

ENGLISH STANDARD

I was only 19

I was only 19 is a lyric written by Redgum describes a life of a nineteen year old man has been taken away to serve his country during the Vietnam War through conscription in a state that he was forced to go even though he was still young. It reflects the horror and traumatising times that the man had to go through, especially the fear of losing his life. The composer has utilised a variety of techniques to portray the men's experiences of moving into a different world and his feelings at that time.

The song tells the story in first person view point thus has a very descriptive and personal tone. The second verse draws the audience to the main character and helps us visualise him standing there with his slouch hat, "SLR" (his Australian army uniform). This is achieved through the rhyme of "greens, clean and nineteen" as it draws the readers' attention to the descriptive words. With the repetition of the line "God help me, I was only nineteen", it reinforces how young and hopeless he was, hence engages the audience to sympathise his feelings. With the use of repeated rhetorical questions like "why I still can't get to sleep?" throughout the song also enables the audience to walk in the young man's shoes of not being able to sleep at night due his immense fear from attacks and the horrific experiences he have been through. Thus these techniques vividly portray the character's emotions during the war.

Even though the young man is forced into a world that brings horrific challenges to him, "for months" he and other soldiers have been trying their best to make the most of the situation and obscure their fear away – "we made our tents a home, VB and pinups on the lockers." They put posters of pin-up girls on their lockers and relaxing at times with VB which symbolises home in this context as it is a popular beer from home. Therefore this stanza reveals how the character copes with the challenges in the new place and also allows the audience to see how much he misses his home at that time.

At certain times in our lives, we come to situations that bring us great challenges and difficulties, and that is when we need to learn ways to overcome the problems. Through Redgum's use of rich diversity of techniques, he successfully portrayed a young man's experiences in the new world – the Vietnam War, his immense fear felt at that time and the ways he tried to overcome the horrific situation. As a result, this allows the audience to learn the young man's resilience and encourages us to face the difficulties in our lives.