ("Japonica ... gardens") is pleasing and forces readers to really pay attention to words like "Japonica," "glistens," and "coral."

Importantly, none of these words would normally be associated with an otherwise boring and rote rifle lesson, and the euphony created by this consonance calls attention to the beautiful words. In this sense, consonance helps highlight the difference between the procedural world of the rifle lesson and the "glisten[ing]" world of the nearby gardens.

At the same time, there is also quite a bit of consonance within the actual rifle lesson, as is the case with the repetition of the /w/ and /l/ sounds in the second stanza, which contains phrases like "lower sling swivel," "upper sling swivel," and "piling swivel." These phrases also contain sibilance, which develops even further in the third stanza ("This is ... their finger").

To that end, the third stanza features an onslaught of /s/, /z/, /th/, and /f/ sounds, and though some people believe that only true /s/ sounds count as sibilance, the number of soft, hissing noises that run throughout this stanza are undeniably prominent. In this way, the instructor's otherwise dry, routine way of speaking ultimately takes on some of the quiet consonant beauty of the lines about nature, effectively suggesting that nature flourishes even in the unlikely context of military life and wartime procedure.

Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 4:** "Japonica"
- **Line 5:** "Glistens," "like," "coral," "in," "all," "neighbouring," "gardens"
- **Line 6:** "And," "naming"
- **Line 7:** "This," "lower," "sling," "swivel," "this"
- **Line 8:** "sling," "swivel," "will," "see"
- **Line 9:** "When," "slings," "this," "piling," "swivel"
- **Line 10:** "Which," "case," "branches"
- **Line 11:** "Hold," "gardens," "silent," "eloquent," "gestures"
- **Line 12:** "case"
- **Line 13:** "This," "safety," "catch," "which," "always," "released"
- **Line 14:** "With," "easy," "flick," "the," "thumb," "please"
- **Line 15:** "See," "using," "his," "easy"
- **Line 16:** "strength," "thumb," "The," "blossoms"
- **Line 17:** "fragile," "motionless," "letting"
- **Line 18:** "them," "their," "finger"
- **Line 19:** "this," "see," "bolt," "purpose," "this"
- **Line 20:** "breech," "see," "slide"
- **Line 21:** "Rapidly," "backwards," "forwards," "this"
- **Line 22:** "Easing," "spring," "rapidly," "backwards," "forwards"
- **Line 23:** "early," "bees," "assaulting," "fumbling," "flowers"
- **Line 24:** "call," "easing," "Spring"
- **Line 25:** "easing," "Spring," "easy"
- **Line 26:** "strength," "thumb," "like," "bolt"
- **Line 27:** "breech," "piece," "point," "balance"
- **Line 28:** "almond," "blossom"
- **Line 29:** "Silent," "all," "gardens," "bees," "going,"

"backwards," "forwards"
- **Line 30:** "For"

ENJAMBMENT

Most of the lines in "Naming of Parts" are enjambed. This creates an interesting effect, as if the instructor's lecture about rifle parts will never end, since almost every line features the beginning of a new sentence that carries over to the next line. Consequently, readers feel the drone-like quality of the instructor's lesson, experiencing what the soldiers listening to the lecture must surely feel as they try to pay attention to this never-ending speech.

This is perhaps most apparent in the third stanza ("This is the ... their finger"), in which every line is enjambed. In particular, these lines play with the way phrases continue across line breaks but then end in prominent caesuras in the middle of the next line:

> 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.

The stop-and-start rhythm created by this combination of enjambment and mid-line caesura is important, since it not only highlights the instructor's never-ending drone, but also gives rise to a somewhat lulling cadence. In turn, it makes sense that a soldier (or perhaps even the instructor) would drift off in the final lines of every stanza, employing the same rhythm as the lesson but letting the mind wander to the surrounding gardens.

