



## Why Do We Remember?

### *TEACHER NOTES*

A fictional story set around the events can usually not only enliven the topic but also provide a framework for understanding the events themselves. A search could be made for other fictional stories set at this time, such as the powerful Michael Marpurgo story 'Warhorse'. In 'Why Do We Remember?' children could decide which parts of the story could be illustrated. Once a decision has been made then they could then provide the illustrations.

Joe Henderson called in to see his Gran after school. It was a cold November evening and already dark. She soon had his favourite tea ready, tuna mayonnaise sandwiches and chocolate cake. Gran was always interested in what he was doing and she often helped him with his homework, listening to him read or checking his spellings.

'Miss Dobson is taking our class to the War Memorial' on Friday' he told her. 'I'm not sure why. I think she said it's 'Rembrandt's Day'. He's a famous Dutch artist you know. We looked at some of his paintings to help us draw faces. But I'm not sure what he's got to do with the war memorial'.

Gran nearly choked on her cake, then burst out laughing. 'Remembrance Day, you daft onion, not Rembrandt's Day'. Joe grinned

back with a puzzled kind of grin, not quite sure what he had got wrong.

'Wait a minute and I'll explain,' said Gran, 'I think it's time to tell you a story'. She walked over to a tall cupboard and came back with an old wooden box, about the size of his PlayStation. She carefully lifted the top and he could see the hinges were broken.

'This is the family treasure trove. Some of the things in here go back nearly a hundred years and they have a lot to do with Remembrance Day.

Henderson's have lived in this village for a long time Joe. And they've always done their duty when war came.' She took out a photo of a smiling young man in uniform. 'This is, now let me think. Your GREAT...GREAT... GREAT... erm...GREAT...yes that's right....four generations back. Your great, great, great, great uncle, Ernie Henderson.'

'Ernie joined the DLI, the Durham Light Infantry in 1914, along with a lot of the young miners from around here. 1914 was the year the First World War began. The fighting lasted for four years and nearly 750,000 men were killed from this country. They called it the Great War at the time....and the War to End Wars.'



'They were wrong about that then', said Joe. 'Yes, they were,' said Gran sadly. 'People always seem to have something to squabble over.'

Gran passed Joe a badge and a small bible. 'He wore that badge on his cap to show which regiment he was in. The DLI was the County Durham regiment, like a big Beaver or Cub pack for the army. Most of the local men joined the DLI when they went to fight.' Joe turned the badge over in his hands. There was a crown at the top, DLI in big letters in the middle and a horn at the bottom. *I could pin that to my school bag*, he thought. *It would look really cool.*

When Joe looked carefully at the bible he glanced at Gran in surprise. 'It's got a big hole nearly all the way through it.' 'Yes', agreed Gran. 'And not just any hole. That's a bullet hole. That bible saved Ernie's life in the trenches in 1915. It stopped a German bullet. He brought that home and left it with his Mother. A kind of souvenir.'

'Wow,' Joe murmured. 'That's awesome.'

'The trouble is Joe', Gran went on, 'this story doesn't have a happy ending. 'Ernie went back to the war and was killed in 1917, at a big battle called Paschendale. It's lads like Ernie and all those killed or injured in wars since then that we think about on Remembrance Day.'

'What will happen when we go to the war memorial Gran?' asked Joe.

'Well,' she replied quietly, 'it depends what time your class walks along. I should think you'll all be there for 11 o'clock. That's a very special time, the hour when the fighting stopped. 11am on 11 November 1918. It must have seemed strange to all the soldiers when the all guns fell quiet.'

'And speaking of quiet Joe. When the clocks strike eleven, your class will have to stand completely still, with no talking for two minutes. Do you think a chatterbox like you can manage that?'

Joe thought for a moment and nodded. 'It will be hard work Gran but I think I can. Why do we have to do that?'

Gran pointed to the photograph of Ernie. 'It's a way of honouring the dead. We can stop and think about the soldiers on the memorial, or anyone we know who has died and would like to remember. All the bustle and noise of life takes a quick pause. Some people use the time to say a little prayer.'

'After the two minutes silence you'll see wreaths of poppies being laid at the bottom of the memorial. Some people call Remembrance Day, Poppy Day, Joe.'

I'll give you 50p to buy one at school and you can pin it your coat. The British Legion sells artificial poppies to raise money to look after hurt soldiers and their families today. They



remind us that real poppies grew all over the battlefields in Belgium. They were a little bit of beauty in an ugly war.'

'It's funny how things stick in our minds,' Gran went on. 'I can still say a poem we had to learn when I was a girl at school:

*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.*

'That sounds sad' said Joe. 'Yes', agreed Gran, 'very sad.....but life goes on....and I've got the washing up to do.'

She collected the plates and walked towards the kitchen, then stopped and turned back. 'On Friday Joe, take the time to find Ernie's name. Put your finger on the letters and tell him there's still Henderson's in the village, we've still got his bible and we still think about him.'

Joe looked at Ernie's photograph and nodded. 'I will Gran, that'll be mint.'