On another occasion, we got sent out

to tackle looters raiding a bank.

And one of them legs it up the road,

probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else

are all of the same mind,

so all three of us open fire.

Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

I see every round as it rips through his life –

I see broad daylight on the other side.

So we’ve hit this looter a dozen times

and he’s there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.

One of my mates goes by

and tosses his guts back into his body.

Then he’s carted off in the back of a lorry.

End of story, except not really.

His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol

I walk right over it week after week.

Then I’m home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.

Sleep, and he’s probably armed, and possibly not.

Dream, and he’s torn apart by a dozen rounds.

And the drink and the drugs won’t flush him out –

he’s here in my head when I close my eyes,

dug in behind enemy lines,

not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-

smothered land

or six-feet-under in desert sand,

but near to the knuckle, here and now,

his bloody life in my bloody hands.

Simon Armitage

If you want to help your understanding you could:

-Look up PTSD (Post traumatic stress disorder), what are some of the stories and experiences of sufferers,

how has it changed their life and how can this be related to the speaker in the poem?

-Go through the poem and highlight the words and phrases which help show the speakers tone.
**Themes:**

The poem is originally set in a warzone and naturally looks at conflict in a direct way. However, it also looks heavily at the aftereffects of conflict and the long-term effects it has on the people involved. Power is partly shown in this as well, firstly the soldiers' power over life and death but later the power over their own memory and experiences. Mental health and morality are also key in this.

**Structure:**

The poem is written in 8 stanzas, the last of which is a couplet which leaves the poem on a dramatic end note. It does not rhyme and the poem is a monologue, using very conversational asides and syntax to structure the sentences into a very conversational tone “end of story, not really”. There is also a lot of *enjambment* and *caesura* used to emphasise the natural speech patterns of the speaker. Another key factor in this poem is the use of *colloquialism* (slang) and *personal pronouns* to give it a sense of *realism*, “One of my mates,”.

There is a loose set of rhymes in the poem, often internal and used to give an almost childish aspect to the horror of the warzone. It perhaps suggests how numb this soldier is to what is happening.

**Numb:**

The speaker in the poem (the soldier) appears to be numb to the horror of the experience of war, most of the horrific images of death and killing are juxtaposed to the casual nature of the way the soldier speaks, using slang and clichés. In part this reflects a conflict in himself, the way he sees these events and how they affect him, but also his way of trying to maintain control, by trivialising the whole experience.

**Higher Marks**

- The poem explores the events in a soldier's life which in turn trigger PTSD, it is worth noting the memory hurts him more than the event itself.

- The colloquial nature of the speaker's voice is used to create a sense of heightened realism to the piece.

- The poet suggests a conflict in the speaker's mind, an avoidance of the reality of what happened which haunts him.

**Lower Marks**

- The poem looks at the experiences of a soldier at war and how he suffers from the memory.

- The poem uses a lot of slang to show the tone of the speaker.

- The way he talks about what happened and the actual content of what happened don't seem to match up.

**By the end of this you should know:**

**Space for your notes:**