

LESSON PLAN

JOHN MCCRAE: POET, DOCTOR, SOLDIER, CANADIAN

BY FIONA TAPP



DURATION:

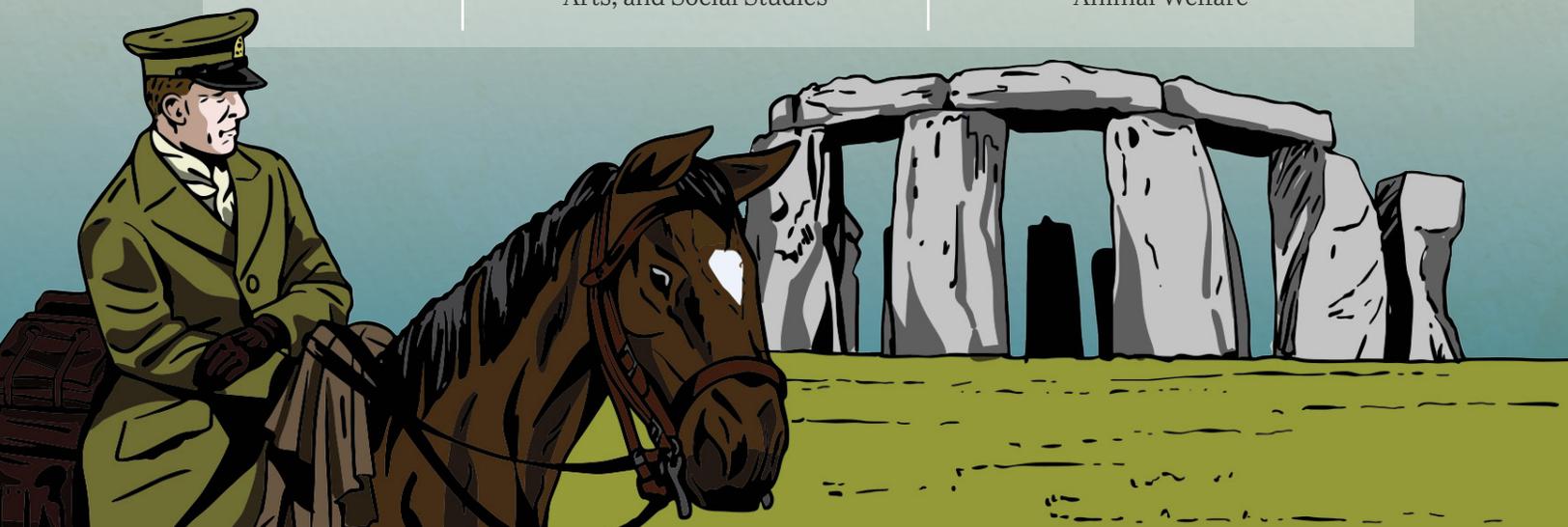
4-5 classes

SUBJECTS:

Art, Geography, History, Language
Arts, and Social Studies

KEY CONCEPTS AND THEMES:

War, Poetry, and
Animal Welfare



EXPECTATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Students will:

- Expand their knowledge about the First World War and Canada's role in it;
- Learn about the life and service of John McCrae;
- Understand the different roles and responsibilities he held during his life as a teacher, doctor, and soldier;
- Begin to appreciate the effects of war and combat on a person;
- 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 #1-2**

KEY VOCABULARY:

Combat
World War I
Remembrance

Armistice
Flanders Fields
Mortar

Trench
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 up as a medical officer with the 1st Brigade of the Royal 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

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT LINES

- Have students read the graphic novel independently or in small groups. Then bring them together to read a few pages aloud as a class. Review the main themes and record them on a flip chart or whiteboard.
- Look at the photographs of John McCrae’s letters in the graphic novel. Distribute **Worksheet #1** and read aloud McCrae’s letter to his mother, printed at the bottom of the sheet.
- Explain to the class that soldiers in the First World War wrote letters home to their families but it could take a long time for mail to reach them. Have students consider the first question on the worksheet: How do you think soldiers in combat today communicate with their loved ones back home?
- Ask the students to imagine they are fighting abroad and want to compose a short video clip describing their experiences using their phones or a camera. Students can choose to record themselves reading John McCrae’s letter as though it were their own or they can come up with their own modern message. Depending on the available resources, students may also create the videos using Instagram, TikTok, etc. that could then be shared with their classmates or the larger school community.



