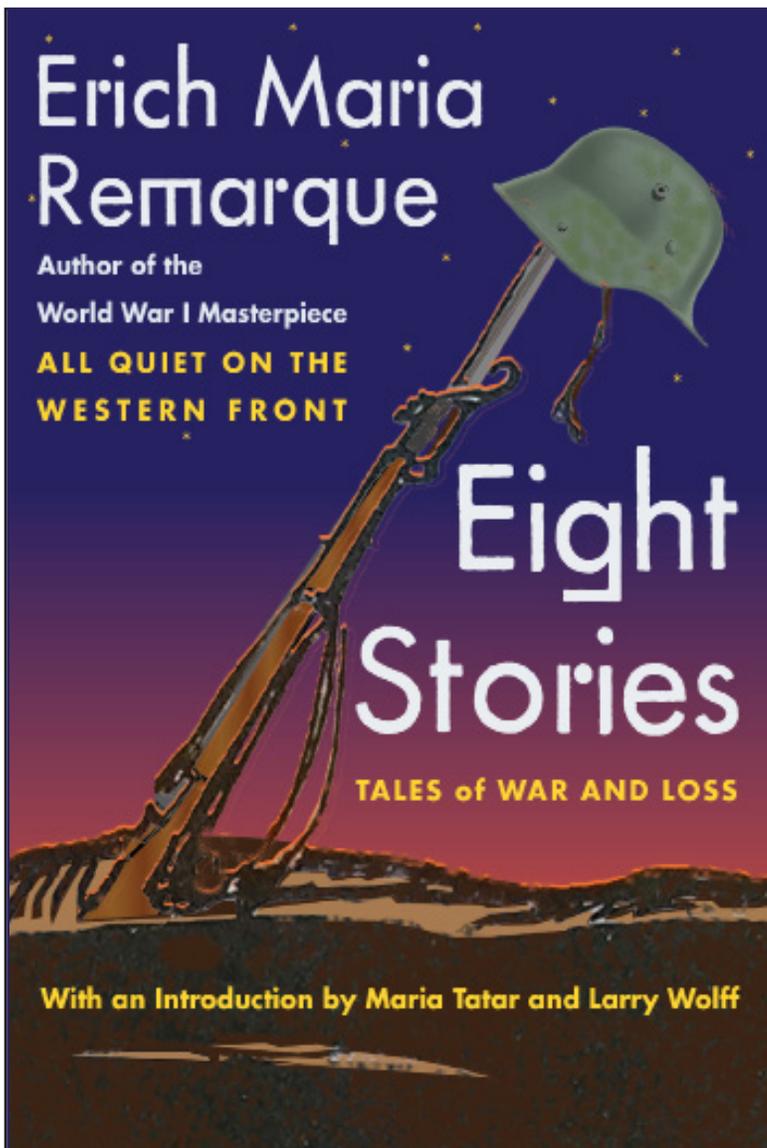


# EIGHT STORIES

Tales of War and Loss

By Erich Maria Remarque

## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE



**G**erman-American novelist Erich Maria Remarque captured the emotional anguish of a generation in his World War I masterpiece, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as well as in an impressive selection of novels, plays, and short stories.

**T**his exquisite collection revives Remarque's unforgettable voice, presenting a series of short stories that have long ago faded from public memory.

**F**rom the haunting description of an abandoned battlefield to the pain of losing a loved one in the war to soldiers' struggles with what we now recognize as PTSD, the stories offer an unflinching glimpse into the physical, emotional, and even spiritual implications of World War I. In this collection, we follow the trials of naïve war widow Annette Stoll, reflect on the power of small acts of kindness toward a dying soldier, and join Johann Bartok, a weary prisoner of war, in his struggle to reunite with his wife.

**A**lthough a century has passed since the end of the Great War, Remarque's writing offers a timeless reflection on the many costs of war. *Eight Stories* offers a beautiful tribute to the pain that war inflicts on soldiers and civilians alike, and resurrects the work of a master author whose legacy – like the war itself – will endure for generations to come.

