

In Flanders Fields

Lieutenant Colonel 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.

Written by Canadian doctor John McCrae, "In Flanders Fields" may well be the most famous poem to have come out of World War I. But it almost didn't make it into print.

McCrae was no stranger to the battlefield, having served in the South African War before he was called upon to serve in World War I. Yet seventeen days of brutal fighting in the Ypres Salient took their toll ... particularly when McCrae saw his friend and former student Lt. Alexis Helmer killed by an exploding shell.

In lieu of a chaplain, McCrae himself performed Helmer's funeral service. Then, the weary doctor sat down to vent his frustrations with pen and paper. The end result? "In Flanders Fields." McCrae had spent less than half an hour scribbling out the now-famous words and deemed them an insufficient expression of battlefield sentiment. He ultimately tossed the work aside as rubbish. Another officer, however, stumbled upon the poem, believed it worthy of publication, and mailed copies off to various British newspapers.

On December 8, 1915, London's *Punch* chose to publish it. From there, the poem that almost didn't make it into print made its way around the world and into the hearts of millions.

Comprehension Questions

1. Who is the author of this poem?

2. Under what circumstances was the poem written?

3. From whose perspective is this poem written?

4. To whom is this poem addressed?

5. How does nature seem to react to the fighting? Explain your answer.

6. What challenge is issued in the final stanza of the poem?

7. Do you think the world met the challenge that was issued? Why or why not?

8. Have you ever used writing to express emotion or relieve deep frustration? If so, tell about it. If not, tell what you do to relieve stress.
