

LESSON PLAN

JOHN MCCRAE: POET, DOCTOR, SOLDIER, CANADIAN

BY FIONA TAPP



DURATION:

4-5 classes

SUBJECTS:

History, Language Arts,
and Social Studies

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEMES:

War, PTSD, Propaganda,
Grief, Poetry



EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Expand their knowledge about the First World War and Canada's role;
- Learn about the life and service of John McCrae;
- Understand the impact of war and the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on service people today and in the past;
- Understand propaganda and how it is used to persuasive effect during times of war;
- Use a variety of skills to comprehend texts, including using prior knowledge, interpreting texts, and asking questions to clarify their understanding.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- *Where the Poppies Blow: The Life and Lessons of John McCrae* graphic novel
- Prepared **Worksheets #1-3**

KEY VOCABULARY:

Combat	Flanders Fields	Propaganda
The First World War	Mortar	PTSD
Remembrance	Trench	Shellshock
Armistice	Western Front	



BACKGROUND

John McCrae was born in Guelph, Ontario, on November 30, 1872. He had a keen interest in poetry and a love for animals from an early age. After studying at the University of Toronto, he became a doctor. He then fought in the Boer War before continuing his work as a surgeon back in Canada.

On August 4, 1914, war was declared in Europe, and McCrae was one of the first to join as a medical officer with the 1st Brigade of the Canadian Field Artillery. His beloved horse, Bonfire, went with him to the front. McCrae fought in the trenches near Ypres, Belgium, in an area traditionally called Flanders. Here, he and the other soldiers faced the true horrors of war.

The day before McCrae wrote the famous poem, “In Flanders Fields,” he lost a close friend in battle. Three years later, in January 1918, McCrae died of pneumonia and meningitis after diagnosing himself. He was honoured with a full military funeral and his body was laid to rest not far from Flanders fields. His poem is read all over the world to this day during remembrance events, as a way of paying tribute to all those who lost their lives in war and combat.

STEP ONE POETRY COMPARISON

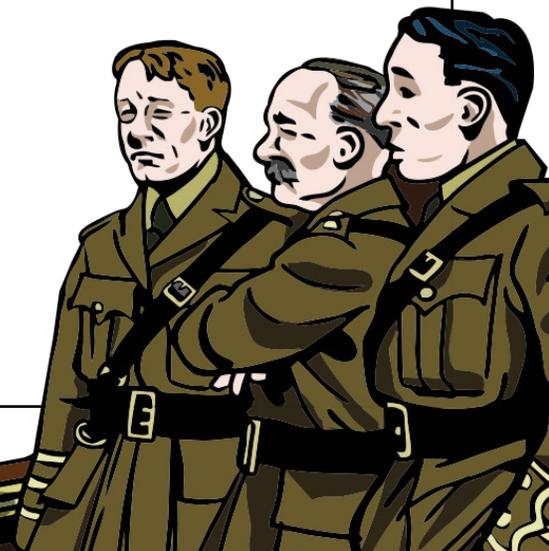
- Have the class read the two poems from **Worksheet #1**.
- Discuss “We Shall Keep the Faith” as a response to “In Flanders Fields.”
- Students will break off into small groups and rearrange the two poems to create a call-and-response dramatic reading. After, each group will present their performance to the class. Here is an example of a call-and-response poem:

Speaker 1: “In Flanders Fields, the poppies blow.”

Speaker 2: “We cherish too the poppy red.”

Speaker 1: “Between the crosses row on row.”

Speaker 2: “We keep the faith with all who died.”



STEP TWO THE TRAUMA OF WAR

Post-traumatic stress disorder: “PTSD is a psychological response to the experience of intense traumatic events, particularly those that threaten life” (Veterans Affairs Canada)

Further Reading on PTSD: [“Post-traumatic stress disorder \(PTSD\) and war-related stress”](#) from the Government of Canada’s website

- Write or display the definition of PTSD on the board.
- Discuss the definition with students and encourage them to share their own thoughts and understanding about this debilitating condition. Create a word wall including the terms “shellshock” and “battle fatigue.”
- Explain to students that terms like “shellshock” were used during the First World War, but are no longer used today to describe someone experiencing PTSD.
- Instruct students to visit the Canadian War Museum [webpage](#) and read about how shellshock was treated during the First World War. You can also print out the information for them to read if you don’t have access to the Internet during class time.
- Ask the class, “What role did PTSD play in McCrae’s experience of war?” Students can create discussion pairs to compare and contrast how soldiers’ traumatic experiences are dealt with today and during the First World War.
 - They should use the graphic novel and a copy of “In Flanders Fields” to find evidence of McCrae’s experience during war.
 - Based on their discussions, students will then create fictional treatment plans for soldiers in both the First World War and modern combat situations using **Worksheet #2**.
- Some suggestions for coping techniques to reduce PTSD symptoms may include:
 - Talk therapy
 - Meditation
 - Deep breathing
 - Thought switching (distracting yourself)
 - Visualization techniques
 - Reducing exposure to triggers and stressors

STEP THREE ALLIES AND ENEMIES

- Write the words “ally” and “enemy” on the board. Have students discuss what they mean and how they may differ based on perspective, location, and the passage of time.
- Discuss the concept of an enemy force and an enemy individual. Ask students what conditions, actions, or events would cause them to change their mind about a person? For example, what would cause them to re-evaluate whether a person should be viewed as an enemy or an ally?
- Read aloud the Battle of Ypres [overview](#) from the Canadian War Museum.



