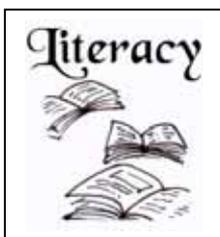


In Flanders' Fields

By Norman Jorgenson, Illustrated by Brian Harrison-Lever

It is Christmas Day on the battlefield. The enemies face each other with no-man's land between them. Christmas mail and parcels arrive amidst the cold and mud, a grim reminder that peace on earth is but a dream in the midst of war. But caught in the barbed wire in no-man's-land is a bright red robin. Will a soldier risk his life to save the bird? The illustrations in the book adds much depth to the sensitively told story of compassion at Christmas.

Background Information



The Christmas Truce of 1914 during the First World War

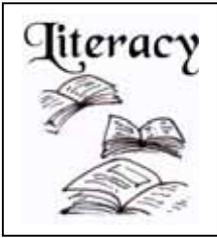
The 'Christmas Truce' of 1914, in where the soldiers on the Western Front laid down their arms on Christmas Day and met in No Man's Land, exchanging food and cigarettes, as well as playing football.

The troops acted spontaneously from goodwill, not orders. Not only did this truce actually happen, but the event was more widespread than commonly portrayed. There are many accounts of the Christmas truce, the most famous of which concerns the meeting of British and German forces although French and Belgium troops also took part. The unofficial nature of the truce meant that there was no one single cause. Some narratives tell of British troops hearing their German counterparts singing Christmas carols and joining in. From this some men crossed the lines with their hands up, and troops from the opposing side went to meet them. By the time officers realised what was happening the meetings had already taken place, and most commanders either looked the other way or joined in.

The truce lasted, in many areas, for most of Christmas day. Food and supplies were exchanged, while in some areas men borrowed tools and equipment from the enemy, in order to quickly improve their own living conditions. Many games of football were played using whatever they could find for a ball, while bodies that had become trapped within No Man's Land were buried. Most modern retellings of the Truce finish with the soldiers returning to their trenches and then fighting again the next day, but in many areas the peace lasted much longer.

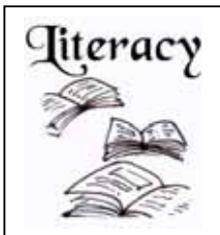
The poppies – poppy seed will lie in the ground for a long time if the soil is not disturbed. The Western Front was covered with masses of poppies which covered the graves of fallen soldiers.

Before Reading the Book



The children share what they know about ANZAC Day. The children ask their family and friends what they know about World War 1. The children write a brief summary about what they discover to share in class. Why do we say the words 'Lest we Forget'? Who is the 'Unknown Soldier'? Should we, as a nation, remember what happened in wars? Discuss.

Introducing the Book

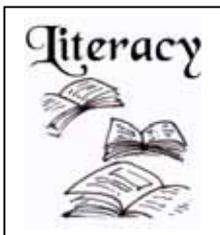


The cover

Show the children the cover of the book.



-  What is the title of the book?
-  Who wrote the book? Illustrated?
-  Where is Flanders?
-  Who is on the front cover?
-  What is the soldier doing?
-  Where does he come from?
-  What else can you see on the cover?
-  When is the book set?
-  What do you think the book is going to be about?



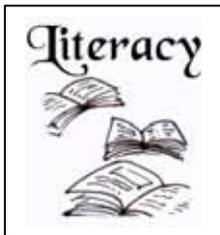
The endpapers

Look at the front endpapers. What country do these soldiers come from? How do you know? Where are they? Why are they there? What does the Western Front mean? From the endpapers, what was life like in the trenches? For example, what does the presence of rats tell you about their living conditions. Record the children's responses.

Look at the back endpapers. What country do these soldiers come from? How do you know? Where are they? Why are they there? From the back endpapers do you learn anything else about life in the trenches? Do the front and back endpapers depict different things? Would the conditions for both sides have been similar? Are they drawn as being similar? Are there any differences? Record the children's responses.

What techniques has the illustrator used to create the endpapers? Why has he chosen to do this? What is the feeling he is trying to create? Is he successful?

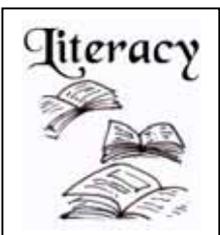
Reading the Book



Pause at various stages throughout the book and ask the children to predict what will happen next.



Responding to the Book



Imagine you are either the soldier in No Man's Land or one of the soldiers in the trenches from either side.

Write a letter home to your family telling them what happened on Christmas day.

Look at the narrator in both the written and the illustrative text. Are they telling the same story? For example, the narrative is written in third person past tense, what effect does this have on the reader?

Is the reader directly involved in the narrative or does the reader remain a spectator? Are there gaps in both the written and the illustrative text where the reader is left to construct some of the narrative by themselves?

Does *In Flanders Fields* convey a message? If yes, what is that message? Is the message conveyed in the text, the illustrations or both? Are the author and the illustrator conveying the same message? If no, what is the purpose of the book? Why has it been written?

Although the popular memory of World War One tends to be one of heavy casualties, heroism and 'wasted' life, the war also has stories of comradeship and peace. Do you think all of the events depicted in the book *In Flanders Fields* really happened? Are any parts of the story 'mythologised'? The illustrations? Discuss.



Visual Arts: Appreciation

How has the illustrator used line and colour to produce an emotional response in the reader? How do the lines convey a sense of movement? What types of lines dominate the illustrations? For example, straight

parallel lines – moving vertically or diagonally can create an alert feeling, while straight parallel lines running in a horizontal direction could create a feeling of calm and quiet.