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# AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



**E**rich Maria Remarque (1898-1970) was a German-American novelist. He was the author of numerous plays, short stories, and novels, most notably *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

## INTRODUCTION: "REMARQUE AT COLLIER'S" BY MARIA TATAR AND LARRY WOLFF

**M**aria Tatar and Larry Wolff detail the fascinating life of Erich Maria Remarque and the influence of his work upon the world in "Remarque at Collier's". Tatar and Wolff write about his new American identity, formed after his emigration from Germany during the rise of Hitler's regime and his foray into the world of Hollywood. Tatar and Wolff argue that Remarque's great work, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was not as conventional as critics wrote, but a great example of modernism. This modernism made his work incredibly accessible and a realistic depiction of the absurdity of war. Tatar and Wolff also explain Remarque's work at the magazine, *Collier's*, and the influence of the 1930s upon Remarque and his work. Remarque's work at *Collier's* brought back in vivid detail the pain of WWI; however, the oppressive nature of the Great Depression dimmed the interest in Remarque's short stories as Americans craved upbeat stories. Tatar and Wolff also connect Remarque's work to psychological theories of the time, Sigmund Freud, and our modern understanding of PTSD. Tatar and Wolff assert that Remarque's work at *Collier's* shows similarities to psychological case studies of the time but with passion and empathy, which brings people together. For all these reasons, Tatar and Wolff write, Remarque's stories transcend nationality, and readers can see the commonalities in all humans.

## CHAPTER ONE: THE ENEMY

The narrator's school friend, Lieutenant Ludwig Breyer describes his most enduring impression of the war. The beginning paragraphs use natural beauty to explain the mindset of the soldiers in the trenches. In the subsection "The Battle of Materials", Breyer explains the usual relationship for two enemy lines and how the space between the two lines is just wasteland. In the subsections "A Private Peace" and "Friendly Meetings", the abnormal relationship of one occasion of the two lines is explained. The French and the German lines begin exchanging things like cigarettes and at one point even shake hands. This interaction raises complicated feelings for Breyer and he questions war in itself. During this time a major shows up and lectures the German soldiers on correct procedure, as it has become evident to the German army that it is becoming common for fraternization among enemy lines. The major takes watch, and despite the German soldiers trying to communicate with the French line to not trade, a young French soldier emerges and the major shoots him. In "To Drown the Cry", Breyer says that after this, fighting increased and there was no interaction between the sides ever again.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER ONE: THE ENEMY

- Discuss the line, "Weapons transfigure men." How do weapons transfigure men?
- What is the effect of the author describing the beauty of the landscape in conjunction with the horror of battle? Is this realistic?
- Why must the major discourage fraternization?
- Think about the physical space of this battle field. Was it easier to kill when there was physical space between the two lines of battle? How does the physical act of meeting strengthen the soldiers' humanity?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## CHAPTER TWO: SILENCE

**T**his short story details the ruggedness and the melancholy beauty of the landscape of old battlefields. The nature and significance of silence on a battlefield both during and after the war is explored. Along with this study of the landscape, the postwar profession of the “seeker” is explained. The “seekers” are silent scavengers of ten year-old battlefields and they profit from old bits of metal, guns, helmets, and personal items taken off the corpses in shallow graves. Every now and then the “seekers” will strike a mine or an explosive and its explosion will injure or kill them. It is said that all of these factors leave a timeless “pall” over the battlefield.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER TWO : SILENCE

- Silence and noise play a large role in this chapter, both during and after the war. Why is it fixated on and what does it add to the description of the battlefield?
- Poppies are a symbol of WWI. The poppy seed lays dormant and grows when the soil is disturbed. They grew all over the battlefields after the war. Remarque often talks about red poppies and chamomile growing in craters after the war. What do poppies symbolize in this story?
- Discuss the role of the seekers in the story. Are they also casualties of the war, or are is their fate a comeuppance for desecrating the bodies of the dead?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



# CHAPTER THREE: WHERE KARL HAD FOUGHT

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**T**he narrator and Karl Broeger are traveling in a car through a town. The busyness of the post-war town is described in detail. The narrator and Karl stop at a battlefield and irritated with the tour-guide, Karl explores the old battlefield on his own. He changes from a banker to a soldier again and tells the narrator of a young boy George who died in this battle. The two explore the ravaged land and pass a cemetery. When they return to town Karl is no longer the same man and laments about how the children playing are the same as children all around the world and how children all play the same games. They leave the town.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER THREE:  
WHERE KARL HAD FOUGHT

- Why is it important to Karl that children are the same in every town?
- The battlefield in the town they visit has become a tourist destination. Why do people want to see battlefields? Can tourists at a battlefield ever fully appreciate the history of it?
- A lot of attention is paid to profession in this chapter. Two men have goals during the war: George and Karl. One gets to fulfill his professional goals and one does not. What is the impact of this upon Karl and society as a whole?



