

LESSON PLAN

JOHN MCCRAE: POET, DOCTOR, SOLDIER, CANADIAN

BY FIONA TAPP



DURATION:

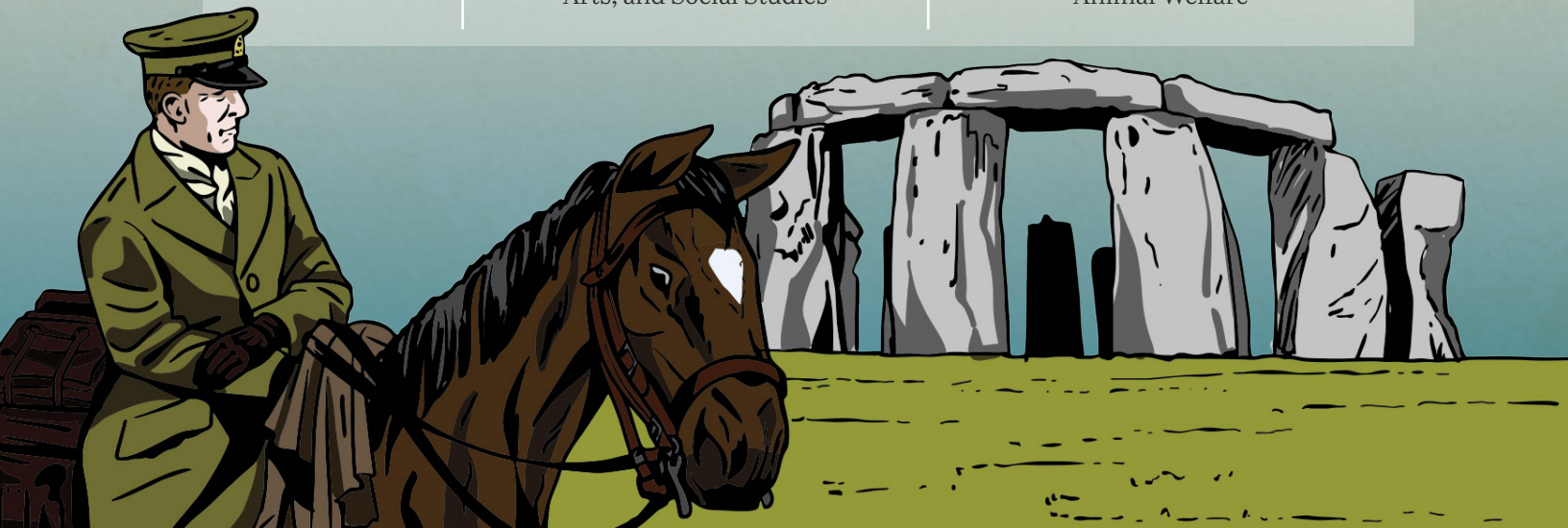
4-5 classes

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

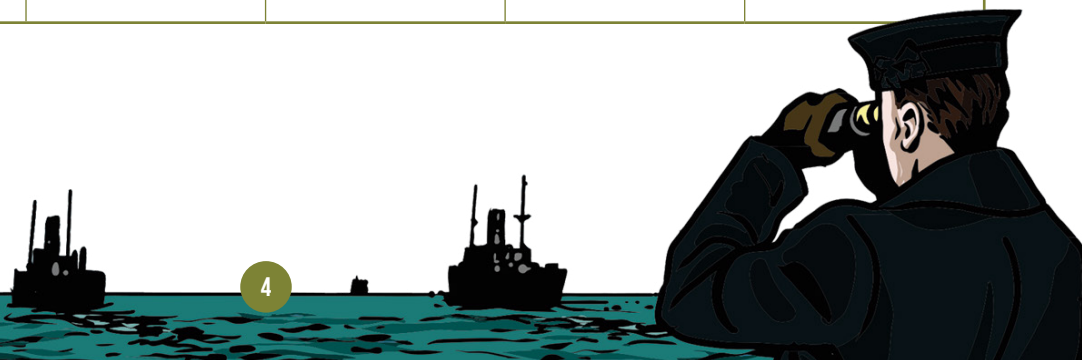
A MULTI-TALENTED MAN

- 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 of 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.



