

Remembrance Day

Objectives

- To explain why we have Remembrance Day.
- To encourage children to support the Poppy Appeal.

Resources

Poppies for sale; the photocopiable sheet 'In Flanders fields' on page 49.

Assembly type

- Teacher-led whole key-stage assembly.
- Presentation and poem.

Background

November is the month when poppies are sold and worn in memory of all those men and women who died during wars. The First World War started in 1914 and ended at 11 o'clock on 11 November 1918. In other words, the guns in that war stopped firing on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month. It is usual for two minutes' silence to be observed at 11 o'clock.

Introduction

- Explain to the children the significance of poppy day. Explain that at 11 o'clock there is usually two minutes' silence so that people can remember the brave men and women who died in the First World War and the Second World War and all other wars. (If appropriate, hold the two minutes' silence.)
- Talk to the children about the kinds of ceremonies that take place on Remembrance Day and Remembrance Sunday, which is usually the nearest Sunday to 11 November.

Main assembly

- Show the children the poppies that you have and ask them why poppies are sold at this time. Why not the daffodil, bluebell or any other flower?
- Explain how part of Belgium is called Flanders and some of the worst fighting of the First World War took place there. Huge guns fired millions of shells that exploded in the ground and buildings, roads and trees disappeared. They fired shells at the same ground for all of the four years of the war. Where homes and farms had been, there was just mile after mile of brown earth, which turned into mud when it rained. Soldiers fought from holes in the ground called trenches. As soon as the weather got warmer, the only plants that seemed to grow were poppies and they flowered in this desert of mud. This is because poppies like disturbed soil. Their seeds can lie around for years and will then grow if the ground is disturbed round them.
- Tell them how a young doctor called John McCrae noticed this on the day after one of his best friends was killed. He was so moved by seeing these beautiful flowers in the middle of the mud and violence that he wrote a famous poem. Say that you will read the poem later.
- The first Poppy Day was held in Britain on 11 November 1921 and raised a lot of money to help soldiers who had been wounded. There are still soldiers who need help.
- Tell the children that we keep the memory of those who died alive by wearing a poppy and that you hope as many of them as possible will buy one.

Closing thought or prayer

Read the poem, 'In Flanders Fields', by John McCrae on the photocopiable page. Let the children close their eyes if they want to.

Links

- This assembly recaps work that the children may have done as part of History Unit 17 'What are we remembering on Remembrance Day?'. It can also link into PSHE work on thinking about the lives of people living in other times.

In Flanders fields

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.

by John McCrae