- Students should scan the graphic novel for information about life in the trenches and make notes for the next task.
- They will then complete **Worksheet #3** by writing a field report as a German soldier looking down at the Canadian soldiers in the Ypres Salient. Students can draw from the graphic novel and any additional research to describe the battle and the use of chlorine gas by the Germans.

STEP FOUR WAR AND PROPAGANDA

- Write the word “propaganda” on the board and discuss the definition. Draw the students’ attention to words such as “persuasive,” “misleading,” and “bias.”
- Share examples of [WWI propaganda posters](#) from the Canadian War Museum and ask the following questions:
 - What do you think the intended message of this poster is?
 - Who was the audience?
 - What persuasive techniques are used?
 - Why would it be important for the public to all feel the same way about the enemy?
- Hold a class debate considering the modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war today. Look at various examples of social media being used by leaders and civilians to get their message across.
- Ask the class, “If John McCrae had access to social media during the First World War, what do you think he would have reported from the trenches?”
- Instruct the students to write a series of social media posts or record a video with an imagined perspective from the front line. Students should use the graphic novel, McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” poem, and reports of the conditions in the trenches to inform their work.

STEP FIVE A MULTI-TALENTED MAN

- Instruct the class to complete a character analysis of John McCrae. They should use the graphic novel and other sources to create a full picture of him. McCrae wasn’t just a poet, doctor, or soldier. Students should explore the different sides of his character by drawing from his childhood ambitions, early accomplishments, and interests.
- When they have written an account showcasing the different sides of McCrae, students can then repeat the exercise to create one of themselves.
- Extension activity: Have students expand their character analysis of John McCrae to a presentation on poster board. Display these posters for Remembrance Day events or assemblies.



RUBRIC – GENERAL

ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 1 (50-59%)	LEVEL 2 (60-69%)	LEVEL 3 (70-79%)	LEVEL 4 (80-89%)	LEVEL 4+ (90-100%)
KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	Student demonstrated a limited knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated some knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated a good knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated a great knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.	Student demonstrated an outstanding knowledge and comprehension of the key concepts, issues, and themes.
THINKING AND INQUIRY	Student's planning and processing skills were not evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with limited proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were somewhat evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with some proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with good proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were very evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with great proficiency.	Student's planning and processing skills were extremely evident; student demonstrated critical and creative thinking processes with outstanding proficiency.
COMMUNICATION	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with limited proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with some proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with good proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with great proficiency.	Student communicated their understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes with outstanding proficiency.
APPLICATION	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with limited proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with some proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with good proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with great proficiency.	Student used knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, issues, and themes to complete their assignments with outstanding proficiency.



RUBRIC – SPECIFIC

ASSESSMENT	LEVEL 1 (50-59%)	LEVEL 2 (60-69%)	LEVEL 3 (70-79%)	LEVEL 4 (80-89%)	LEVEL 4+ (90-100%)
STEP ONE	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the themes in the two poems and how to rearrange them to create a performance.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the themes in the two poems and how to rearrange them to create a performance.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the themes in the two poems and how to rearrange them to create a performance.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the themes in the two poems and how to rearrange them to create a performance.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the themes in the two poems and how to rearrange them to create a performance.
STEP TWO	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the definition of PTSD and how it applies to John McCrae's experience of war.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the definition of PTSD and how it applies to John McCrae's experience of war.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the definition of PTSD and how it applies to John McCrae's experience of war.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the definition of PTSD and how it applies to John McCrae's experience of war.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the definition of PTSD and how it applies to John McCrae's experience of war.
STEP THREE	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the concepts of ally and enemy and how to write a field report from a different perspective.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the concepts of ally and enemy and how to write a field report from a different perspective.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the concepts of ally and enemy and how to write a field report from a different perspective.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the concepts of ally and enemy and how to write a field report from a different perspective.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the concepts of ally and enemy and how to write a field report from a different perspective.
STEP FOUR	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the term "propaganda" and how it applies to modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the term "propaganda" and how it applies to modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war.	Student demonstrated good understanding of the term "propaganda" and how it applies to modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the term "propaganda" and how it applies to modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the term "propaganda" and how it applies to modern use of social media to advance a narrative in war.
STEP FIVE	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the main themes of the graphic novel and how to create a character analysis of John McCrae.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the main themes of the graphic novel and how to create a character analysis of John McCrae.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the main themes of the graphic novel and how to create a character analysis of John McCrae.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the main themes of the graphic novel and how to create a character analysis of John McCrae.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the main themes of the graphic novel and how to create a character analysis of John McCrae.