Stories Behind the Poppy

We Are The Dead











Impact Report 2026

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BIG IDEAS

Stories Behind The Poppy: We Are The Dead

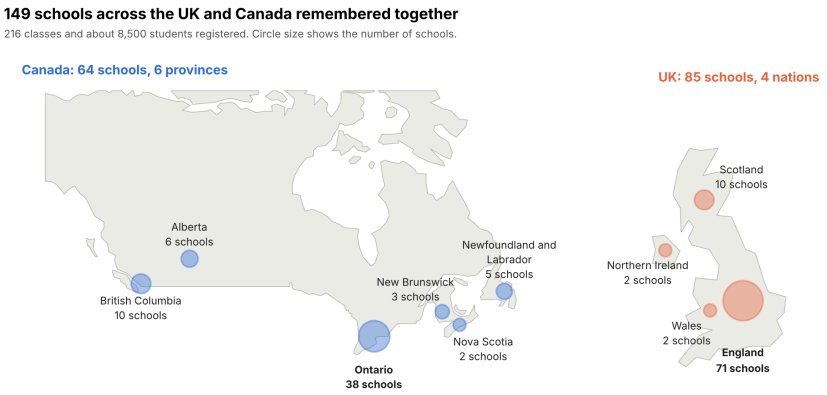
Impact report · 10 November 2026

On 10 November 2026, 216 classes from 149 schools in the UK and Canada registered to remember together, with around 8,500 students signed up for three free, live online sessions.

Funded by Veterans Affairs Canada and the Maple Leaf Trust, Stories Behind The Poppy brings young people in the UK and Canada together to discover shared heritage in the two World Wars. This year's event, We Are The Dead, was inspired by John McCrae's poem *In Flanders Fields*. Classes learned the stories of Canadian service personnel buried in the UK, discovered how to find war graves in their own communities and wrote their own lines in response to the poem.

149
schools

~8,500
students registered



73%
of schools new to UK–Canada events

100%
of surveyed teachers: class learned something new

At a glance

- **Reach:** 216 class registrations from 149 schools (85 UK, 64 Canada), across all four UK nations and six Canadian provinces. At least 79 schools took an active part in the live chat on the day.
- **New audiences:** 73% of schools had never taken part in a UK–Canada school event before, and 52% had not yet studied local veterans' stories.
- **Learning:** every teacher who answered the feedback survey said their class learned something new, and every one would come again.
- **Voice:** teachers shared hundreds of lines of their students' remembrance poetry in the session chat

We are grateful to Veterans Affairs Canada and The Maple Leaf Trust for funding the programme. We also thank our guest expert Simon Bendry, Head of Public Engagement and Education at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC), and His Excellency the Honourable Bill Blair, High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, who read *In Flanders Fields* for the event.

