

## **Remembrance Day in Poetry, Music & Stories**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### ***In Flanders Fields***

*Text by Lt. Col. John McCrae (1872-1918)*

*Music & Arrangement by Lydia Adams*

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row  
    That mark our place; and in the sky  
    The larks, still bravely singing, fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
    Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
    In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
    The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
    If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
    In Flanders fields.

Write down everything you know about Remembrance Day and why we observe it.  
*(Think about causes, people involved, events, locations, writings, etc.)*

## In Flanders Fields: Reading and Remembrance Project 2005

*Durham West Arts Centre*

This poem first appeared anonymously in Punch magazine December 8, 1915. John McCrae composed the poem in May of that year. He described it as, "literally born of fire and blood during the hottest phase of the second battle of Ypres." McCrae was a surgeon attached to the First Brigade Canadian Artillery, posted to a dressing-station near the Yser canal. From his dugout entrance he saw row on row of the white crosses of the military cemetery and in the distance the smouldering city of Ypres.

McCrae also saw poppies. Poppies flower when everything else in their direct neighbourhood is dead. Their seeds lie on the ground for years and only when there are no more competing flowers or shrubs in their vicinity will the seeds sprout. In May 1915 there was a great deal of rooted up soil on the battlefields of the Western Front and as a result, when McCrae wrote his poem, the poppies blossomed as never before.

Poppies can be used to derive opium from which morphine is made. Morphine, as a strong painkiller, was used to put wounded soldiers to sleep. Some medical doctors used high doses of morphine to aid the incurably wounded in their misery. Although McCrae had been a doctor for years and had served in the Boer War in South Africa, he found it difficult to get used to the suffering, screams and blood in his small dressing station in the Ypres salient. He wrote, "I wish I could embody on paper some of the varied sensations of that seventeen days ... seventeen days of Hades! At the end of the first day if anyone had told us we had to spend seventeen days there, we would have folded our hands and said it could not have been done. For 17 days, wrote McCrae, "gun-fire and rifle-fire never ceased for sixty seconds."

One death in particular affected McCrae. A young friend and former student, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer of Ottawa had been killed by a shell burst on May 2, 1915. Lieutenant Helmer was buried later that night in a little cemetery just outside McCrae's dressing station. McCrae performed the funeral ceremony in the absence of the chaplain, reciting from memory some passages from the Church of England's "Order of Burial of the Dead". This happened in darkness as it was forbidden to make light for security reasons. The next evening, sitting on the rear step of an ambulance parked near the Yser Canal, just a few hundred yards north of Ypres, Major McCrae took twenty minutes of precious rest time to scribble fifteen lines of verse into a notebook.

A young soldier, Cyril Allinson, was delivering mail and stood nearby as McCrae wrote. "His face was very tired but calm as he wrote. He looked around from time to time, his eyes straying to Helmer's grave." When McCrae finished writing, he took his mail from Allinson and without saying a word, handed his pad to the young NCO. Allinson was moved by what he read. "The poem was an exact description of the scene in front of us both. He used the word blow in that line because the poppies actually were being blown that morning by a gentle east wind. It never occurred to me at that time that it would ever be published. It seemed to me just an exact description of the scene."

Allinson's account corresponds with the words of the commanding officer at the spot. Lieutenant Colonel Edward Morrison reported, "A couple of hundred yards away, there was the headquarters of an infantry regiment and on numerous occasions during the sixteen day battle, we saw how they crept out to bury their dead during lulls in the fighting. So the rows of crosses increased day after day, until in no time at all it had become quite a sizeable cemetery. Just as John described it, it was not uncommon early in the morning to hear the larks singing in the brief silences between the burst of the shells and the returning salvos of our own nearby guns."

The poem, initially called "We shall not sleep" nearly went unpublished. Dissatisfied with it, McCrae tossed the poem away. Morrison retrieved it and sent it to newspapers in England. The Spectator rejected it but Punch published it.

McCrae was born in Guelph, Ontario in 1872. After graduating from the University of Toronto and John Hopkins University in Baltimore, he joined the staff of the Medical School at McGill. McCrae died of pneumonia in 1918 while on active service.

McCrae's small volume of verse titled, *In Flanders Fields* was first published in 1919, after McCrae's death.

McCrae wrote his poem before the end of the war. Eventually the “quarrel with the foe” ended. Is this an appropriate reason NOT to include the third verse? If you were an editor (of a poetry book, website, newspaper, etc.) would you include the third stanza? Why or why not?

