



We Will Remember Them

Today, we observed the two-minute silence during which we remembered those who lost their lives in World War I, and the Armistice that brought that war to an end on 11 November 1918. Students wore their poppies, and we came together as a school community to remember all who have been lost or affected by conflict through the years.

It is traditional at remembrance services to hear the words taken from Robert Binyon's poem 'For the Fallen':

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them.

Over 16 million people were killed in the First World War, with somewhere around 800,000 these being British. Carole Ann Duffy's poem, 'The Wound in Time', was read on the beaches around the UK and Ireland on Armistice Day in 2018 as part of a nationwide gesture of remembrance and she asks in her poem 'What happened next? War. And after that? War. And now? War.' The second World War followed the First all too quickly, and since 1945, the only years without British personnel being killed on operations were 1968 and 2016. This week we remember not just those who died, but all those families affected by the aftermath of service and all those individuals who survived but whose lives were impacted by service. This time to be still and reflect is as precious as the busiest moment of any school day.

Today I wanted to take the opportunity to think about why we should continue to mark this occasion in the 21st century. I have marked Remembrance Day for as long as I can remember and have cherished the unmissable moments of watching our late Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II laying a wreath at the Cenotaph, always bringing an immediacy to the act of remembrance for me, highlighting its importance as a moment to reflect upon the

high cost of peace, freedom, and democracy, alongside the sacrifices of the First and Second World Wars.

But I do not think that the reason Remembrance Day remains relevant today is simply because we should honour the sacrifices that so many have made for us, or even that it is vital that we pause to appreciate our freedoms, although these are both valid and important reasons. Remembrance Day embodies something bigger and more fundamental than this. Recalling the past eighteen months, each and every one of us have witnessed an unprecedented scale of sadness and sacrifice which adds poignancy to the greater sadness and sacrifice experienced in previous eras. It should also provide some solace to be reminded that however bleak life seemed during the protracted periods of lockdowns, it was not so long ago a great deal bleaker. Amid the horrors of COVID-19, the pandemic has given us a common enemy in 2020 which has helped to unify us at times and where we began to see what a different, more peaceful, and collaborative world might look like.

Having said this, I don't think that this is where the importance lies either. Comparisons of bleakness, while understandable at difficult times, do not give purpose to the act of remembrance. Alongside remembering the fallen and the permanently affected by war, there is a deeper value in the fact that there are precious few moments in the year which bring us together and compel us to look beyond ourselves and to pause and reflect.

The act of remembrance cuts through religious and political differences, through generational and societal divides and can be an unifying moment in the national calendar, and even an internationally unifying moment, where we share this common act with others. War and conflict are bred out of discord and division. Whilst in the First and Second World Wars our troops fought for our own freedom; in more recent times our military have been sent to help restore peace in other countries. To that end, in today's world, a sense of division within our society exists and there is a growing platform and risk for more extreme views through fake news and hate speech that separate us from each other in our world today.

In closing, while it is important to remember the sacrifices made in conflict, I hope we can also reflect on the need to unify, to find common ground and to remember our shared humanity so as to avoid the terrible effects that division and discord can bring through war and conflict.

Dr May Lee
Head