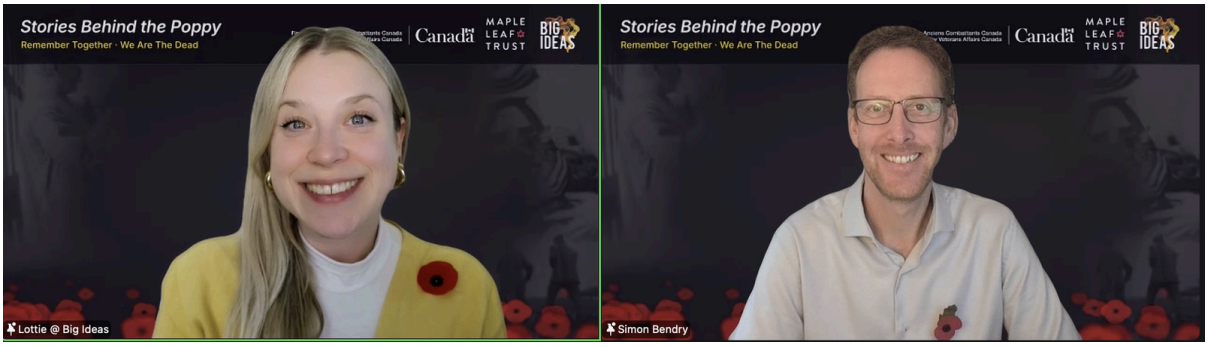
About the event

Stories Behind The Poppy: We Are The Dead was a free, 45-minute live online commemoration for classes aged 8–14, run by Big Ideas on Tuesday 10 November 2026. It focused on Canadian service personnel who died in the two World Wars and are buried in the UK. Three sessions ran so that schools in every time zone could join:

Session (GMT)	Audience	Classes registered
09:30	UK schools	96
14:30	UK and Canadian schools together	79
17:30	Canadian schools	41

Each session followed the same content. Classes opened with a stand-up, sit-down true-or-false quiz. They worked out why there are Canadian war graves in the UK, studied photographs of the graves and guessed how many countries CWGC works in. They then put their own questions to our guest expert, added words to a live word cloud on why remembrance matters, wrote two new lines to follow McCrae's "To you from failing hands we throw / The torch; be yours to hold it high", and took part in a moment of remembrance.

Our expert guest: Simon Bendry, Commonwealth War Graves Commission



Presenter Lottie (Big Ideas) and Simon Bendry (CWGC) during the live session

Simon Bendry, Head of Public Engagement and Education at CWGC, brought to life the stories of individual Canadians buried in the UK, and explained the work of the CWGC. Across the three sessions classes typed in around 80 questions for him to answer.

Participants asked how soldiers were identified, whether women are remembered, what happened to those lost at sea, and whether a Newfoundland Regiment grave carries a maple leaf.

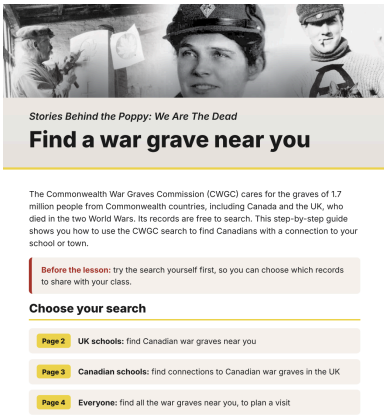
A reading from the High Commissioner

We were honoured that His Excellency the Honourable Bill Blair, High Commissioner for Canada in the United Kingdom, recorded a reading of *In Flanders Fields* especially for the event.

His reading gave the event a real sense of occasion, demonstrated the on-going relationship between Canada and the UK, and served as a moment of remembrance.



Resource for teachers: Find a war grave near you



Every registered teacher received *Find a war grave near you* after the event.

This step-by-step guide enables attendees to explore the content of the workshop through the CWGC's free online records.

The guide has separate routes for UK schools (find Canadian war graves near you), Canadian schools (find connections to Canadian war graves in the UK) and everyone (find all the war graves near you to plan a visit).

Remembering together across the Atlantic

Children in both countries explained the same shared history from their own side, and chose to write about the friendship between Canada and the UK.

UK classes: why are there Canadian war graves in the UK?

- "Because we fought side by side" (Moseley CE Primary, Birmingham)
- "They were helping us in the war" (Mary Elton Primary, North Somerset)
- "Canadians are Britain's allies and it was too far to take the bodies back to Canada" (Maple Walk School, Brent)

Canadian classes: why were Canadians in the UK?

- "They were there to help our allies" (George Street Middle School, New Brunswick)
- "Requested by their 'father country'" (Bruce Trail Public School, Ontario)
- "Travel costs and risk of being hit by U-boats" (St. Carlo Acutis Legacy Academy, British Columbia)

During the shared 14:30 session classes from Bolton, Basildon and Portsmouth worked alongside classes from Ottawa, Mississauga and Newfoundland. Jean Little Public School told the Chat that it is in Guelph, John McCrae's hometown. A teacher from Flex Academy in British Columbia wrote afterwards that her class "loved that they were a part of something 'bigger' with classes across Canada and in the UK."

