THE CHARGE OF THE LIGHT BRIGADE
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

- **Alfred, Lord Tennyson** was an English poet writing during the Victorian period (that means during the reign of **Queen Victoria**, or 1837-1901). Tennyson was a superstar poet during his life and was named poet laureate in 1850.

- Tennyson published "**The Charge of the Light Brigade**" in an English newspaper called *The Examiner* on December 9, 1854.
• "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is a narrative poem about the Charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava during the Crimean War.

• **Place:** On the southern Crimean coast in the Ukraine.

• **Combatants:** British, French and Turkish troops against the Imperial Russian Army.
SUMMARY

• The poem tells the story of a brigade consisting of 600 soldiers who rode on horseback into the “valley of death” for half a league (about one and a half miles). They were obeying a command to charge the enemy forces that had been seizing their guns.

• Not a single soldier was discouraged or distressed by the command to charge forward, even though all the soldiers realized that their commander had made a terrible mistake: “Someone had blundered.”

• The role of the soldier is to obey and “not to make reply...not to reason why,” so they followed orders and rode into the “valley of death.”
SUMMARY

• The 600 soldiers were assaulted by the shots of shells of canons in front and on both sides of them. Still, they rode courageously forward toward their own deaths: “Into the jaws of Death / Into the mouth of hell / Rode the six hundred.”

• The soldiers struck the enemy gunners with their unsheathed swords (“sabres bare”) and charged at the enemy army while the rest of the world looked on in wonder.

• They rode into the artillery smoke and broke through the enemy line, destroying their Cossack and Russian opponents. Then they rode back from the offensive, but they had lost many men so they were “not the six hundred” any more.
SUMMARY

• Canons behind and on both sides of the soldiers now assaulted them with shots and shells. As the brigade rode “back from the mouth of hell,” soldiers and horses collapsed; few remained to make the journey back.

• The world marvelled at the courage of the soldiers; indeed, their glory is undying: the poem states these noble 600 men remain worthy of honor and tribute today.
QUESTIONS

• Do you think this poem glorifies war? Does it criticize it? How can you tell?

• Do you believe that war is sometimes necessary? Do you think your feelings about that issue change the way you read this poem?

• Do you think someone could write a poem like this today? How do we celebrate the courage of soldiers in the modern world?

• Do events like this one from the Crimean War seem really far away to you? Did this poem make them feel more alive?

• Is it noble to follow orders without asking questions? This might sound like a loaded question, but we're serious. Did the poem make you see the issue differently?