



# Charles Dickens; Poets of the First World War; William Shakespeare

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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These titles were first published in 1999 in Evans's 'Writers in Britain' series. The areas introduced in each full colour double-page spread are those you might expect: for example, 'Dickens and childhood' and 'Dickens and Christmas'; 'The origins of war' and 'Over the top'; or 'Companies and theatres' and 'Actor, playwright and businessman'. Since the target readership is evidently 11-14, it makes sense to meet the writers by visiting such well-known features of the territory. The illustrations, photographs and design are inviting. The series authors have also found a voice and vocabulary which seems nicely judged for their readership; relaxed, yet well-informed. Inevitably, the Shakespeare text is the most general, given the lack of hard evidence concerning its subject; but Stewart Ross provides a useful context for the man and his plays.

The challenge for the creators of the double page spread, however, has always been to provide a way for readers to *enter* the text in order to learn. The inevitable brevity of the topic summarised in two pages may leave a young reader interested, admiring even, but rather in the mode of the coffee-table book browser. No doubt the creators of these attractive books would be disappointed if students did little more than slavishly reproduce paragraphs or images to ornament their course work. But it would, I think, need the intervention of a teacher to enable students to engage to the point of formulating their own ideas and questions. Solitary readers would need to be highly motivated and already well-versed in the writers' work to do that - and if they were, they would probably be searching for something of greater depth than these books set out to provide in the allotted space. And they'd probably be using the net anyway.

Running Order:

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