Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Class\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Gas Attack, 1916

The First World War accelerated the development of new technologies designed to improve the ability to kill an enemy: the machine gun, the tank, the airplane, the zeppelin, and gas to name a few. Among these, gas was probably the crudest, certainly the most capricious - a change in wind direction could spell disaster. Initially, gas cylinders were simply placed along the front lines facing the enemy trenches. Once the wind was deemed favorable, the cylinders were opened and the gas floated with the breeze, carrying death to the enemy. Later, gas was packed into artillery shells and delivered behind enemy lines. No matter the method of delivery, its impact could produce hell on earth. Chlorine and phosgene gases attacked the lungs ripping the very breath out of its victims. Mustard gas was worse. At least a respirator provided some defense against the chlorine and phosgene gases. Mustard gas attacked the skin - moist skin such as the eyes, armpits, and groin. It burned its way into its victim leaving searing blisters and unimaginable pain.

*Arthur Empey was an American who fought in the British Army. We join his story after he has been made a member of a machine gun crew and sits in a British trench peering towards German lines. Conditions are perfect for an enemy gas attack - a slight breeze blowing from the enemy's direction - and the warning has been passed along to be on the lookout:*

"We had a new man at the periscope, on this afternoon in question; I was sitting on the fire step, cleaning my rifle, when he called out to me: 'There's a sort of greenish, yellow cloud rolling along the ground out in front, it's coming ---'

But I waited for no more, grabbing my bayonet, which was detached from the rifle, I gave the alarm by banging an empty shell case, which was hanging near the periscope. At the same instant, gongs started ringing down the trench, the signal for Tommy to don his respirator, or smoke helmet, as we call it.

Gas travels quietly, so you must not lose any time; you generally have about eighteen or twenty seconds in which to adjust your gas helmet….

For a minute, pandemonium reigned in our trench, - Tommies adjusting their helmets, bombers running here and there, and men turning out of the dugouts with fixed bayonets, to man the fire step…

German gas is heavier than air and soon fills the trenches and dugouts, where it has been known to lurk for two or three days, until the air is purified by means of large chemical sprayers. We had to work quickly, as *Fritz* generally follows the gas with an infantry attack. A company man on our right was too slow in getting on his helmet; he sank to the ground, clutching at his throat, and after a few spasmodic twistings, went West (died). It was horrible to see him die, but we were powerless to help him.

*"Gas Attack, 1916," EyeWitness to History, eyewitnesstohistory.com (1999).*

1. “Tommies” is the nickname for British soldiers during WWI. The word “Fritz” is used on line   
 37. Who is Fritz referring to? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Underline the 2 words in the last   
 paragraph that helped you figure out the meaning of the word.

2. What words and phrases in lines 6-15 and 30-31 help you to understand the meaning of

the word capricious? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. What is the meaning of the word *don* on line 28?  
 A. a tutor B. to put on  
 C. to take on D. to call someone by a title