Where Enjambment appears in the poem:

- **Lines 4-5:** "Japonica / Glistens"
- **Lines 7-8:** "this / Is"
- **Lines 8-9:** "see, / When"
- **Lines 10-11:** "branches / Hold"
- **Lines 13-14:** "released / With"
- **Lines 14-15:** "me / See"
- **Lines 15-16:** "easy / If"
- **Lines 16-17:** "blossoms / Are"
- **Lines 17-18:** "see / Any"
- **Lines 19-20:** "this / Is"
- **Lines 20-21:** "it / Rapidly"
- **Lines 21-22:** "this / Easing"
- **Lines 22-23:** "forwards / The"
- **Lines 25-26:** "easy / If"
- **Lines 28-29:** "almond-blossom / Silent"

JUXTAPOSITION

Each stanza in "Naming of Parts" features some kind of juxtaposition. This is because the first three and a half lines of every stanza (except, perhaps, the final one) focus on the rote, emotionless rifle lesson, and then the last two and a half lines of every stanza pivot abruptly to focus on beautiful images of nature in the nearby gardens. This is evident as early as the first stanza, when the surprising contrast between lines 4 and 5 jumps out at readers:

> Today we have naming of parts. Japonica
> Glistens like coral in all of the neighboring gardens

The first half of this stanza has concentrated exclusively on the instructor's words about what the soldiers have been or will be studying. After a reiteration of the fact that the soldiers will be studying the "naming of parts," though, the poem's attention suddenly shifts. This change is signaled by a caesura between the word "parts" and "Japonica," one that cleanly separates the rifle lesson from the image of Japonica (a plant found in Japan) "glisten[ing]" in the nearby gardens.

As mentioned throughout this guide, many readers interpret the last two and a half lines of each stanza as issuing not from the instructor, but from a distracted soldier who can't stay focused on the rifle lesson. This theory is supported by the juxtaposition between the two portions of every stanza, since there is such an obvious difference between the lines about the rifle lesson and the lines about the gardens.

However, even without this interpretation, the profound contrast between these two worlds is still noteworthy. In other words, readers don't need to imagine there are two speakers in the poem in order to sense the obvious divide between the emotionless setting of the military lecture and the flourishing beauty of the natural world—this contrast makes itself overwhelmingly apparent just by the mere fact that violent weapons and mechanical instructions aren't normally associated with springtime blossoms or carefree bees.

Furthermore, it's significant that the final stanza begins with the pun, "They call it easing the Spring," a phrase that mixes the image of bees flying through the flowers during the beginning of springtime with the image of a bolt moving back and forth through the breech of a rifle—a motion known as "easing the spring." In this way, the two worlds (that of the military and that of nature) aren't quite as clearly delineated from one another as they are in the previous stanzas.

In fact, it seems that images of springtime have worked their way into the rifle lesson, suggesting that even mundane lectures about violent weapons won't stop nature from flourishing. In turn, the *lack* of juxtaposition in the final stanza demonstrates nature's indifference to human activity.

Where Juxtaposition appears in the poem:

- Lines 3-6
- Lines 9-11
- Lines 15-18
- Lines 20-24
- Lines 25-26
- Lines 27-30

PERSONIFICATION

The natural elements in the nearby gardens are often personified in "Naming of Parts," as the speaker attributes human qualities to blossoming plants and swarming bees. In some cases, this use of personification is blatant and obvious, like when the speaker suggests in lines 17 and 18 ("Are fragile ... their finger") that the blossoms in the gardens never let "anyone see / Any of them using their finger." In other cases, though, the speaker employs a slightly subtler form of personification. In fact, the first moment of personification in the entire poem hinges on a single adjective:

> ... The branches
> Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures

The word that fully turns this image into personification is "eloquent," an adjective generally used to describe someone who is expressive, graceful, fluent, or persuasive. Without this word, the image of the branches' posture in the gardens arguably wouldn't qualify as personification, since it would merely function as an observation of how the trees are positioned. With the word "eloquent," though, the image takes on new meaning, suggesting that the branches possess a certain dignity reminiscent of the most graceful human behavior.

Moreover, the word "eloquent" implies that the branches are capable of expressing or conveying something through their "gestures," although the speaker also notes that they're silent. As a result, it comes to seem as if the speaker—who is perhaps a daydreaming soldier—senses the beauty of the natural world but feels as if this beauty is being withheld or is out of reach, perhaps because the speaker is stuck in the mundane, unspectacular world of the military during wartime. From this position, the speaker has no choice but to simply watch and admire the "silent, eloquent gestures" of the nearby branches, which have come to seem more human and alive than the actual human world.

The other two moments of personification in the poem say less about the difference between military life and nature. Instead, they simply highlight the extent to which phrases and notions from the rifle lesson have influenced the speaker's inability to focus.

For instance, lines 22 through 24 ("And rapidly ... the Spring") suggest that the bees flying through the newly blossomed flowers call their behavior "easing the Spring," ultimately repurposing a line from the lecture and demonstrating that the world of the military and the natural world have begun to mingle with one another in the speaker's mind. And all the while, the speaker gives human qualities to nonhuman entities or beings, effectively using pathetic fallacy to give nature a strong sense of agency that animates it and makes it feel that much more vibrantly alive in the poem.