WORKSHEET #1

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT LINES

NAME: _____



1. Soldiers in the First World War wrote letters home to their families, but those letters could take a long time to reach them. How do you think soldiers in combat today communicate with loved ones back at home?
2. Read this excerpt from one of McCrae's letters to his mother, dated Friday, April 23, 1915. After, imagine you are fighting abroad. Send a message home describing your experiences through:
 - A short video clip
 - A Facebook post, Instagram Reel, TikTok video, etc.
 - Or by composing your own modern version of John McCrae's letter using the template provided on the next page

As we sat on the road, we began to see the French stragglers, men without arms, wounded men, teams, wagons, civilians, refugees, some by the roads, some across country, all talking, shouting. The very picture of debacle... Traffic whizzed by, ambulances, transport, ammunition, supplies, despatch riders, and the shells thundered into the town, or burst high in the air nearer us, and the refugees streamed. Women, old men, little children, hopeless, tearful, quiet or excited, tired, dodging the traffic, and the wounded in singles or in groups. Here and there I could give a momentary help, and the ambulances picked up as they could.

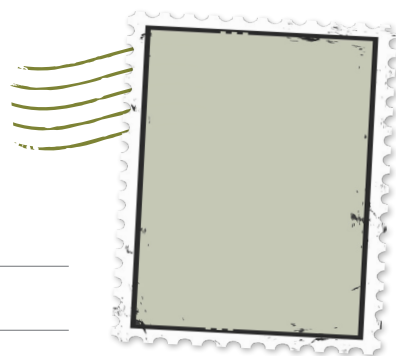
So the cold moonlight night wore on—no change save that the towers of Ypres showed up against the glare of the city burning, and the shells still sailed in.

Published in *In Flanders Fields and Other Poems* (WWI Centenary Series)

By John McCrae (Read Books Ltd, 2014)



Dear _____



WORKSHEET #2

POPPIES AROUND THE WORLD

NAME: _____



Read the poem below and think about the significance of the poppy in both art and John McCrae's poetry. Research different designs of poppies from around the world and design your own poppy using a medium of your choice.

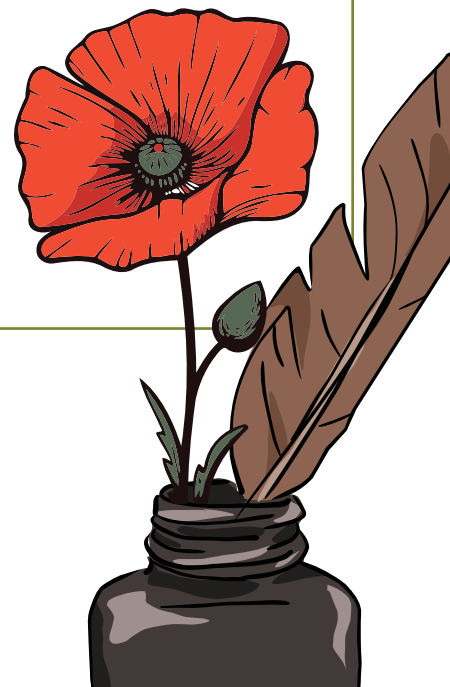
IN FLANDERS FIELDS

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.



