

In Flanders Fields: The Story of The Poem By John McCrae

Linda Granfield

Janet Wilson, Illustrator

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Celebrating a decade in print, this lovely anniversary edition of *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae* tells the famous wartime poem and the stories behind it. The author weaves lines of the poem (“In Flanders fields the poppies blow / Between the crosses, row by row”) with details about the poet’s life and the First World War. The Canadian-born McCrae, who served as a medical officer during the war, wrote the fifteen-line poem after experiencing the horrific death of a close friend.

The full and double-page impressionistic paintings that illustrate each line of the poem vividly capture the wide array of emotions in wartime, from pride over soldiers heading off, to grief over those who didn’t return. Adding to the visual appeal of the book are black-and-white sketches, photographs of the poet, and pictures of wartime posters and medals. These historical images contrast with the illustrations, reminding readers that the poem is about real people and events. Of special interest to young readers will be the description of soldiers’ daily life—what they ate and did in their free time, and how they fought their enemy.

“In bad weather, rain filled the trenches,” explains Granfield. “Days of standing in the cold, stagnant water left men with a dangerous condition called trench foot, which is similar to frostbite. Rats and brutal winter weather added to the misery.”

According to the book, McCrae sent the poem to England for possible publication and it first appeared in 1915 without his name. After his identity was revealed, this work was declared “the most popular English poem of the Great War,” and it became well known in the United States before the country’s involvement in the war. This poem inspired the use of the poppy flower as a universal symbol of remembrance of the war dead.

The anniversary edition is enhanced with new cover art by the illustrator and an introduction by Ronald A. Jobe, the University of British Columbia’s Professor of Children’s Literature. Granfield is an award-winning author of more than twenty non-fiction books for young readers. *I Remember Korea* was a Junior Library Guild Selection in 2003, and *Pier 21: Gateway of Hope*, a story about immigration, was selected as a 2001 Honour Book by the Canadian Children’s Literature Roundtables. Wilson’s picture-book illustrations have also earned honors: *Jasper’s Day* won the ASPCA’s Henry Bergh Award in 2003 for best illustrations, and *Lighthouse: A Remembrance* received a Gold Medal Best Book award by the Oppenheim Toy Portfolio in 2004.

In Flanders Fields is a moving story and the illustrations in this edition make it that much more powerful. War is always a difficult subject and teachers and parents alike will find this book a compelling spark for discussion.

LYNN GEIGER (August 18, 2009)

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