**English 10-2/20-2**

**Short Texts Unit: Taking Sides**

**Reading #2: Casualties by George Elliott Clarke**

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is the “we” in the poem? What are “we” watching? Where are “we” watching from?
2. Look at the date in the title of the poem. What is its significance?
3. Make a list of words in the poem that describe war, pain, or death, or words that fall under the category of *casualties*.
4. What words or phrases does the author intend to emphasize? What do these words/phrases have in common? What poetic device is being used in the lines, “rat-a-tat-tat tactics, / stratagems ...” What other poetic devices are used?
5. Where does the poet intend there to be pauses and stops? How do you know? What is the effect if it is read in a different manner?
6. Effective adjectives: the author has very carefully chosen his adjectives. What effect is created by using the word *merciless* to modify *January*? What image do the words *blurred children’s charred bodies* bring to mind? How did you react to that image when you first read it? What other more or less powerful adjectives could have been chosen?

Assignment Questions:

1. Read the poem silently. What are 3 questions you need to have answered in order to fully understand the poem? How will you find out the answers to your questions? /5
2. Read the article: *Warfare’s linguistic Novocain*. Explain how the words in your list from #3 above relate to the last two lines of the poem which read, “The first casualty of war/ is language.” You may reference the article if you wish, but it is mostly for a bit of extra information to help you answer the question. /5
3. Although the poet seems to detest war, violence, death, and destruction, what bothers him or her even more? Support your answer with at least 2 quotes from the poem. /5
4. In your own words, explain the purpose of this poem. Do you agree or disagree with the poet’s point? Explain your response. /5

Total Marks: /20

Please put your name and the assignment at the top of the assignment!

Article: *Warfare’s Linguistic Novocain* <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=TqRJAAAAIBAJ&sjid=fg0NAAAAIBAJ&pg=1361%2C3205022>

Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xfWxUA1S8xU>

**Casualties**

**January 16, 1991**

Poem by George Elliott Clarke

Snow annihilates all beauty

this merciless January.

A white blitzkrieg, Klan – cruel,

arsons and obliterates.

Piercing lies numb us to pain.

Nerves and words fail so we

can't feel agony or passion,

so we can’t flinch or cry,

when we spy blurred children’s

charred bodies protruding

from the smoking rubble

of statistics or see a man

stumbling in a blizzard

of bullets. Everything is

normal, absurdly normal.

We see, as if through a snow-

storm, darkly. Reporters

rat-a-tat-tat- tactics,

stratagems. Missiles bristle

behind newspaper lines.

Our minds chill; we weather

the storm, huddle in dreams.

Exposed, though, a woman,

lashed by lighting, repents

of her flesh, becomes a living

X-ray, “collateral damage.”

The first casualty of war

is language.