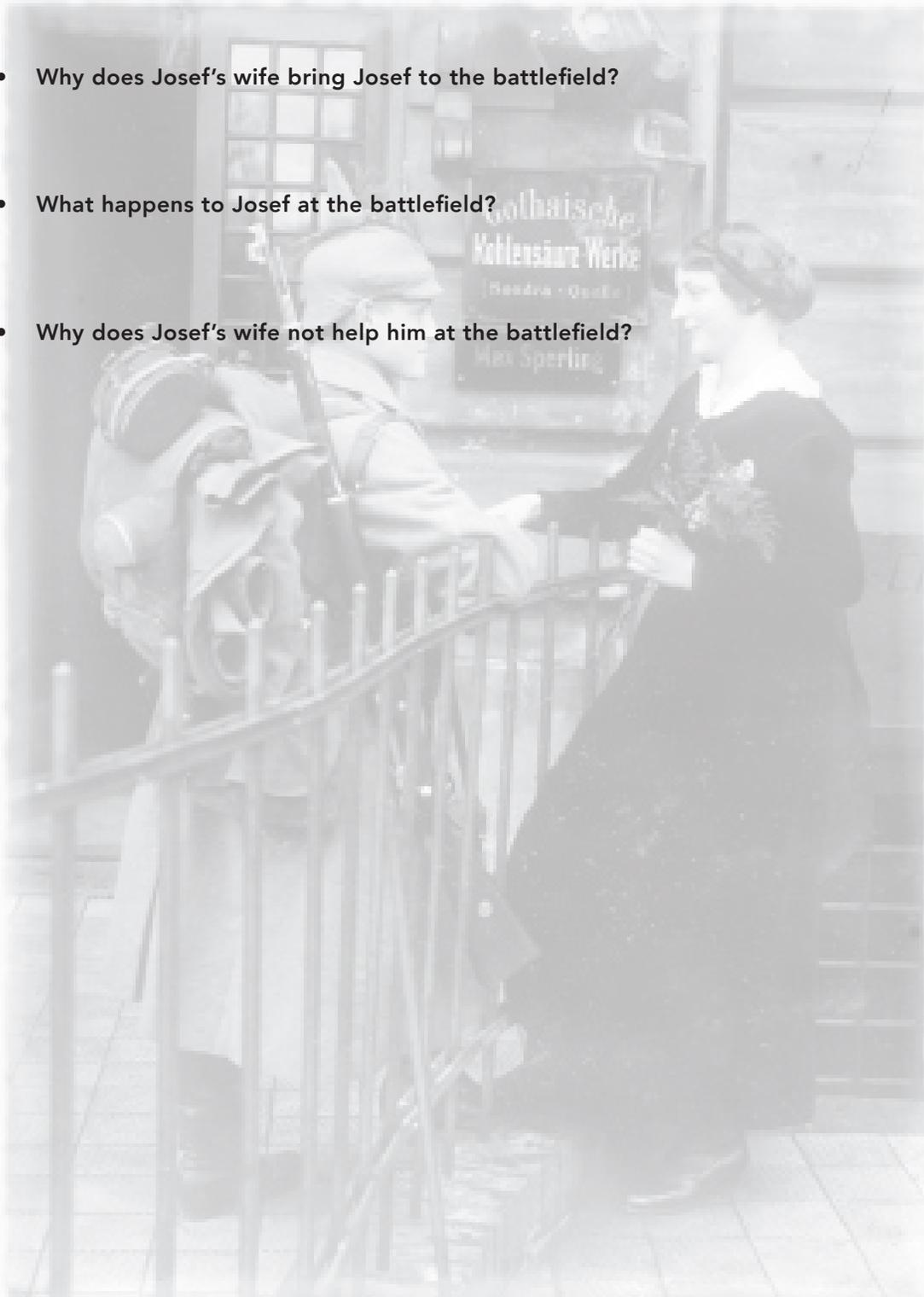
## CHAPTER FOUR: JOSEF'S WIFE

Corporal Josef Thiedemann returns home unable to recognize any of his family or even his horses, due to being buried by a trench mortar for several hours in battle. He is no longer the same man and in a particularly sad anecdote, when Josef is taking a shortcut with his children across open country, he is transported back to the battlefield and crawls, ducks, and hides until his wife retrieves him. Josef's wife manages the farm alone and has to work very hard because she fired the foreman for making fun of Josef's condition. She tries to get doctors to treat Josef but none can help him. After a comrade of Josef's visits, Josef's wife decides to take Josef to the battlefield where he was injured during the war. The couple walks all over the battlefield and Josef seems to recognize nothing until a "seeker" strikes a shell and it explodes. Josef is found taking cover and despite offers from others to help move him, Josef's wife decides to leave him laying in the dugout. They stay in the dugout through nightfall and when he attempts to lift himself up his wife does not help him. He recognizes her and calls her name. Later they return to the farm and he is able to take it over.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER FOUR: JOSEF'S WIFE

- Why does Josef act the way he does when gets home? What do we recognize this as today?

