

Historica Canada Education Portal

Soldier Poetry of the First World War

Overview

Students learn more of the First World War by way of a study of the Canadian, British, and American soldier poets that served in France and Belgium.

Aims

Students will search and read the poetry of their soldier poet. It is hoped that they will choose a poem or two that appeals to them and ones in which they can examine word choice, imagery, mood, and figurative language. The pair of students will research and write a biography of their soldier poet. The aim here is that the students will learn about specific details of their soldier including birth, country of origin, enlistment dates, regiments, and battles fought, as well as any information of interest learned. The research also looks at the soldier's death in battle or their deployment home and life after. By learning of a specific soldier, the hope is that the information then can be broadened to a better understanding of this period in history. The students will research for images of the soldier/poet as well as maps where they can plot the soldier's travel from enlistment, to battles. The research must include visuals of the battles and aspects of war pertinent to the soldier poet. The search for images continues to the soldier's death (maybe in battle), and to a burial site. If possible a picture of the headstone or cemetery will be documented. By

looking at poetry of soldiers, it is hoped that the class will be able to get a glimpse of various opinions of war, glory, death, courage, fear, and patriotism. The aim is that the above research will be shared with the class by way of a power point presentation.

Background

Students would already have a general introduction to the First World War and Canada's role. Background must be given on specific battles of the First World War, including: Gallipoli, Ypres, the Somme, Passchendaele, and Vimy. Additionally, the teacher should provide information on various military concepts such as: trench warfare, shrapnel, gas, and shellshock. A reading and analysis of Wilfred Owen's poem, "Dulce et Decorum" would set the appropriate atmosphere. The students would be paired and assigned their soldier poet. The following is a list of soldier poets, all of which for whom research is readily available:

- Richard Aldington
- 2nd Lt. Harold Beckh
- Edmund Charles Blunden
- Vera Brittain
- Sgt. Leslie Coulson
- Wilfred Owen
- Alex Robertson
- William Hodgson
- 2nd Lt. Bernard Freeman Trotter
- Captain Cyril Horne
- Lt. Ewert Mackintosh
- Charles John Beech Masefield
- Francis Ledwidge

- James Hamish Mann
- John Masefield
- A.P. Herbert
- Robert Osbourne Dorman
- Ernest Hemingway
- Seigfried Sassoon
- Isaac Rosenberg
- Julian Grenfell
- Robert Graves
- Rupert Brooke
- Allan Seeger
- Frank Prewett
- John William Streets
- Lt. Walter Scott Stuart Lyon
- John McCrae

Activities

Time Allowance: Research in class is given three classes. The students will need one week to complete project at home. In-class presentations take four classes.

Procedures:

The pair of students will present their soldier poet to the class in a 10-15 minute powerpoint presentation. They will include samples of the soldier's poetry and one or two will be read in class. The biography of the soldier interwoven with pictures, maps, battle descriptions, and details of interest will be the focus of the presentation. Some students will want to present their project as a slide show with appropriate music. After all presentations, the class will engage in discussion of what was learned

focusing on:

- What were the reoccurring images of the First World War portrayed in many of the poems?
- What opinions of war were expressed by the soldier poets?
- The reality of war is best depicted in poetry or pictures, what is your opinion? How will you support it? A wall map can show the battle sites as well as the picture and quotes from the soldier poet.

Resources

Students will require access to the Internet and the technology to develop a power point presentation. Printed materials such as English Anthologies often include war poems and biographies of the writer. The following sites are samples of some good sites for ready information. A general Google search of sites and images is most helpful.

[Canadian War Museum](#)

[First World War Prose and Poetry](#)

[The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