In the students' own words

Invited to write two new lines about remembrance or "the friendship between Canada and the UK", students responded:

> *"Our alliance stays strong, even after death carries on."*
> — St John's Cathedral Catholic Primary, Portsmouth

> *"As you have moulded a friendship that we will hold forever."*
> — Netherlee Primary School, Glasgow

> *"Now it's your turn to care and protect the flame from dying."*
> — Fogo Island Central Academy, Newfoundland

> *"Hand in hand we beat the beast and we did make our stand for peace."*
> — Chase Lane Primary School, Essex

Little Hallingbury Primary's Sycamore Class in Essex summed up the event in their sign-off: "We remember together, across the Atlantic."

Sharing students' words

After the event we turned students' lines into social media tiles, shared on 11 November, pairing McCrae's call to "hold it high" with what pupils on each side of the Atlantic wrote next.



Social media tiles featuring lines written by participants

Learning and curiosity

The event was active and participatory. Students were encouraged to read evidence from photographs, ask questions of an expert and connect the history to their own communities.

Reading the evidence

Shown photographs of Canadian war graves in the UK, classes worked out for themselves what the graves could tell them:

- **Identity:** "Maple leaf on the grave" (Little Hallingbury); "Flags showing where they'd come from" (Northfield Manor).
- **Change over time:** "The wooden crosses have been changed to head stones with etched cross" (Stocksbridge Junior School).
- **Faith:** "Crosses and star of David" (St Vincent's, Dagenham); "Soldiers from all different religions fighting alongside each other" (Osidge School).
- **Equality in death:** "They were all identical in shape and size" (Stocksbridge); "treated the same" (Mount St Joseph).
- **Care:** "Very clean and well looked after" (Central Park Primary).
- **Human stories:** "First row is shoulder to shoulder like soldiers" and "maybe the front row is a family" (Maddaugh Elementary, British Columbia).

Asking real questions

Classes typed around 80 questions for Simon Bendry. Many were the questions historians ask:

- How do you know when or how a soldier died, and who they were?
- Are there women in the records too? Were animals remembered?
- What happened to the soldiers who died at sea?
- Have names on graves ever been mixed up?
- Newfoundland wasn't part of Canada in either World War. Is there a maple leaf on Newfoundland Regiment graves?
- Do countries still consider themselves enemies because they went to war?

Connecting to home

The chat shows students linking the history to their own communities. Chase Lane and St Vincent's asked whether Essex Farm cemetery has a link to Essex. Wildern School mentioned Netley military hospital near their school,

which treated wounded soldiers. Vradenburg Junior Public School asked where the war graves are in Toronto. Central Park Primary's Year 4 had visited Canadian war graves in France on a school trip.

Why is remembrance important?

In the live word cloud, students' biggest answers were **sacrifice, respect, bravery, remember, peace and honour** alongside **kindness, empathy, compassion, forgiveness, togetherness and solidarity**.



Word cloud from the 09:30 session: Why is remembrance important?

Teacher feedback

> *“My Grade 4 students truly enjoyed this event, and it was very well done! Rather than being overly heavy, war-laden, or sad, the presentation felt like a meaningful celebration of the connectedness between Canada and the United Kingdom, and the shared honour that is held between our nations.*
>
> *Just last Friday, prior to our school's Remembrance Day ceremony, my students participated in a No Stone Left Alone ceremony where they recited ‘In Flanders Fields’ from memory for those in attendance. Watching your presentation afterward allowed my class to visually witness the very images they had originally pictured in their minds, as well as the beauty and care of the cemeteries that house our fallen Canadian soldiers.*
>
> *The absolute highlight of the event was the visual coverage of the cemeteries—seeing the immaculately kept, almost glowing white headstones, the tended green lawns, and the fresh flowers. My students were especially moved by seeing the carved national emblems, like the maple leaves identifying our Canadian soldiers, alongside personal faith symbols such as crucifixes and Stars of David. A standout moment was the highlight of Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae—when he was featured, my entire class erupted into cheers!*
>
> *Following the session, my students were eager and willing to open up, sharing both their own reflections and their families' personal military histories and experiences. For young learners, it struck an incredible balance—helping them understand the weight of war alongside the honour that was earned. Through remembering together, my students truly felt connected.”*