- Why does Josef's wife bring Josef to the battlefield?
- What happens to Josef at the battlefield?
- Why does Josef's wife not help him at the battlefield?



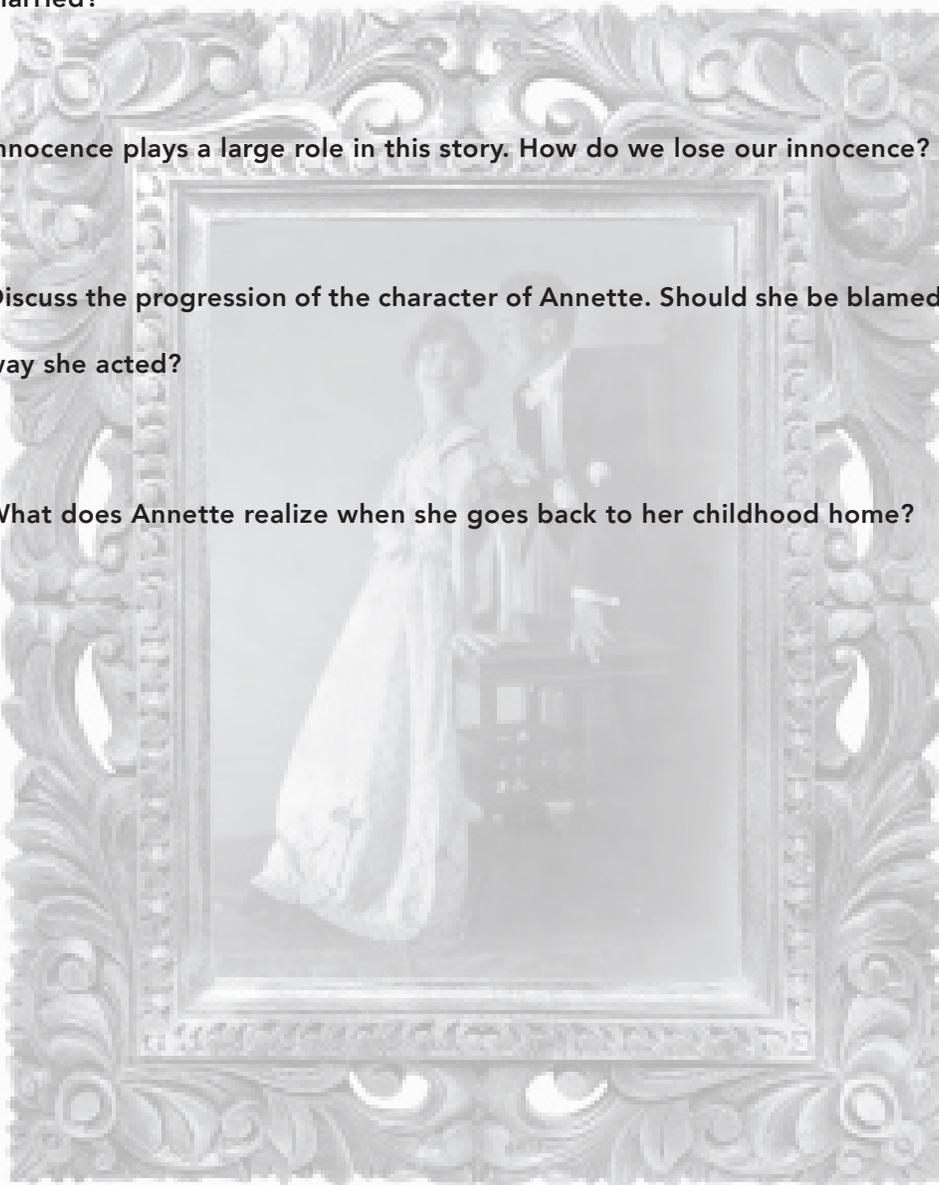
# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## CHAPTER FIVE: ANNETTE'S LOVE STORY