How does the use of black and white convey a particular mood. The children can experiment with line and colour using felt-tipped pens over a grey, blue or brown colour wash.

What is the purpose of the bird? Why has a robin been chosen? Is it a symbol? Why is it depicted in almost full colour? The colour red is used to warn of danger – is this connected to the colour of the bird? The children write an exposition about the purpose of the bird in the book.



Visual Arts: 2D Wax Resist

Look at the pictures throughout the book.

Discuss with the children the colours used.

Apart from black, white and brown what other colours are used? (Red for the robin's breast and red and yellow for the fire).

Why did the illustrator use so few colours?
How does this help evoke the cold and mud and awfulness of war?



Using wax crayons, cover a piece of thin card with red colour.

Paint it over completely with black and brown paint.

When this is dry, have them scratch out pictures relevant to the story, through the dark paint to reveal the bright red underneath.

They might start with scratching out a robin and a fire, copying the pictures from the book.

When they are finished display the pictures with a short paragraph either summarising the story or using procedural text to detail how the wax resist was completed.



Music: Duration

Listen to the song *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda* by Eric Bogle (*Time to Sing! ABC*, 1993).

This song tells about one person's memories of the first ANZAC Day in World War I, and the ongoing repercussions of war in his life.

As the song is played through, have the children feel the three beats in each bar by clapping on the first beat and clicking fingers to the other two beats.



Music: Structure

Learn to sing the chorus and sing it as the song is played through again. During the verses create and play a three beat body percussion pattern.

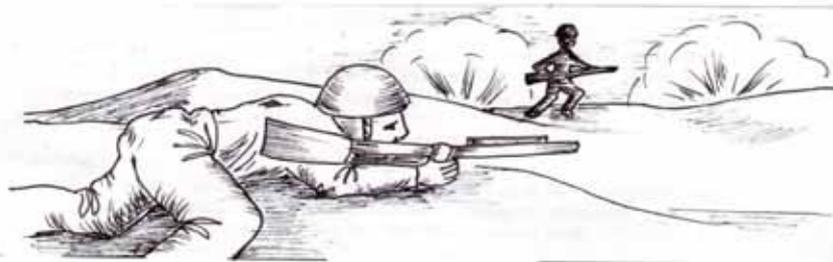


Music: Tone Colour

Divide the class into four groups and give them a copy of one verse each.

Have each group describe what is happening in their verse, first verbally, then using instruments to represent the sounds and characters in the lyrics.

Add these to the song as it is played and sung through again.



Dance: Student Compositions

Look at the pictures showing what the soldiers on each side of no-man's-land were doing in the trenches that Christmas, ie.

- *Drinking tea*
- *Reading mail*
- *Opening presents*

- *Showing their gifts to others*
- *Warming their hands around the fire*
- *Looking up the periscope for any enemies approaching*
- *Getting ready to fire on the soldier*
- *The soldier rescuing the robin*
- *Putting the guns down*
- *Singing Christmas Carols*

Divide into two groups, each group being one group of soldiers, German or British.

Find a copy of the carol *Silent Night*, which was originally written in German. This is a very popular Christmas carol, which would be found in most Christmas carol books. Play this carol as the two groups mime the different actions they are doing in the trenches.

Have each group use selected actions to create a simple dance sequence to the song, using slow, large movements on different levels, joining together at the end, eg.

Silent night, Holy night

All is calm, all is bright

Round yon virgin Mother and child

Holy infant, so tender and mild

Sleep in heavenly peace,

Sleep in heavenly peace

Crouch down, open and read letters / gifts

Stand up and point rifles at the enemy

Take several steps forward and untangle robin

Hold robin, stretch up high and release it

Step back and join hands with own soldiers

Reach out and form circle with enemy soldiers



Drama: Role Playing

Look at the last two double page pictures showing each group of soldiers celebrating Christmas.

Have each child take on the role of a different soldier in one of the pictures.

Have them think about questions such as:

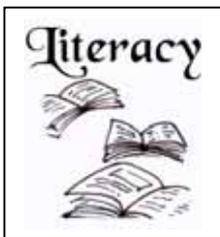
- Who is he?
- What is his name?
- Who are in his family?
- Who are his friends?
- What has he been doing in the war?
- How is he feeling, emotionally and physically?
- What is he thinking?
- What is he doing in the picture?

As a class, split into two groups and create a still representation of the two pictures, with each child taking up the position their soldier is in, from the picture.

As the teacher taps a child on the shoulder, that child tells the rest of the class about themselves as one of the soldiers.

Take a photo of the two groups and, if possible, of each child in character. Have them each write about their character and attach this to the relevant photo.

Going Beyond the Book



Compare the original poem *In Flanders Fields* by John McCrae with the book.

See <http://www.arlingtoncemetery.com/flanders.htm> for the poem and more details about John McCrae.

Other related websites:

www.inlandersfields.be/

www.geocities.com/~worldwar1/mccrae.html

www.noblenet.org/year/fland.htm

www.abmc.gov/ff.htm

home.vicnet.net.au/~rasigsau/flanders_fields.htm

John McCrae (1872-1918) was a Canadian doctor who fought on the Western Front in 1914. He died of pneumonia while on active duty in 1918. His volume of poetry, *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems*, was published in 1919. Find out more about the topic of Flanders Fields from the Flanders Fields Museum website - www.inlandersfields.be/default2.htm

Read and compare other picture books which focus on war. For example, *Rose Blanche* by C. Gallaz and R. Innocenti, *My Hiroshima* by Junko Morimoto, *Memorial* by Gary Crew and Shaun Tan.