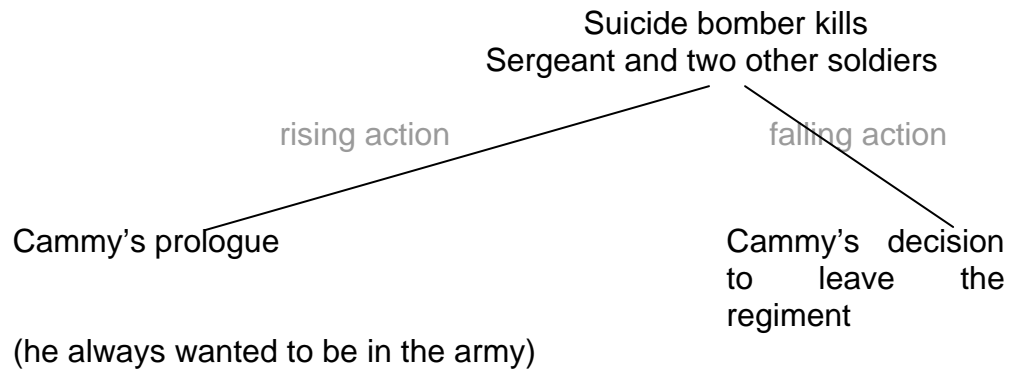


Black Watch

Author	Gregory Burke
Published by	Faber and Faber, London
Published in	2007
Price	€12.99
Genre	State-of-the-nation play Political/Social drama
Length	112 pages
Summary	<i>Black Watch</i> is a play narrated through the soldiers' eyes. It reveals conflicts that soldiers of a legendary regiment like the Black Watch have to deal with while being part of a war on terror.
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two main plots are interwoven.• Time and space frequently switch from present to past. The plot in the present takes place in a pub, where a writer interviews a group of Black Watch soldiers that just left the regiment. In flashbacks, scenes of the past events at Camp Dogwood in Iraq are recaptured after it was talked about in the interview with the writer in the pub.• There are several embedded subplots that connect the present to the history of the Black Watch. The merging of time and places brings history, past, present and future together.• <i>Black Watch</i> is not a typical play it has an informal structure without acts or scenes. It is only slightly structured by 24 headlines, which might indicate different scenes.• The storyline begins with a prologue of one of the soldiers, Cammy, who somehow appears to be the main character. Preceding the prologue the play starts off with military pipe and drum music followed by an introducing voice-over that directly addresses the audience.• Although the play has a rather open structure that goes beyond the conventional model, an overall storyline can be recognised:

