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# SHARED READING

## Extract 1

- Display and read Extract 1. Together analyse the voice and tense of the text (a direct address delivered in the first person, present tense, as if Martens is talking directly to us).
- Challenge the children to find incomplete (lacking a verb) sentences ('Very few cars... Wide skies...') and a sentence beginning with a conjunction ('Because that same war...') Discuss how the language is informal because it suggests spoken, not written, words.
- Ask: *What do we learn about the place where Martens lives?* (It is in a valley in Flanders, which is part of present-day Belgium; it was once the site of First World War battles.) *What kind of farm is it? How do we know?* (It is a mixed farm; we know because Martens mentions wheat fields, cows and a milking parlour.)
- Focus on the mood Martens's description evokes. How would the children describe the place where Martens lives? (peaceful, quiet, rural) Challenge them to find a simile. ('lanes like ribbons')
- Ask the children to identify words or terms specific to the First World War ('trenches', 'No Man's Land') and suggest definitions. Ask: *What are the only signs of the war now?* (the cemeteries and memorials)
- Can the children describe what the same landscape would have been like during the war? (noisy with shelling and gunfire; muddy and covered with debris and rubble)
- Ask: *What question does the author raise in the last sentences?* (How the war killed Martens's father so long after it ended.)

## Extract 2

- Display Extract 2 and read it together. Analyse the voice and tense of the text (a recount text, relating something that happened in the past tense). Circle the possessive pronoun ('your'). Ask: *How does this make the recount personal?* (It tells us that Grandpa is relating the story to Martens.)
- Explain to the children that Essex Farm was located near Brielen Bridge. During the second battle of Ypres, the Canadian field artillery established this small field hospital a few kilometres from Brielen to tend wounded soldiers. Remind them that John McCrae, who wrote the poem that features in the story, was a Canadian medical officer. Encourage the children to identify historical facts in the extract and distinguish them from fiction. (For example, there was a field hospital near Brielen and they called it Essex Farm, but the story of Marie, the little poppy girl, has been invented by the author.)
- Pick out tricky words in the extract and challenge volunteers to explain their meaning (for example, 'bombarded', 'invalided', 'refugees').
- Underline the phrase 'a matter of pride' and ask the children if they can explain what it means and then suggest a replacement. (It was important to how Marie felt about herself.) Ask: *What made Marie feel pleased and satisfied?* (when she sold all her eggs)
- Revise onomatopoeia, circling the word 'jingling' and inviting definitions (making a light metallic, clinking sound).
- Focus on the last sentence. *How does the author make us want to read on?* (We want to find out why they name Marie 'the little poppy girl'.)



## Extract 1

My name is Martens Merkel. I live on a farm in Flanders, with my mother and my grandfather. I go to school in Poperinge, just a few kilometres away. I cycle there if the weather isn't too bad. All around us are the battlefields of the First World War, which ended a long time ago, in 1918. You wouldn't know it was a battlefield now, that the trenches ran right through our farm, that where the cows now graze was No Man's Land.

Poppies grow here in their millions, so thick sometimes in the wheat field in the valley that you can barely see the wheat for the poppies. We all call it just "Poppy Field". So, one way or another, poppies have been part of my life, of all our lives, ever since I can remember – and before that even, as you will see.

It's very quiet here, just birdsong in the morning early and the milking parlour humming twice a day, a place of small woods and neat fields, and lanes like ribbons running through the farmland. Very few cars, very few people. Wide skies over a landscape of gentle hills and valleys, the towers and spires of Ypres in the distance.

You would only know there had ever been a war here from the cemeteries and memorials. There are dozens of them, hundreds probably. I've never counted them. We can see two of them from the house, go past them almost every day, one for British soldiers, one for Germans. Most of my friends hardly notice the cemeteries, because they're always there, part of the landscape. I notice them, but then I have good reason to. Because that same war killed my father, and that was 11 years ago, in the spring of 2005. That's 87 years after the war ended.



# GET WRITING

## 1. Marie's diary

### Objective

To use similar writing as models for their own.

### What you need

Copies of *Poppy Field*, photocopyable page 41 'Marie's diary'.

### What to do

- Read together from 'It was springtime, the spring of 1915' as far as 'and then hung the poem up on the wall'. Explain that they are going to draft Marie's diary entry about that day. Briefly revise the key features of diary writing (first person, past tense, informal style) and refer to any novels in diary form the children may be familiar with (such as *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*).
- Ask them to summarise the main events in Marie's day (walking up to the Field Hospital, picking poppies, spotting the soldier, her father framing and hanging the poem).
- Challenge them to suggest other things that Marie would do in the day, referring back to the text (collecting eggs or helping to milk the cows) and encourage them to think how she feels (enjoying her walk, being surprised that the soldier spoke to her in Flemish, seeing her father cry).
- Hand out photocopyable page 41 'Marie's diary'. Ask the children to complete it, referring back to the text for detail, before writing their draft diary entries. Remind them to write in the first person.
- Share diary entries as a class and decide which are the most convincing and why.

### Differentiation

**Support:** List the main events in the day on the board for children to refer to.

**Extension:** Children write a diary entry for another day, such as the day Marie met Piet.

## 2. One morning

### Objective

To draft and write by composing and rehearsing sentences orally (including dialogue).

### What you need

Copies of *Poppy Field*, examples of playscripts.

### Cross-curricular link

Drama

### What to do

- Tell the children that they are going to draft a short playscript. The scene should focus on Emile arriving home after he sees the vision of soldiers meeting during the Christmas truce.
- They need to write parts for three characters: Emile, Mama and Grandpa.
- Arrange the children into groups of three. Briefly revise the form of a playscript, referring to examples or modelling lines of dialogue on the board.
- Encourage the children to use words and information from the novel to help make their play script convincing. They could begin with the lines:  
**Mama:** Come and have some breakfast, Emile.  
**Emile** (sits down at the kitchen table): I've just been down to Poppy Field.  
**Grandpa:** Has the mist cleared?
- Ask them to discuss how Mama and Grandpa might respond to what Emile tells them. Ask: *Would they believe him?* Allow them time to discuss and rehearse their playscripts.
- Invite groups to present their playscripts to the class, discussing which are most effective and why.

### Differentiation

**Support:** Begin the playscript on the board as a shared activity, then let pairs develop it.

**Extension:** Pairs could draft another short scene, perhaps when Marie comes home to her parents and shows them the scrap of paper.



# Marie's diary



- Plan an entry for Marie's diary on the day she meets the soldier.
- Use the headings below to make notes.

What she did in the morning	The date
Who she saw	
What he said to her	
What she did next	
What happened when she got home	