Where Personification appears in the poem:

- **Lines 10-11:** "The branches / Hold in the gardens their silent, eloquent gestures,"
- **Lines 16-18:** "The blossoms / Are fragile and motionless, never letting anyone see / Any of them using their finger."
- **Lines 22-24:** "And rapidly backwards and forwards / The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers: / They call it easing the Spring."

REPETITION

"Naming of Parts" is filled with repetition. Some phrases repeat within the same stanza, whereas others echo throughout the poem at large. In turn, the poem takes on a measured cadence that is representative of the instructor's monotonous, highly organized lecture.

Right away, the use of anaphora and parallelism in the first stanza call attention to the instructor's repetitive way of speaking. As mentioned in our previous discussion of anaphora, the first four sentences all begin with the same syntactical construction: "Today we have," "Yesterday, / We had," "And tomorrow morning, / We shall have," "But to-day, / Today we have." These parallel grammatical structures convey a sense of consistency that aligns with the instructor's militaristic approach, which is procedural and ordered. This, in turn, stands in stark contrast to the less ordered world of the surrounding gardens.

There are other forms of repetition in the poem, including andiplosis, which occurs at the end of the fourth stanza and the beginning of the fifth:

> The early bees are assaulting and fumbling the flowers:
> They call it easing the Spring
> They call it easing the Spring ...

It's worth noting, of course, that this phrase has *already* been repeated before this instance of anadiplosis, since the instructor first uses the term "easing the spring" to refer to the action of working the bolt back and forth in the breech of the rifle. Then, at the end of the fourth stanza (as quoted above), the phrase reappears, only this time the word "Spring" is

capitalized, shifting the meaning so that it refers not to the rifle lecture, but to how the bees' pollination of the newly budded flowers helps nature "eas[e]" into springtime.

When the phrase reappears once more at the beginning of the fifth stanza, though, (line 25) the speaker doesn't continue to talk about springtime, instead reverting to the rifle lesson and going on to repeat a number of things that appeared earlier in the lecture. As a result, it's no longer clear how, exactly, the phrase "easing the Spring" is being used—the only thing that *is* clear is that these repetitions have called attention to how language is used in the poem, as well as to the fact that words can mean different things depending on the surrounding context.

Another important thing to consider is what these repetitions say about the speaker's (or speakers') concentration. Indeed, if readers choose to attribute the observations about nature to a distracted soldier, then the recycled phrases in the final stanza become even more significant. Under this interpretation, elements of the instructor's lesson echo in the soldier's head with little or no organization, as phrases like "If you have any strength in your thumb," "Which in our case we have not got," or "backwards and forwards" return in quick succession. These phrases feel dislocated from their original purposes in the broader rifle lesson, suggesting that the soldier has now fully zoned out and that these words are simply circulating in his head while he thinks about the surrounding gardens. In this regard, repetition helps the poem create a unique feeling of distraction.

Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "Today we have naming of parts."
- **Lines 3-4:** "But to-day, / Today we have naming of parts."
- **Line 6:** "And today we have naming of parts."
- **Lines 7-8:** "This is the lower sling swivel. And this / Is the upper sling swivel,"
- **Line 9:** "And this is the piling swivel,"
- **Line 10:** "Which in your case you have not got."
- **Line 12:** "Which in our case we have not got."
- **Line 15:** "using his finger."
- **Line 16:** "If you have any strength in your thumb."
- **Line 18:** "using their finger."
- **Line 21:** "Rapidly backwards and forwards:"
- **Line 22:** "Easing the spring.," "rapidly backwards and forwards"
- **Line 24:** "They call it easing the Spring."
- **Line 25:** "They call it easing the Spring:"
- **Line 26:** "If you have any strength in your thumb: like the bolt,"
- **Line 28:** "Which in our case we have not got;"
- **Line 29:** "backwards and forwards,"
- **Line 30:** "For today we have naming of parts."

POLYSYNDETON

Although it only appears once, polysyndeton helps sustain the list-like quality that characterizes much of the poem. This is especially significant because this polysyndeton appears in the final stanza, which is noticeably less organized than the other stanzas. To that end, it's not entirely clear in the final stanza ("They call it ... naming of parts") what the speaker is saying or who, for that matter, the speaker is, since some people might attribute all six lines of this stanza to a daydreaming soldier instead of the military instructor. Nonetheless, the repetition of the word "and" in line 27 ("And the breech ... point of balance") ties the stanza to the rest of the poem, bringing back the exhaustive, procedural tone that the instructor employs in the first four stanzas.