Grade 4 teacher, Olds Elementary School, Alberta

> *"The children had lots of questions after the zoom call and made beautiful and thoughtful posters."*
> — St Vincent's Catholic Primary School, Dagenham (survey)

> *"They liked the idea of looking up war graves of people from their area. The stories of specific individuals were appealing."*
> — Brookside Intermediate, Newfoundland (survey)

> *"Thoroughly engaging and thought-provoking content, presented at an age-appropriate level."*
> — St Anne Line Catholic Junior School, Essex (survey)

> *"They could see real pictures from a long time ago and current grave sites - making the experience as authentic as it could be."*
> — King George VI Public School, Ontario (survey)

> *"It truly helped them to understand how far away from home Canadian soldiers went."*
> — ALIF Canada, Ontario (survey)

> *"It's been brilliant. Such a great range of activities, the children were really engaged."*
> — Northfield Manor Primary Academy, Birmingham (live chat)

> *"This was very touching while being super informative."*
> — John T Tuck Public School, Ontario (live chat)

92%	**100%**	**100%**
said pupils enjoyed it	said their class learned something new	would attend again

Teachers most valued the interactive format, the real photographs of graves, individual soldiers' stories, the link to *In Flanders Fields*, and being part of something shared with classes across both countries.

Appendix

Sources

This report draws on the registration forms, in which teachers specified the number of pupils attending; the post-event teacher survey; the live chat logs; and the word clouds.

Participating schools

UK (85)

Bloxwich Academy Primary (Walsall) · Breadsall Hill Top Primary (Derby) · Brookhouse Primary (Blackburn with Darwen) · Buckingham Primary (Hull) · Buile Hill Academy (Salford) · Caroline Haslett Primary (Milton Keynes) · Carolside Primary (East Renfrewshire) · Central Park Primary (Newham) · Chase Lane Primary (Essex) · Chiddingstone Primary (Kent) · Collingwood Primary (Hull) · Conyers School (Stockton-on-Tees) · Drumgor Primary (Armagh) · Farnborough Primary (Bromley) · Fishermoss School (Aberdeenshire) · Gaskell Primary (Bolton) · Golborne High School (Wigan) · Harlow Fields School and College (Essex) · Harris Academy Clapham (Lambeth) · Hatfield Heath Primary (Essex) · Hatton of Fintray School (Aberdeenshire) · Hawthorn Primary (Cardiff) · Hebburn Lakes Primary (South Tyneside) · Hill West Primary (West Midlands) · Hillside School (Aberdeenshire) · Home education (Perth and Kinross) · Home education (Surrey) · Horizon Academy (Newham) · Horizons Academy (Nottinghamshire) · Howwood Primary (Renfrewshire) · Kettle Primary (Fife) · Kewstoke Primary (North Somerset) · Ladybridge Primary (Bolton) · Lambourne Primary (Essex) · Little Hallingbury Primary (Essex) · Loanhead Primary (East Ayrshire) · Longspee Secondary (Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole) · Lower Farm Primary (Walsall) · Manor Junior School (Barking and Dagenham) · Maple Walk School (Brent) · Marfleet Primary Academy (Hull) · Marshland Primary (Doncaster) · Mary Elton Primary (North Somerset) · Mount St Joseph (Bolton) · Netherlee Primary (East Renfrewshire) · Northfield Manor Primary Academy (Birmingham) · Osidge School (Barnet) · Our Lady of Victories (Kensington and Chelsea) · Our Lady's Catholic Primary (Birmingham) · Oxford Grove Primary (Bolton) · Red Barn Community Primary (Hampshire) · Richmond Primary (Northern Ireland) · Rogiet Primary (Monmouthshire) · Sacred Heart Catholic Primary (Wigan) · Sandfield Park School (Liverpool) · Scott Wilkie Primary (Newham) · SEVA School (Coventry) · Short Heath Junior School (Walsall) · St Anne Line Catholic Junior School (Essex) · St Anne's Catholic School (Enfield) · St Bernard's Catholic Primary (Birmingham) · St Cyrus School (Aberdeenshire) · St James Primary Farnworth (Bolton) · St John's Cathedral Catholic Primary (Portsmouth) · St John's Highbury Vale (Islington) · St Joseph's Catholic Primary (Hartlepool) · St Mary Abbots CofE Primary (Kensington and Chelsea) · St Nicholas Chantry Primary (North Somerset) · St Stephen's Tockholes CE Primary (Lancashire) · St Teresa's Catholic School (Essex) · St Vincent's Catholic Primary (Barking and Dagenham) · St William of York Catholic Primary (Bolton) · Stocks Lane Primary (Bradford) · Stocksbridge Junior School (Sheffield) · Sutton cum Lound C of E Primary (Nottinghamshire) · Talbot Specialist School (Sheffield) · Tame Valley Academy (Birmingham) · The Sydney Russell School (Barking and Dagenham) · Townfield Primary (Wirral) · Turves Green Primary (Birmingham) · Valence Primary (Havering) · Walmsley Primary (Bolton) · Whimple Primary (Devon) · Wildern School (Hampshire) · Winterbourne Boys' Academy (Croydon)

