

**Topic:** World War I poetry

**Level:** B1 / B2

**Time:** 90 minutes

### **Aims**

- To introduce students to the poetry of World War I.
- To develop students' vocabulary relating to World War I and poetic devices.
- To give practice of reading aloud, memorising and retaining information, speaking clearly to others, analysing poetry.

### **Introduction**

This lesson looks at John McCrae's poem 'In Flanders Fields'. It provides students with practice of reading and analysing a poem, with a focus on:

- interpretation of meaning.
- rhyme and rhythm.

An animated version of the poem can be accessed at:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/worldwarone/hq/flanders\\_field.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/worldwarone/hq/flanders_field.shtml) (requires Flash 4)

### **Preparation**

Photocopy sufficient student worksheets for your class. You may wish to read through the PowerPoint presentation to familiarise yourself with the order of the slides before your lesson.

In **Task 1 – Reading and listening in pairs: Background to the poem**, students will work in pairs (student A and student B – labelled on the worksheet), so ensure that you make enough copies for half the class to have Student A's version (page one of the student worksheets), and half the class to have Student B's (page two of the student worksheets).

In **Task 3 – Running dictation: Stanza one**, you will need to cut up stanza one of the poem into five lines and stick each line on the walls of the classroom before class starts. There is a version in large print in **Appendix 1** at the end of the lesson plan. Alternatively, if it is not possible to stick anything to the walls, you could give a line or two to each group and ask students to read the lines to students from other groups.

### **Procedure**

#### **Warmer – Introduction to World War I: Presentation (10 mins)**

- Open PowerPoint presentation
- Show slides one to three: stop after each question (in black text) in order to elicit responses from students (allow students a minute to confer if necessary). After students suggest an answer to each question, click again and the correct answers will appear below in grey text.
- Show slide four: read the information (or ask a student volunteer to read) and ask the students what they think Moina did after she had read the poem (answer on slide five).
- Show slide six: tell students they are going to read the poem that inspired Moina.

**Task 1 – Reading and listening in pairs: Background to the poem (15 mins)**

- Ask students to work in pairs. For part one, student B reads the first part of the text while student A listens and notes the missing information on their worksheet. They then change roles, taking turns to read and note the answers until the information is complete.
- When finished, students should compare their notes with their partner’s worksheet and note any missing information.
- N.B. this is not a dictation, students should be encouraged to make notes/summarise information, rather than reproducing word-for-word their partner’s information.

Tip – If there is an odd number of students in the class, a weaker student could be paired with stronger students for peer support.

**Task 2 – Vocabulary in the poem (10 mins)**

- This task will give students the vocabulary they need to complete **task 2 – Running dictation: Stanza one** and **task 3 – gap fill: Whole poem**.
- Ask students to work with a partner and match the vocabulary and meanings. They may consult a dictionary if they wish. Then, ask students to use the words they have just learnt to complete the gap fill activity.

Answers:

<b>Word</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<i>Flanders</i>	<i>part of Belgium where there was heaving fighting during World War I</i>
<i>lark</i>	<i>bird that sings beautifully</i>
<i>scarce</i>	<i>hardly at all</i>
<i>dawn</i>	<i>time when the sun comes up in the morning</i>
<i>sunset</i>	<i>time when the sun goes down in the evening</i>
<i>quarrel</i>	<i>fight/argument</i>
<i>foe</i>	<i>enemy</i>
<i>torch</i>	<i>A light that can be carried</i>
<i>ye</i>	<i>Old English word, used for “you”</i>
<i>faith</i>	<i>belief in someone/something</i>

1. The sky was beautiful this morning at dawn.
2. Last summer, I heard larks singing every day.
3. I’m a religious person, so I have faith in God.
4. In battle, armies try to defeat their foe.
5. The Flanders region was the scene of terrible loss of life during the Great War.
6. Last night’s sunset was incredible – the whole sky turned red and orange.
7. I had a quarrel with my brother last week, but we are friends again now.
8. He passed the torch to me so I could see the way.

**Task 3 – Running dictation: Stanza one (15 mins)**

Stanza one is to be stuck around the room before the start of class. There is a version in larger print in **Appendix 1** at the end of the lesson plan.

- Ensure that there is space for students to move around the room safely.
- Divide students into small groups of between three to five students (depending on the size of the class).
- One at a time, ask one member of each group (the “runner”) to walk to line one, which the teacher has stuck on one of the walls of the room. The student should read and remember the line. Ask the student to return to their group and say the line to the others so that they all understand it. Another member of the group (the writer) then writes down the line.
- The process should be continued, with students alternating roles, so that everyone has had a chance at being “runner” and “writer”. Discourage waiting groups from cheating by looking at the lines on the walls!