**T**his chapter begins with Annette Stoll's childhood in central Germany and her relationship with her childhood playmate, Gerhard Jäger. As Annette and Gerhard enter teenagehood, Annette no longer wants to play with Gerhard and finds him immature. Gerhard goes to University and she wants a respectable husband and so they no longer speak to each other. Gerhard volunteers for the war and as he leaves on the train he catches Annette's hand and she tells him to bring her something pretty from Paris. Annette and Gerhard write to each other while he is away and when he comes back on leave he asks her to marry him. They have a wedding steeped in nationalist pride and the one day they spend together after their wedding all he wants to do is run through gardens and she is disturbed by this. Four weeks after he returns to the front, Gerhard is killed and Annette is a widow at seventeen. Annette is no longer a child and not yet an adult and not knowing where she belongs, she works as a nurse in a hospital. She decides to remarry and her fiancé and herself revisit her childhood home and awash in the memory of Gerhard, she leaves her fiancé. Full of remorse and love for Gerhard, she loses her job and joins a seance sect.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Compare why Annette wants to get married and why Gerhard wants to get married.
- Why does Gerhard only want to run in the gardens with Annette after they get married?
- Innocence plays a large role in this story. How do we lose our innocence?
- Discuss the progression of the character of Annette. Should she be blamed for the way she acted?
- What does Annette realize when she goes back to her childhood home?



# CHAPTER SIX: THE STRANGE FATE OF JOHANN BARTOK

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Only five months married when the war broke out, Johann Bartok spends his last day securing his business for his wife and they take a picture together, which he puts in his watch, cutting his own face out. After some fighting Bartok is sent to a concentration camp and after a mutiny on a transport ship, Bartok receives fifteen years imprisonment. When he is released from prison, he return to his city and finds it much changed. He doesn't know anyone and the town has grown. He has trouble finding his wife and when he does find her she has two children and had remarried when she received Johann's death certificate. He leaves her house and goes to look for work.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER SIX: THE  
STRANGE FATE OF JOHANN BARTOK

- What is the significance of Bartok's actions towards the picture of his wife and him?
- Compare the way Bartok spends his last day with his wife and how Gerhard (Annette's Love Story) wants to spend his last day with his wife.
- Throughout the story, the goal of reuniting with his wife is a strong motivating factor for Bartok. What do you think will motivate him at the end of the story, when he discovers that she has remarried?



# CHAPTER SEVEN: ON THE ROAD

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**T**he narrator is starving on a road. A farmer finds him, revives him and eventually brings him into town. The farmer tells him that three miles away there is a gang at work on a railroad and he can find work. The narrator arrives at the barracks still weak and is helped by a man named, Heinrich Thiess. They watch the healthy young wife of the watchman and Heinrich begins a relationship with her. The narrator is harassed by a man named Meck. Heinrich teaches the narrator how to fight back. One day Meck accosts the narrator and the narrator yells at Meck and hits him in the stomach. Meck fights back and Heinrich attacks him. The narrator and Heinrich live in peace after the fight. After talking to the watchman about his wife, Heinrich decides to leave and go back to his wife. Three weeks after Heinrich leaves, the narrator leaves as well.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER SEVEN: ON THE ROAD

- Why does Heinrich not go home right away?
- Why does talking to the injured watchman make Heinrich go home?
- What is the significance of the relationship between Heinrich and the watchman's wife?
- Compare and contrast the dynamic between the workmen in this story and soldiers at war.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## CHAPTER EIGHT: I DREAMT LAST NIGHT

Officer Gerhart Brockman is dying in a hospital of a bullet in the lungs and tuberculosis. He still believes he will be cured and sent back out to the war and the narrator studies his persistence. He tells everyone in the hospital of how he was once a teacher and taught his students to sing. As Gerhart lays dying, a children's chorus sings for him his favorite song and he is finally filled with peace. The class leaves and that night Gerhart is screaming for morphine and the narrator goes to look for the young teacher of the class. The young teacher goes to Gerhart's bedside and soothes him until the nun in charge threatens to kick her out but the narrator refuses to let the young teacher leave. Gerhart dies the morning after Christmas and the young teacher, at first just a girl, has now aged from sorrow. The narrator, comforted by Gerhart's death, lays down beside him.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER EIGHT: I DREAMT LAST NIGHT

- Why does the presence of the very young teacher soothe Gerhart?
- Why does Gerhart's death soothe the narrator? Why is his death a "testament and promise"?



In several of Erich Maria Remarque's short stories contained within *Eight Stories*, he mentions poppies and chamomile growing in the once battlefields. This was common in the battlefields of Europe in the years after WWI, so much so that the poppy has become a symbol of WWI and memorials all over Europe feature the poppy prominently.

The reason the poppy is found on these battlefields is because poppy seeds lie dormant for many years and appear only when the ground is stirred. The action seen on these once bucolic fields is what caused the poppies to bloom.

Poet John McCrae, a Canadian doctor and teacher, wrote a poem commemorating this sight. It was the second to last poem he would ever write.



*In Flanders Fields*

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.

- John McCrae 1872 - 1918

