

Historica Canada Education Portal

Remembrance Day: Integrated Arts Lesson Plan

Background

Start this activity by introducing your students to Canadian writer John McCrae with the [Heritage Minute](#) about his poem "In Flanders Field" and to the Unknown Soldier by reading "Waiting in Line" from Chicken Soup for the Canadian Soul (text below).

"Waiting in Line"

As I approached the Peace Tower at the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa I saw it: a line of orderly, polite, patient, Canadians - waiting. Without a word, I joined the line and many more followed. The young man in front of me carried a backpack large enough to carry four weeks of food and clothes. He looked like a student, and I imagined he had come a long way to stand in this line. An old soldier wearing a uniform covered in medals, by-passed by the long line. With the assistance of a family member, he went straight to the front without incident. As he passed I could only smile at him.

The woman behind me, who had just arrived from work, approached the RCMP officer on duty. She returned to tell the rest of us, "It will be about twenty minutes. I suppose I can wait twenty minutes for him," she said with a smile, "he did give his life for us." Several of us murmured in agreement.

The Ottawa papers had been full of it. A Canadian Soldier who had left Canada on a First World War troop ship had died in France in 1917, and his name had been lost forever. Four years ago the Royal Canadian Legion embarked on a mission to bring him home, and a few days ago his remains had been exhumed, and then carried to the Vimy memorial in France by a French Honour Guard. In the emotional ceremony that followed he was turned over to a Canadian Honour Guard. Then this soldier with no name was flown home to Canada in a maple casket covered in a Canadian Flag.

Tomorrow, Sunday, May 28, 2000, his remains would be laid to rest at the Canadian War Memorial. But today he lay in state in his flag draped casket on Parliament Hill, to be honoured by all Canadians as a hero. The 27,500 Canadian mothers who lost their sons at war this century and never knew where their bodies lay, would now have a place to come.

As we waited in line, the flag on Parliament Hill flew at half-mast and the Peace Tower bells tolled the quarter hour a dirge for Canada's war dead, sending chills up and down my spine.

I was so proud to be a Canadian that day as I paid my respects. The number of people there astonished me. For me it was a very personal pilgrimage, but it was for thousands of others as well. As I stood in line I wondered, could this passionate display of quiet respect happen anywhere else?

When I reached the doors, I climbed the steps. The last time I had climbed those steps I was a wide-eyed child taking my first tour of the Parliament Buildings. But all tours were cancelled on this special day. Instead, I was greeted by a very young cadet who gave me a pamphlet

that told the story of the Unknown Soldier and his long journey back home. As we entered the Hall of Honour and drew close, suddenly all conversation in the line stopped, and we stood in silent awe and reverence.

Six soldiers in full dress uniform from all the divisions of the Canadian Military protected his remains. Keeping a 24-hour-a day-vigil, these soldiers, men and women, young and old, stood surrounding the coffin with heads bowed in respect for their fallen comrade. Clergy members from all religions including the First Nations communities participated in the vigil. Flowers and wreaths from Prime Minister Chretien and Governor General Adrienne Clarkson along with many others cascaded over the casket. Many other visitors had left poppies behind. The image was overwhelming.

A veteran signalled the student in front of me to proceed to pay his respects to the Unknown Soldier. As he walked forward I suddenly realized that I was at a funeral unprepared. I didn't have a poppy or even some tissue! As I waited, my anxiety built and I wondered, "What do I do? What do I say? How long should I stand there?" These questions rushed through my head. The nod came from the veteran and I moved unsteadily forward.

My anxieties disappeared as I entered into his sphere. What I did was unimportant, my presence was paramount. Suddenly I became aware of all the energy in the room. It wasn't just sorrow or remorse, it was pride! The energy washed over me like a wave. In that moment I knew I was not alone paying my respects, my whole family was there behind me. My Great-grandfather, who fought in both World Wars, stood beside me and saluted. My grandfather, who was killed in World War Two, held my hand. Although I probably only spent a moment there in front of that coffin, in

many ways it was a lifetime. As I left, I signed the registry for all of us. Over the three days he lay in state, 10,000 Canadians waited in the line to pay their respects to the Unknown Soldier.

The next day, during an emotional hour-long ceremony, the Unknown Soldier was lowered into his final resting place at the Canadian War Memorial. An Honour Guard of the Royal Canadian Regiment fired three volleys as the coffin disappeared into the new Tomb for the Unknown Soldier. In silence the audience watched as a silver cup containing soil from the Unknown Soldier's former gravesite in France was emptied over the coffin. A Parade of veterans representing Royal Canadian Legions across the country followed, scattering soil from every province and territory onto the coffin. Nine Buglers played the Last Post and Ottawa held two minutes of silence. Then, four CF-18 fighters thundered past overhead, and by the time "Oh Canada" was sung, most of the audience was in tears.

When I got home, I called my Grandma in Uxbridge and recounted every little detail of my time waiting in line for the Unknown Soldier. I needed a hug from her. And even though we were far apart we shared a virtual hug over the telephone lines.

On that day, I learned how very proud I am to be a Canadian.

This inspirational story and many others can be found in Chicken Soup for the Canadian Soul.

Jack Canfield, Mark Victor Hansen, Janet Matthews and Raymond Aaron, eds. <I>Chicken Soup for the Canadian Soul</I>. Florida: Health Communications Inc., 2002.

Activities

- Ask the students to read "In Flanders Field" out loud. Brainstorm about how the author felt when he wrote the poem.
- Locate the general area of the field on a map and discuss the soldiers' living conditions.
- Ask the students to research the war in which the Unknown Soldier fought and where he was buried.
- Ask the students to create a persona for the Unknown Soldier. (The students should be able to answer questions like: what language did he speak, how old was he, where did he come from, was he married etc.) Then instruct the students to imagine the Unknown Soldier on the same battlefield as John McCrae. The Unknown Soldier could be working with McCrae or could be one of his patients, for example. The Unknown Soldier is going to write a letter home describing John McCrae and his poem. Ask the students to think about how McCrae affected the Unknown Soldier. The letter should be limited to one or two pages.
- Once all the letters are complete, ask the students to form groups of three to six people each.
- The group will choose its favourite letter (or excerpts from several letters) to be performed in front of the class.
- The performance must include at least two art forms (ie: music, poetry, dance, art, drama) and part or all of McCrae's poem should be included in the performance. The performance should be under five minutes. These are the only limitations.
- In choosing music, students should consider music that reflects the tone and mood of the poem. In creating works of visual art, the students could research war artists and examine some of their works. In creating dance, students could research the famous

Snowbirds' missing man flight formation as a possible movement idea. In adding drama to the performance, the students may want to act out the letter or a scene between McCrae and the Unknown Soldier, for example.

- Give the students time in class to discuss and practise their performance.
- When the groups are ready to perform, ask the students in the audience to give both positive and critical feedback. The performances could be assessed on both creativity and letter content.

Extensions:

- Once the groups finish their performance, the class could combine elements from all the groups to create a short multi-disciplinary performance for the whole school.

Resources

[Tomb of the Unknown Soldier](#)

[First World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Second World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#)

[The Memory Project](#)

[Heritage Minutes – Military](#)

[National War Memorial – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Monuments of the First and Second World War – The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

[Unknown Soldier - The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)