

Carry the Torch

Education

Dr. John McCrae, a lieutenant colonel and physician in the Canadian army, wrote this poem in 1915, after witnessing a friend die. He writes from the perspective of the dead, in their voice. The crosses row on row, suggest large numbers of graves. Today, as then, throngs who lived, loved and were loved, now are gone.

In Flanders Fields by Dr. 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.*

Insight and Empowerment

This poem and other pieces of literature are open to the reader's interpretation. No right or wrong explanations exist. Journal about the questions based on your understanding and how the images of this poem apply to you.

1. Depending on the feelings and visions this evoked, please draw, write, meditate, pray...
2. Poppies, red in color, ironically grew in blood-soaked fields. Today they represent remembrance. How do you remember the person or people you lost?
3. The larks have been considered symbols of beauty and freedom contrasted with the guns and graves below. Some see larks, still bravely singing, as people with perseverance and courage. What do the larks mean to you?
4. The Dead speak in this poem. What would your deceased person say to you?

5. Taking up the quarrel with the foe has many interpretations: continue the war? fight the enemy? The foe may be war itself, or intangibles like prejudice, hate, ignorance, etc. What foe will you fight?
6. The torch may be an object of pride. Describe about whom or of what your person was the most proud.
7. What does the torch in this poem represent?
8. Handing over a torch symbolized transferring a duty. What will you do to carry on the person's responsibilities, beliefs, and aspirations?
9. How will you not break faith with the person?