However, the effect of the polysyndeton in the final stanza is different from the effect of the repetition used in the rest of the poem. Whereas the other stanzas feature repetitions that build a somewhat monotonous, slow cadence, the rapid-fire use of the word "and" in the following passage gives the entire stanza an excited, somewhat overwhelmed quality:

> And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance,
> Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom

By stringing together this list with so many conjunctions, the speaker goes through the names of different rifle parts in a fast, feverish way. In fact, it almost feels as if these terms have overtaken the speaker. In keeping with this, if these lines belong to a daydreaming soldier, one might argue that the polysyndeton illustrates the extent to which the young man has been inundated by rifle terminology.

And yet, these terms seem to simply swirl around in the soldier's mind before he once again turns his attention to nature, suddenly fixating on the "almond-blossom" instead of the comprehensive list of rifle parts. Accordingly, polysyndeton acts as an intensifier that suggests that the instructor's terminology has become so overwhelming that listeners let the rifle names drift into their minds without actually scrutinizing them.

Where Polysyndeton appears in the poem:

- **Lines 27-28:** "And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point of balance, / Which in our case we have not got; and the almond-blossom"

ALLITERATION

Moments of alliteration are scattered throughout "Naming of Parts." On the whole, the sound of the poem is lulling and almost hypnotic, reflecting the military instructor's unwavering

cadence. In some ways, the alliteration that pops up throughout the poem emphasizes the instructor's drone-like way of speaking, as is the case in the second stanza when the sibilant /s/ appears multiple times:

> This is the lower sling swivel. And this
> Is the upper sling swivel, whose use you will see,
> When you are given your slings. ...

This repeated hissing sound (which also repeats within words as consonance) gives the instructor's lesson a sleepy quality, illustrating why it would be hard for the soldiers—or even the instructor—to stay focused on the rifle lecture.

But this kind of alliteration also adds a pleasing sound to the poem, making the lines sound beautiful even when the instructor is speaking in a boring, procedural way. By the time the fourth stanza ("And this ... the Spring") comes around, the poem has already offered up several beautiful and poetic observations of nature; as if to accentuate this beauty, the last two stanzas of the poem are much more alliterative than the previous ones.

Indeed, the fourth stanza prominently features the /b/ and /f/ sounds, and the final stanza continues this repetition of the /b/ sound. In turn, as the effect of nature's beauty accumulates throughout the poem, the use of alliteration increases, suggesting that this device is intended to underscore how impossible it is to ignore the splendor of the surrounding environment.

Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "sling," "swivel"
- **Line 8:** "sling," "swivel," "see"
- **Line 9:** "slings," "swivel"
- **Line 11:** "silent"
- **Line 14:** "flick"
- **Line 15:** "finger"
- **Line 17:** "fragile"
- **Line 18:** "finger"
- **Line 19:** "bolt"
- **Line 20:** "breech"
- **Line 21:** "backwards," "forwards"
- **Line 22:** "backwards," "forwards"
- **Line 23:** "bees," "fumbling," "flowers"
- **Line 26:** "bolt"
- **Line 27:** "breech," "balance"
- **Line 28:** "blossom"
- **Line 29:** "bees," "backwards"

VOCABULARY

Japonica (Line 4) - A kind of plant. Many plant names include the word "Japonica," so it's difficult to say exactly which species the speaker has in mind. However, the word "Japonica" was often used in the 20th century to refer to flowering shrubs known as "Japanese quince." At the same time, this reference to "Japonica" also may refer to a certain kind of camellia found in southern Japan.

Coral (Line 5) - The word "coral" often refers to a hard, porous surface found in the sea. Sometimes coral has a reddish or pinkish hue, which is most likely why the speaker mentions it in reference to the Japonica flowers in the nearby garden.

Sling swivel (Line 7) - The "sling swivel" is a bracket on a rifle where a strap can be connected. The "lower sling swivel" is located somewhere near the trigger of the gun, whereas the "upper sling swivel" is located further up along barrel.

Sling (Line 7) - In this case, the word "sling" refers to the strap that attaches to a rifle so that the user can carry the weapon more easily.

