

Read the poem and make notes on each verse following these points of enquiry: –

1. Who and what is being presented in the first verse? Put this into your own words. Where would you say the speaker of the poem is standing? What is the speaker's perspective?
  2. There are changes of focus in the second verse. What are these changes? (Think of how Hughes changes focus in 'Wind'.)
  3. The focus changes again in the third verse, how? Think of the mechanical function of a camera lens.
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Closer reading ...

4. The six young men are seen as fixed in time – what technique, beyond the key image of the photograph itself, does the poet use to achieve this?
5. The key theme of the first verse can be seen as change. What changes and what doesn't? Identify the lines that express the change that occurs/does not occur.
6. Celluloid is a very fragile medium. Old movies – many early silent films and 'talkies' have since disintegrated. Which predominant fricative alliterative consonant in the early part of the first verse seems to represent the flimsy and impermanent nature of the snapshot? How does this mirror the key theme of change and impermanence throughout the poem?
7. A famous line from a World War One poem seems to find its echo in the first verse. Do you know what it is? It is always read at the Remembrance Day Service at the Cenotaph in London and at memorial services throughout the land. What do you think its key effect is on the reader – how do we feel when reading it?
8. What is the immediate impact on the reader of the final line of the first verse? What type of language is used to achieve this effect?
9. The third verse ends with a smile. This smile is not linked to laughter, but what? What would you say is smiling – 'forty years rotting into soil'?
10. The poet uses a technique familiar to readers of World War One poetry to involve the reader in the final verse. What is the name of this technique and how does it achieve this effect?