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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:

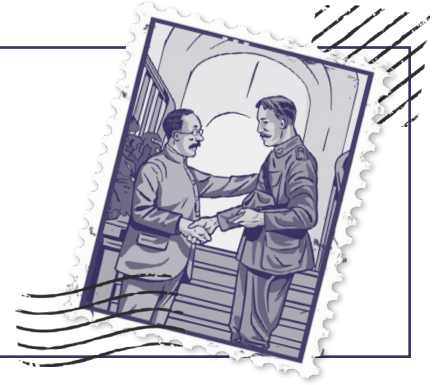
- Expand their knowledge about the First World War and Canada's role;
- Learn about the life and service of John McCrae;
- Understand the impact of war and the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on service people today and in the past;
- Understand propaganda and how it is used to persuasive 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

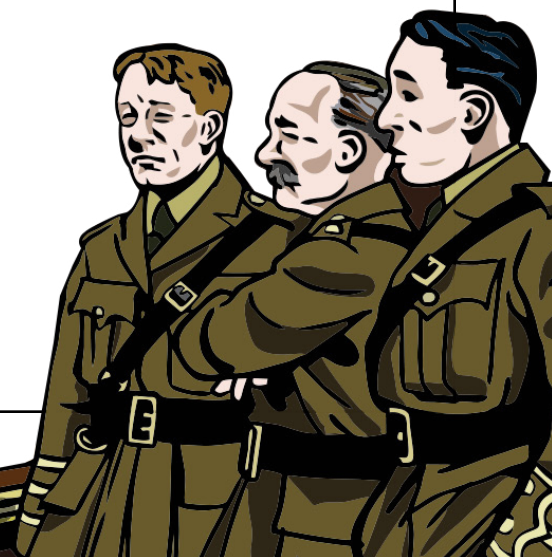
- Have the class read the two poems from **Worksheet #1**.
- Discuss “We Shall Keep the Faith” as a response to “In Flanders Fields.”
- Students will break off into small groups and rearrange the two poems to create a call-and-response dramatic reading. After, each group will present their performance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

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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.

WORKSHEET #1

POETRY COMPARISON

NAME: _____



Create a call-and-response dramatic reading using John McCrae's poem "In Flanders Fields" and Moina Michaels' poem "We Shall Keep the Faith," both of which are shown below. Here is an example of a call-and-response:

Speaker 1: "In Flanders fields, the poppies blow."

Speaker 2: "We cherish too the Poppy red."

"IN FLANDERS FIELDS" BY JOHN MCCRAE (1915)	"WE SHALL KEEP THE FAITH" BY MOINA MICHAEL (1918)
<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Oh! you who sleep in Flanders Fields, Sleep sweet – to rise anew! We caught the torch you threw And holding high, we keep the Faith With All who died.</p> <p>We cherish, too, the Poppy red That grows on fields where valor led; It seems to signal to the skies That blood of heroes never dies, But lends a lustre to the red Of the flower that blooms above the dead In Flanders Fields.</p> <p>And now the Torch and Poppy Red We wear in honor of our dead. Fear not that ye have died for naught; We'll teach the lesson that ye wrought In Flanders Fields.</p>