Piling swivel (Line 9) - The "piling swivel" is a bracket intended to enable soldiers to connect three rifles together to form a tripod of sorts. This enabled soldiers to leave the rifles in one place without having to lay them down on the wet or muddy ground.

Eloquent (Line 11) - Expressive and graceful. Eloquence can also refer to the ability to articulate something with sophistication and ease.

Safety-catch (Line 13) - A small component near the trigger of a gun that, depending on how it's positioned, determines whether or not the trigger can be pulled and, thus, whether or not the gun can be fired.

Bolt (Line 19) - In bolt-action rifles, the bolt is a metal component that moves back and forth through the barrel to control the loading and unloading of ammunition.

Breech (Line 20) - The rear-end of a rifle's barrel.

Cocking-piece (Line 27) - A component on the rifle that allows the user to ready the gun for firing.

Point of balance (Line 27) - The place on a rifle where the weapon will balance in the user's grip. The poem plays with the meaning of this phrase, using it to suggest that the soldiers are unable to strike a balance between wartime activities and the joyful blossoming of springtime.

FORM, METER, & RHYME

FORM

"Naming of Parts" has its own set structure, but it doesn't adhere to a previously established poetic form or tradition. The poem is broken into five stanzas, each of which is consists of six lines. Because of the frequent repetition throughout the stanzas, some readers may be reminded of the villanelle or the

pantoum form, but the repeated phrases in "Naming of Parts" aren't consistent enough to adhere to either of these forms.

Having said that, the poem does follow its own internal conventions. For instance, it's not only the case that it's made up of sestets, but also that there is always a shift in tone and focus that comes partway through the fourth line of each stanza. To that end, the fourth line of every stanza features a caesura, after which roughly two and a half lines follow, concentrating on the natural world instead of on the rifle lesson. Because of this format, many readers uphold that the poem has two separate speakers: the military instructor who speaks in the first three and a half lines of each stanza, and then a daydreaming soldier who speaks in the remaining two and a half lines.

METER

"Naming of Parts" is a free verse poem. It is not composed in any set meter, even if most of its lines are roughly the same length and often contain a similar amount of syllables.

Instead of a specific meter driving the rhythm of the poem, the overall cadence is determined by the speaker's use of enjambment and, to a certain extent, the way caesuras interact with these instances of enjambment (as previously discussed in the Poetic Devices section of this guide). To that end, the majority of the lines in "Naming of Parts" carry over onto the next line, but there are also a number of caesuras that break up this otherwise unchecked flow. In turn, the poem takes on a unique rhythm that is achieved not through the use of formal meter, but through the strategic manipulation of momentum—a manipulation that often emulates the straightforward, clipped cadence of the military instructor.

RHYME SCHEME

As a free verse poem, there is no rhyme scheme in "Naming of Parts." In a way, this aligns with the military instructor's dry, straightforward way of speaking, since the lack of rhyming lends the poem a certain sense of seriousness.

To that end, whatever internal slant rhymes exist in the poem feel mostly incidental. For instance, the slant rhyme in line 27 doesn't feel particularly significant: "And the breech, and the cocking-piece, and the point balance." Of course, "breech" and "piece" create a slant rhyme and this is perhaps adds a small amount of euphony to the line, but the effect this has on the overall poem is minor.

What's more important, it seems, is the repetition that runs throughout "Naming of Parts," which further accentuates the instructor's procedural, monotonous way of speaking. Similarly, the poem's *lack* of a rhyme scheme is more notable than the few instances of internal slant rhyme because it is this lack that underscores the instructor's emotionless, joyless attitude.

SPEAKER

It is common to interpret the poem as having two speakers. The first is a military instructor who addresses a group of new soldiers and delivers a lecture about the terminology and uses of various parts on the soldiers' military-issued rifles. The second speaker—according to many readers—is one of the soldiers listening to this lecture. Except, of course, that the soldier isn't actually listening very closely, and is instead paying attention to the nearby gardens as they teem with life and the vitality of springtime.

Under this interpretation, the two speakers split each stanza, with the instructor delivering the rifle lesson for the first three and a half lines and then the soldier taking over in the final two and a half lines. The overall structure of the poem supports this reading, since each stanza features a significant shift in tone and perspective halfway through the fourth line. In fact, this change is quite evident even if readers choose to interpret the poem as having only one speaker, demonstrating that—at the very least—the instructor's lesson is interrupted in each stanza by brief observations of nature.