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In form, *In Flanders Fields* is called a rondeau. This French form consists of 13 lines divided into three stanzas (verses) with refrains consisting of the first half of the first line, repeated at the end of the second and third stanzas. The effect of the refrain is to bind the ideas into a neatly tied parcel of thought.

The rhyme scheme is ***a a b b a, a a b, a a b b a***. These features of the rondeau form indicate the tight framework that McCrae used.

**First**, label the lines of the piece with the rhyme scheme.

**Next**, underline the refrain.

**Then** answer the following question: Considering what you have read from eyewitness accounts of McCrae’s writing the poem, what is remarkable about the poem’s composition in this form?

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# Canadian Indigenous Code Talkers Remain Unacknowledged

*November 05, 2020*

The ability to send encrypted, unintelligible messages is crucial for keeping the wraps on military campaigns. The Germans, in the 1920s, developed the Enigma machine which scrambled messages using a letter substitution system and variable rotors. Decoding the messages required knowledge of the exact settings of the wheels. The Germans believed the Enigma code was unbreakable and used it extensively for transmitting communications during WWII. The British, with input from Polish engineers, were eventually able to decipher the messages. And the Germans were able to break the British naval codes. The weak links in coded messages were the reliance on recognized language and numerical systems.

Enter the Indigenous “code talkers” whose messages were undecipherable. Why? Because Indigenous languages are historically oral so the Axis codebreakers had no written reference from which to work.

Typically associated with members of the Navajo Nation and WWII, the Americans initially used code talkers during WWI. The Choctaw Telephone Squad were the first code talkers, but it wasn't until WWII that the US military actively recruited and trained Native Americans from many nations as communicators of indecipherable messages.

The Navajo language, with its complex syntax and phonology and numerous dialects, was particularly suitable for this purpose. It was virtually unintelligible to those without extensive immersion. Very few non-Navajo were familiar with the language at the outbreak of WWII, and the language was unwritten at that time. Additionally, many Navajos spoke both English and their home language.

The men were sequestered and under guard while they worked to develop and memorize complex codes.

“The first type of code they created, Type 1 code, consisted of 26 Navajo terms that stood for individual English letters that could be used to spell out a word. For instance, the Navajo word for “ant,” wo-la-chee, was used to represent the letter “a” in English.

Type 2 code contained words that could be directly translated from English into Navajo, and the code talkers also developed a dictionary of 211 terms (later expanded to 411) for military words and names that didn't originally exist in the Navajo language. For example, since there was no existing Navajo word for "submarine," the code talkers agreed to use the term besh-lo, which translates to "iron fish." [1]

Several presidents have honoured native American code talkers. Code Talkers Recognition Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-420) was signed into law by President George W. Bush on November 15, 2008. At this time, there are just four remaining Navajo code talkers alive.

Relatively unknown are the Canadian code talkers who also developed, memorized and transmitted messages in code based on their language, and whose contributions were just as vital as their American counterparts in World War II.

While enlisted men from different nations were selected as code talkers, it appears there were more Cree code talkers. This preference may be due to more Cree speaking men enlisted, or it may be because the language was particularly suitable as there were different dialects, it was complex, and little known outside the communities in which it was spoken.

There are a few reasons why the Canadian code talkers are relatively unknown. The Canadian government has never recognized them, nor are their contributions included in textbooks.

Another reason may be the oath of secrecy the code speakers took. The majority of them carried that secret with them to their grave, not even telling their closest family members. The government lifted the commitment to secrecy in 1963, but that information either did not reach many of the veterans or their experiences in the war and treatment upon their return home was so painful they could not share.

Charles Checker Tompkins, a Métis of Cree and European ancestry, was 85 and near the end of his life when two documentarians from the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian knocked on his door and asked if he would be interested in telling his story. His family was stunned as he had honoured his oath of secrecy and had never spoken of this aspect of his experiences during the war.

All of the Indigenous code talkers from Canada have now passed on.

**After reading the article and watching the documentary, answer the following questions:**

Why are veterans so honoured within the Indigenous community?

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Why were Indigenous peoples so critical to the Second World War?

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How were Indigenous people's lives changed upon their return to Canada and the U.S.?

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Why hasn't the Canadian government formally acknowledged Canada's Cree code talkers publicly, the way Navajo code talkers have been recognized in the U.S.?

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Remembrance Day is an opportunity to reflect, remember, and honour the many people who made sacrifices to protect their communities.

As the major conflicts like World War I and II pass further into history and many of the stories from those who lived through these times are lost, how can we learn from the past in a meaningful way?

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What is something you already do, or might consider doing, on Remembrance Day in order to learn or honour the people and the sacrifices they made?

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