STEP TWO

POPPIES AROUND THE WORLD

- Read the poem “In Flanders Fields” from **Worksheet #2** and discuss the main themes. Talk about the significance of the poppy in both art and McCrae’s poetry. Have the class study different designs of poppies from around the world that you have collected, or ask them to perform an Internet search to look for different versions.
- Students can then design their own poppy using the medium of choice, including paint, craft materials, digital art, or sculpture.

STEP THREE

A PERSON OF NATIONAL HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

- John McCrae is an official “Person of National Historic Significance.”
- Discuss these key questions with the class:
 - Why do you think McCrae deserves this honour?
 - What are the qualities that make him so significant in our country?
 - Who else do you think should be on the list?
- After students have thought about who they would like to make a “Person of National Historic Significance,” ask them to create a persuasive piece of writing with a biography about their chosen person, their contribution to Canadian society, and why they should receive this honour.

STEP FOUR

A WAR HORSE

- Horses had many important jobs in the First World War. They carried men, equipment, and messages across battlefields. John McCrae’s horse, Bonfire, brought him great comfort and companionship during his time at war.
- Ask the class to study their graphic novel and find examples of how horses featured in McCrae’s life.
- They should then discuss, in groups, the times that McCrae connected with and protected animals.

STEP FIVE

A MULTI-TALENTED MAN

- John McCrae had many talents and worked as a teacher, a doctor, and a soldier.
- Ask the students to choose one of these occupations and write a job description. Encourage them to think about the skills and personality traits needed to excel in this job.
- Match students up with others who chose a different profession and see if they can draw comparisons between the different roles McCrae took on during his life.
- Extension activity: Have students scan the graphic novel for place names and plot them on a world map to show McCrae’s travels—from Guelph to England, South Africa, and different parts of France.



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 graphic novel's main themes and how to create messages in the medium of their choice.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the graphic novel's main themes and how to create messages in the medium of their choice.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the graphic novel's main themes and how to create messages in the medium of their choice.	Student demonstrated a great understanding the graphic novel's main themes and how to create messages in the medium of their choice.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the graphic novel's main themes and how to create messages in the medium of their choice.
STEP TWO	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the themes in the poem "In Flanders Fields" and how to create their own artwork to honour Remembrance Day.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the themes in the poem "In Flanders Fields" and how to create their own artwork to honour Remembrance Day.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the themes in the poem "In Flanders Fields" and how to create their own artwork to honour Remembrance Day.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the themes in the poem "In Flanders Fields" and how to create their own artwork to honour Remembrance Day.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the themes in the poem "In Flanders Fields" and how to create their own inspiring artwork to honour Remembrance Day.
STEP THREE	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the term "person of historic significance" and how to create an argument for their choice of recipient.	Student demonstrated some understanding of the term "person of historic significance" and how to create an argument for their choice of recipient.	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the term "person of historic significance" and how to create an argument for their choice of recipient.	Student demonstrated a great understanding of the term "person of historic significance" and how to create an argument for their choice of recipient.	Student demonstrated an outstanding understanding of the term "person of historic significance" and how to create an argument for their choice of recipient.
STEP FOUR	Student demonstrated a limited ability to find examples of John McCrae's dedication and care toward animals in the text.	Student demonstrated some ability to find examples of John McCrae's dedication and care toward animals in the text.	Student demonstrated a good ability to find examples of John McCrae's dedication and care toward animals in the text.	Student demonstrated a great ability to find examples of John McCrae's dedication and care toward animals in the text.	Student demonstrated an outstanding ability to find examples of John McCrae's dedication and care toward animals in the text.
STEP FIVE	Student demonstrated a limited ability to create a job description and make connections between the different roles McCrae held during his life.	Student demonstrated some ability to create a job description and make connections between the different roles McCrae held during his life.	Student demonstrated a good ability to create a job description and make connections between the different roles McCrae held during his life.	Student demonstrated a great ability to create a job description and make connections between the different roles McCrae held during his life.	Student demonstrated an outstanding ability to create a job description and make connections between the different roles McCrae held during his life.