Furthermore, the instructor's general personality is easily discernible because of the straightforward, clipped cadence of the lecture, suggesting that this is a person who would rather focus on the mundane project of cataloguing rifle parts than on the violent implications of actually using a weapon during wartime. Despite the frequent interruptions, then, the instructor's procedural mentality comes through quite clearly, whereas the daydreaming soldier's personality is a bit harder to pinpoint, since the only thing readers know about this soldier is that he can't stay focused on the lecture.

SETTING

“Naming of Parts” takes place on a military base in early spring, as a military official addresses a group of soldiers and teaches them about their rifles. There are no more specifics beyond that, though readers can assume, based on the fact that the poem came out in 1942, that it more broadly takes place during World War II.

The mention of the Japonica plant in line 4 (“Today we ... Japonica”) also suggests something about the poem’s context. Japonica is native to Japan, and the poem’s author, Henry Reed, served as a Japanese translator during World War II. The mention of this plant thus hints at the conflict between the United Kingdom and Japan during WWII. The fact that, even as the (ostensibly British) soldiers learn how to use their weapons, the Japonica “glistens” nearby indicates that the beauty of nature flourishes in spite of human conflict. Nature doesn’t care who’s fighting, as made clear by the presence of Japonica in the context of a British military training session.

CONTEXT

LITERARY CONTEXT

Because "Naming of Parts" is a poem about war and, more specifically, about Henry Reed's experience as a soldier during World War II, it belongs to an important category of 20th-century poetry devoted to unveiling the true nature of war. This genre was firmly established during and after World War I, when poets like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, and Rupert Brooke focused on the inglorious aspects of military life during one of history's bloodiest conflicts.

Like "Naming of Parts," Wilfred Owen's poem "Exposure" focuses on the monotony that sometimes arises during war. However, poems about World War I (including ones like "Exposure") are often harsh and gritty, dealing with violence in an unflinching, immediate manner.

In contrast, "Naming of Parts" exists as a different kind of war poem. After all, the style of combat in World War I was much different from the style of combat in World War II, which was fought more remotely. Indeed, the violence of World War I was immediate and visceral, since soldiers faced one another on actual battlefields, firing at each other from trenches. The battles of World War II, on the other hand, were much more spread out and involved machinery like tanks, airplanes, submarines, and guns that were more powerful than the ones used in World War I.

This emphasis on violent machinery is reflected in "Naming of Parts," which focuses on the parts of a rifle instead of on World War II itself. Other famous poems that center around the machinery of World War II include Randall Jarrett's "The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," Oscar Williams's "On the Summer Sky the Airship Hangs," and Karl Shapiro's "Troop Train." On the whole, all of these poems—both those about World War I and those about World War II—belong to the genre of war poetry that made up a large portion of the 20th century's overall poetic output.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

"Naming of Parts" was published in 1942. World War II began in 1939 and ended in 1945, meaning that the poem was published roughly in the middle of the war. The United Kingdom went to war with Japan in late 1941, which is why Henry Reed was assigned to be a Japanese translator and code breaker. This decision was made because he was fluent in French, Italian, and Greek, but he never actually travelled to Japan, nor did he take to Japanese as a language.

All in all, "Naming of Parts" is one of the very few war poems that Reed wrote, composing it during his basic training. In fact, he didn't write many poems at all in his life, transitioning after the war to become a radio broadcaster for the BBC, where he wrote several radio plays. As it stands, "Naming of Parts" is his best known and most enduring piece of writing, since it not only subtly critiques violence and war, but also celebrates classic poetic themes having to do with nature, beauty, and vitality.

MORE RESOURCES

EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- About the Author — Learn more about Henry Reed in this short overview of his life and work. (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/henry-reed)
- The Enfield Rifle — The rifle in question in "Naming of Parts" is, in all likelihood, the Lee-Enfield rifle. Read here about the long history of the Enfield rifle and its use in the British military in both World War I and World War II. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lee%E2%80%93Enfield)
- A Reading of the Poem — Listen to the famous Welsh poet Dylan Thomas read "Naming of Parts" (but don't spell Henry Reed's name incorrectly like the person who uploaded this video did!). (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ixXIopiSvXI)
- Lessons of the War — Check out the five other poems that accompany "Naming of Parts" in Henry Reed's "Lessons of the War." (http://www.solearabiantree.net/namingofparts/judgingdistances.php)
- A Very Great Man Indeed — Listen to one of Henry Reed's radio plays, "A Very Great Man Indeed," which aired on BBC in 1953. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZZMgECu5lAI&t=10s)

HOW TO CITE

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