Speaker #1: _____

Speaker #2: _____

Speaker #1: _____

Speaker #2: _____

Speaker #1: _____

Speaker #2: _____

Speaker #1: _____

Speaker #2: _____



WORKSHEET #2

THE TRAUMA OF WAR

NAME: _____



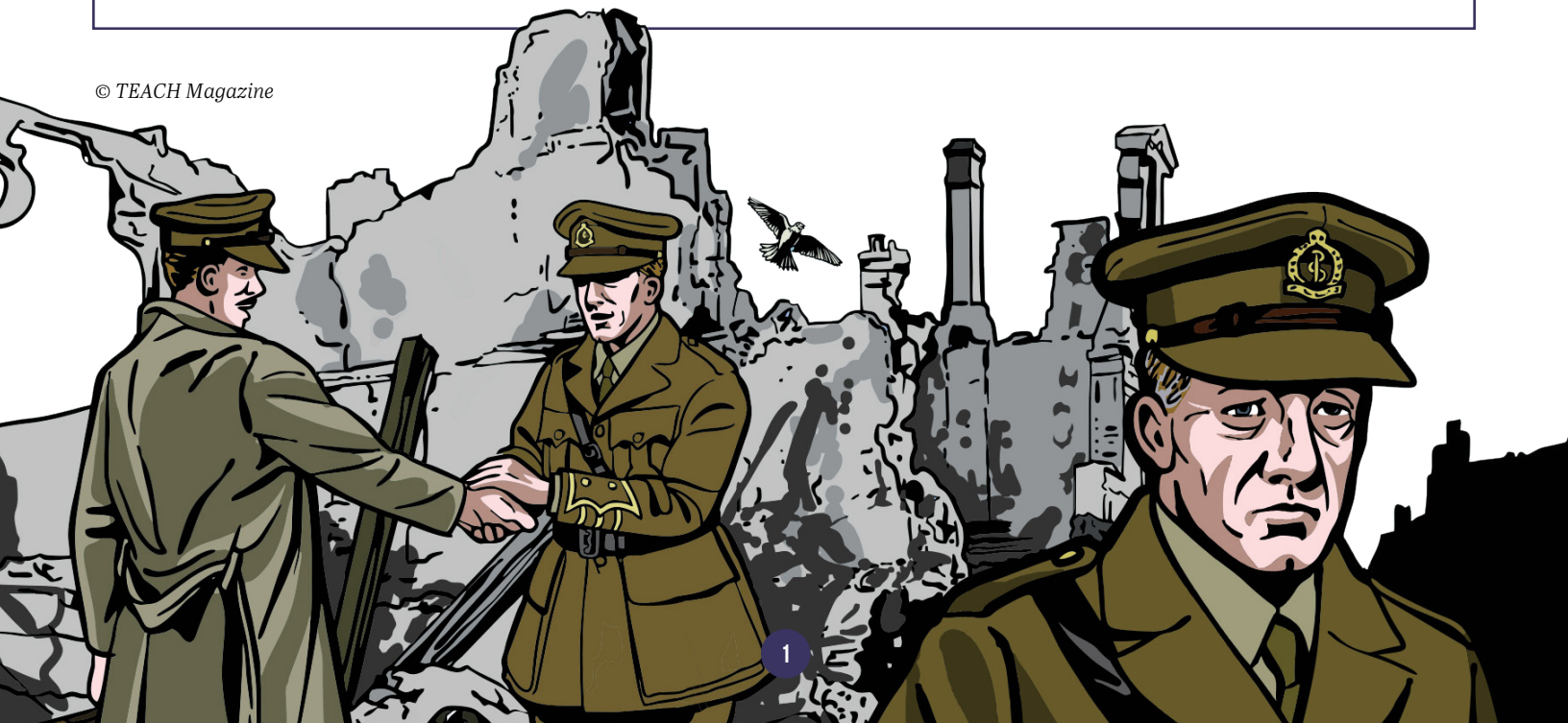
Use the checklist below to determine whether you believe John McCrae suffered from PTSD. After, prescribe two treatment plans: the first based on the time John served in the war, and the second based on the present day and what you know and have researched about mental health and well-being.

OBSERVATION

What symptoms of PTSD is the patient experiencing?

- ☐ Intrusive thoughts/flashbacks
- ☐ Trauma-related fears, panic, and avoidance
- ☐ Detachment from others, loss of interest in life
- ☐ Irritability, angry outbursts
- ☐ General anxiety
- ☐ Sleep disturbances
- ☐ Difficulty concentrating

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

This image depicts a standard sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines, typical of notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. In the bottom right corner, there is a small, partial illustration of a person's head, showing brown, wavy hair and a portion of a light-colored face. The rest of the page is completely blank.



WORKSHEET #3

YPRES SALIENT FIELD REPORT

NAME: _____



Write a field report as a German soldier looking down at the Canadian soldiers in the Ypres Salient. You may draw from the graphic novel and any additional research to describe the battle and the use of chlorine gas by the Germans.

Date: April 27, 1915

From: Lieutenant Hans Schmidt, German Army

To: General Staff, German Army

Location: Ypres, Belgium

Dear Sir,

I am writing to provide a detailed report of the ongoing battle at Ypres and our first use of poison gas as a weapon...



Yours faithfully,
Lieutenant Hans Schmidt