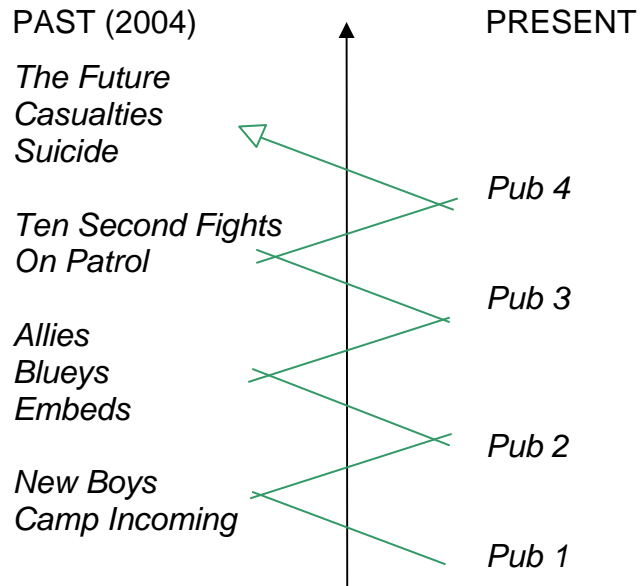


<p>Characters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The group of soldiers, who encounter the audience in the very first pub scene, are at the centre of the character constellation of <i>Black Watch</i>. • One soldier, Cammy, is placed in front, since he is the one who builds up the frame narration. • Three other characters stand outside this circle. For the scenes in Iraq, there are the officer and the sergeant, for the pub scenes there is the writer.¹
<p>Topics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implicit criticism of a highly visible element of the British foreign policy, the Iraq War • Ordinary soldiers of the regiment tell their own stories. • The role of the media, the relentless boredom of almost every passing hour of the war and the asymmetry between the power of the west and people of Iraq.
<p>Available Media</p>	<p>There is a very good BBC TV production available on DVD. Watching the play is absolutely essential, since it was created to be watched and not to be read only. Although it is important to watch the play, the production notes that are highlighted in the text edition and the included production photographs give a good first expression of what the words alone cannot convey.</p>
<p>Helpful Secondary Literature</p>	<p>Cull, Nicholas J. <i>The National Theatre of Scotland's Black Watch: Theatre as Cultural Diplomacy</i>. Web. 24 March. 2011.</p>
<p>Language</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Black Watch</i> makes rich use of dialects and sociolects. What makes it difficult to understand on the one hand makes it all the more authentic on the other hand. The use of regional speech patterns, the Scottish dialect, likewise contributes to authenticity. If they are assisted in the understanding process, the rich use of dialect and sociolect allows the students to get a proper image of the cultural characteristics as well as the regional identities and social background of the characters.

¹ See Appendix 1.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The dialogues in the pub are based on real interviews, thus use a reliable form of sociolect. • Since language “is one of the key areas in the study of drama” and it is “largely through language that meaning in drama is communicated” (Baumbach, Nünning 76) it is primarily important for students to understand the language in the play. The language in <i>Black Watch</i> is definitely difficult to understand at first; therefore students should be assisted in the reading process. Basic rules of the Scottish dialect can be given in an introductory lesson. This can help students to get over the first obstacles of understanding the play.
Non-verbal devices	In his Director’s Note, John Tiffany explains that in the process of production the question of publishing the text arose. Because the production cannot be understood from the words alone he “ha[s] written production notes, [...] and chosen production photographs to correspond with moments and sequences that weren’t spoken but were still trying to communicate something to an audience” (<i>Black Watch</i> , xiii).
Semiotics	Sounds and music create the special atmosphere in a play. In <i>Black Watch</i> there are sounds of explosions that produce a military war atmosphere. In contrast to this war atmosphere, the traditional songs of the Black Watch emphasize the feeling of brotherhood and enhance the tradition of the regiment.
Suitable Age	16-18 years
Activities	<p>For a deeper understanding of the play the teacher might prepare some units that give the students further background information. Different learning methods can be taken into account.</p> <p>Pre-reading activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internet research on the Black Watch regiment can be a preparatory step as well as researching the background story of the Iraq war is helpful to understand the setting of the play. <p>While-reading activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The play has a very open structure with frequent time and space switches. It is thus necessary for the students to restructure the play for themselves during the reading process. The interrelation of the two main plots and the embedded subplots may at first seem confusing but end up in logical order when the structure is finally clear. • It might be good to create a timeline with the students so that they have a visible aid to understand the structure. Out of the interview situation in the pub (present) the Iraq scenes follow in form of flashbacks. Therefore the action seems to go back and forth.

- The students can make use of the headlines that title every new scene in the play and create an illustration of the structure of the two main plots that might look like the following:



<p>Teachability Pros</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Black Watch</i> is a theatre piece that is absolutely topical. It depicts conflicts soldiers have to deal with in Iraq. The morality of fighting is questioned in a very special way. <i>Black Watch</i> appears as a multi-layered, both political and social drama. Since there is a very good DVD production available, the play is accessible. Watching the production is necessary, since the meaning cannot be conveyed through the text on its own.
<p>Teachability Cons</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In terms of practicability the question of language is to be taken into consideration, the use of dialect and sociolect might discourage students from reading at first, yet the vulgar and colloquial language contributes to a very authentic insight into the life of the soldiers.
<p>Overall Evaluation</p>	<p>The play offers a great chance to teach these highly topical themes. Although language and content as such are rude and violent, a very authentic insight into the life of the soldiers is given. The play shows the conflicts soldiers have faced in Iraq and Afghanistan; it talks about the changing nature of warfare and about the morality of fighting.</p>

