In Flanders Fields

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.

Dive in:

1. Who are the speakers of the poem, the “we” who appear in line 6? What do they want us to know about themselves? What information do they withhold from us?
2. The poem follows a consistent 4-beat line (with the exception of the lines with the “In Flanders fields” refrain). This is called tetrameter – (In Greek, tetra=four and meter=a measure or stride). But McCrae varies where the stresses of the lines appear. Read the
poem and circle every stressed syllable. See if you can find places where McCrae deliberately speeds up, or slows down the line.

3. Some readers have challenged the sentiment of the last stanza: “take up our quarrel with the foe.” Why do you suppose the dead soldiers want us to “hold [the torch] high”? You might compare this poem to Wilfrid Owen’s “Dulce et Decorum Est” for a different approach.

4. This poem uses a lot of *enjambment* — the grammar of the sentences runs right through the line breaks. Experiment with reading the poem with small pauses at the line breaks as well as the grammatical pauses (the commas and periods). Then try reading “straight through,” without pausing at the ends of the lines. Which method is more effective, to your ear? Are there some places where pausing adds some extra “punch” to the line, and others where it’s a distraction? (If you listen to the reading by Leonard Cohen, below, you’ll hear that he does a bit of both…)

5. Write a poem in the voice of someone who is dead. It could be someone from your family or someone from history (or both!). What would this person want you to know about them? What do you think this person would want from you, in order for you to carry on their legacy?

**Useful Links:**

1. A website with information about how the poppy became such an important symbol of the fighting of the Western Front of the First World War: http://www.greatwar.co.uk/article/remembrance-poppy.htm


*Legion* Magazine released a video commemorating the 100th anniversary of the poem “In Flanders Fields” by Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae. In a poignant tribute to McCrae, Canadian songwriter, painter and poet Leonard Cohen has recited that stirring poem for this exclusive video. His voice is accompanied by stirring imagery from the First World War.

**Dive In written by:**
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