*Answers:*

1. *In Flanders fields the poppies blow*
2. *Between the crosses, row on row,*
3. *That mark our place: and in the sky*
4. *The larks still bravely singing fly*
5. *Scarce heard amid the guns below.*

- Once all lines are completed, ask students to draw what they “see” in the first stanza. Students can then discuss the scene they have drawn, comparing their drawing to those of others in their group. Emphasise that this is not an art competition (a simple line drawing will suffice), it is a way of showing what students understand the poem to mean.
- Ask students: To whom does “our” refer in line three? Whose places do the crosses mark? (i.e., whose voice is narrating/speaking in the poem?)

*Answer: the dead.*

**Task 4 – Gap fill: Whole poem (15 mins)**

- Ask students to put away their worksheet from **Task 3 – Running dictation: Stanza one** and complete stanza one from memory. Then ask them to listen to the poem and complete the missing words on their worksheet. Read the poem aloud.
- Note: this task starts with stanza one, which they have already written out in task 3. This should ease them into the task and give them confidence.

**In Flanders fields** by John McCrae

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place: and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the dead: Short days ago,  
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved: and now we lie  
In Flanders fields!

Take up our quarrel with the foe  
To you, from failing hands, we throw  
The torch: be yours to hold it high  
If ye break faith with us who die,  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields

Check students have completed the gap fill correctly, then ask them to work in small groups and answer the questions.

*Suggested answers:*

1. Who were the dead in the poem?

*Allied soldiers, e.g. British (and nationals of the British Empire: Canadians, New Zealanders, Indians, etc.), plus French, Russians, etc.*

How old were they, do you think?

*Mostly young men, in their late teens/early twenties.*

2. Why did McCrae choose to write the poem as if it were spoken by the dead?

*The dead no longer have a voice. It was McCrae's way of given them a voice, and asking the living to remember them.*

3. Who are the dead speaking to? What if we forget what happened to them?

*They are speaking to the living, i.e. to us. They are telling us never to forget the horrors of war, or they will never rest.*

**Task 5 – Structure of the poem: Rhyme and rhythm (15 mins)**

- Ask the whole group what syllables are and what rhyme is before starting the questions.  
*Answers: a syllable is a sound/beat within a word, e.g. "fly" has one syllable; "poppy" has two syllables, "po-ppy".*  
*Words which rhyme have the same sound at the end, e.g. war, floor, more, etc. N.B. rhyming words do not always have the same spelling.*
- Explain to students that they can clap their hands together or tap their fingers on the desk as they say words aloud to help them work out how many syllables are in each line. Demonstrate this for students, and ask them to practice.
- Ask students to work with a partner to answer the questions, giving support where necessary.

*Answers:*

1. How many syllables are there in each line of the poem? (Count them.)  
*Eight syllables in every line, except line four of stanza two, and line six of stanza three, which have only four syllables each.*  
*Point out to students that the pattern of syllables creates a rhythmic regularity/continuity across the poem.*
2. Why did McCrae choose to have a different number of syllables in each line?  
*c) The lines with fewer syllables are different, so they make us stop, think and remember.*
3. Look at the words at the end of each line. Can you see any words that rhyme?  
*The rhyme scheme is:*  
*Stanza one: blow/row, sky/fly, below (aabba)*  
*Stanza two: ago/glow, lie, fields (aabc)*  
*Stanza three: foe/throw, high/die, grow, fields (aabbac)*  
*Point out to students that the rhyme scheme creates a regularity/continuity across the poem.*
4. Why do you think some lines do not rhyme with the others? (Choose one answer)  
*b) The lines that do not rhyme break the pattern and make us stop, think and remember.*

**Cooler – Response to the poem/reflection on acts of remembrance (10 mins)**

- Ask students if there is a remembrance day for soldiers from their country. Are there any national events/ceremonies of remembrance? What do people do at such events? Do the students know of any poems similar to this?

**Homework**

Ask students to write a postcard home to a family member/sweetheart from the perspective of a soldier fighting in Flanders in WWI.

## Appendix 1

## Task 2 – Running dictation: Stanza one – to be put on classroom wall

In Flanders fields the poppies blow  
Between the crosses, row on row,  
That mark our place: and in the sky  
The larks still bravely singing fly  
Scarce heard amid the guns below.