Canada (64)

ALIF Canada (ON) · Arthur Stringer PS (ON) · Ashton Meadows PS (ON) · Beaconsfield Junior High (NL) · Berrigan Elementary School (ON) · Braeburn Junior School (ON) · Brookside Intermediate (NL) · Bruce Trail PS (ON) · Centennial Hylands ES (ON) · Clarksdale PS (ON) · Dolphin Senior PS (ON) · Elora Road Christian School (ON) · Elsie Roy Elementary (BC) · École Brantford Elementary (BC) · Flex Academy (BC) · Flex Academy (ON) · Fogo Island Central Academy (NL) · George Street Middle School (NB) · Hantsport School (NS) · Harbour View High School (NB) · Hillhurst School (AB) · Holy Rosary (ON) · J.W. Sexsmith Elementary (BC) · Jean Little PS (ON) · John M James PS (ON) · John T Tuck PS (ON) · Kew Beach JPS (ON) · King George VI PS (ON) · M.F. McHugh Education Centre (ON) · Maddaugh Elementary (BC) · Marlborough Elementary (BC) · Marlborough PS (ON) · McNaughton Avenue PS (ON) · New Start Program, Dufferin-Peel CDSB (ON) · North Preparatory PS (ON) · Olds Elementary School (AB) · Ottawa-Carleton District School Board class (ON) · Our Lady Immaculate (ON) · Overlanders School (AB) · Riverwood Academy (NL) · Rocky Lake Elementary (NS) · Rolling Hills PS (ON) · Saseenos Elementary (BC) · Seaside Park Elementary (NB) · Secord ES (ON) · Sir James Douglas Elementary (BC) · St Andrew School (ON) · St Bernadette (ON) · St Carlo Acutis Legacy Academy (BC) · St Isabel (ON) · St James Catholic School (ON) · St Kevin (ON) · St Kevin's Junior High (NL) · St Rose of Lima (ON) · Steinhauer School (AB) · Sunset Park PS (ON) · TCS School (AB) · Vancouver School District class (BC) · Vradenburg JPS (ON) · West Humber Junior Middle School (ON) · Westfield PS (ON) · Westglen School (AB) · William Armstrong PS (ON) · Williamson Road JPS (ON)

Image credits

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