



# National Poetry Day Remembrance Poems

---

*From W. W. Gibson's shocking poem about breakfast in a trench, to Roger Stevens on a cat awarded the Victoria Cross, there are both new and familiar names in this selection of poems for Remembrance. We hope they will work well in your classrooms.*

*Reproduced with kind permission of Macmillan Children's Books.*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
<b>POETRY FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR</b>	
The Call by Jessie Pope	2
Breakfast by W. W. Gibson	3
Break of Day in the Trenches by Isaac Rosenberg	4
The Last Laugh by Wilfred Owen	5
In Memoriam by E. A. Mackintosh	6-7
<b>CONTEMPORARY POETRY ABOUT WAR FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN</b>	
The Colour of Your Skin by Roger Stevens	8
When Your Name's Not on the List by Roger Stevens	9
Luke and Jessie by Brian Moses	10
The Animal Victoria Cross by Roger Stevens	11
Spoils of War by Roger Stevens	12

# The Call

by Jessie Pope (1868-1941)

Who's for the trench –  
Are you, my laddie?  
Who'll follow French –  
Will you, my laddie?  
Who's fretting to begin,  
Who's going out to win?  
And who wants to save his skin –  
Do you, my laddie?

Who's for the khaki suit –  
Are you, my laddie?  
Who longs to charge and shoot –  
Do you, my laddie?  
Who's keen on getting fit,  
Who means to show his grit,  
And who'd rather wait a bit –  
Would you, my laddie?

Who'll earn the Empire's thanks –  
Will you, my laddie?  
Who'll swell the victor's ranks –  
Will you, my laddie?  
When that procession comes,  
Banners and rolling drums –  
Who'll stand and bite his thumbs –  
Will you, my laddie?

*Jessie Pope wrote this poem in 1915 to encourage young men to do their duty and enlist. She was a well known pro-war writer: Wilfred Owen's original title for 'Dulce et Decorum Est' was 'To Jessie Pope'.*

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# Breakfast

by W. W. Gibson (1878-1962)

We ate our breakfast lying on our backs,  
Because the shells were screeching overhead.  
I bet a rasher to a loaf of bread  
That Hull United would beat Halifax  
When Jimmy Stainthorp played full-back instead  
Of Billy Bradford. Ginger raised his head  
And cursed, and took the bet; and dropt back dead.  
We ate our breakfast lying on our backs,  
Because the shells were screeching overhead.

*Although he never served abroad, Wilfred Wilson Gibson was one of the first poets to write about the real lives of ordinary soldiers. Gibson said he wanted his poems to 'get at' people and his work influenced Isaac Rosenberg, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. This poem was published in October 1914 in The Nation and was based on a soldier's story quoted in the same journal in an earlier issue.*

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# Break of Day in the Trenches

by Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918)

The darkness crumbles away –  
It is the same old druid Time as ever.  
Only a live thing leaps my hand –  
A queer sardonic rat –  
As I pull the parapet's poppy  
To stick behind my ear.  
Droll rat, they would shoot you if they knew  
Your cosmopolitan sympathies.  
Now you have touched this English hand  
You will do the same to a German –  
Soon, no doubt, if it be your pleasure  
To cross the sleeping green between.  
It seems you inwardly grin as you pass  
Strong eyes, fine limbs, haughty athletes  
Less chanced than you for life,  
Bonds to the whims of murder,  
Sprawled in the bowels of the earth,  
The torn fields of France.  
What do you see in our eyes  
At the shrieking iron and flame  
Hurled through still heavens?  
What quaver – what heart aghast?

*Isaac Rosenberg was an English poet who trained originally as an artist. He enlisted to fight in 1915 and was killed at the battle of Arras in 1918. This poem was first published in the American magazine Poetry in December 1916.*

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# The Last Laugh

by Wilfred Owen (1893–1918)

'O Jesus Christ! I'm hit,' he said; and died.  
Whether he vainly cursed, or prayed indeed,  
The Bullets chirped—In vain! vain! vain!  
Machine-guns chuckled,—Tut-tut! Tut-tut!  
And the Big Gun guffawed.

Another sighed,—'O Mother, Mother! Dad!'  
Then smiled, at nothing, childlike, being dead.  
And the lofty Shrapnel-cloud  
Leisurely gestured,—fool!  
And the falling splinters tittered.

'My Love!' one moaned. Love-languid seemed his mood,  
Till, slowly lowered, his whole face kissed the mud.  
And the Bayonets' long teeth grinned;  
Rabbles of Shells hooted and groaned;  
And the Gas hissed.

*The 22-year-old Wilfred Owen enlisted in 1915 as an Officer with the Artists' Rifles. His initial enthusiasm for battle did not survive his first encounters with the trenches and he was soon writing home about the horrors of the war. In 1917, whilst being treated at Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh for shell shock, he befriended Siegfried Sasson who encouraged him to develop his poetry. Although by that point the two believed that the war ought to be ended, both returned to the front to support their men. Owen sent an early draft of this poem to his mother in February 1918. He was killed in November, one week before the Armistice.*

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# In Memoriam

*(Private D. Sutherland, killed in action in the German trench,  
16 May 1916, and the others who died)*

by E. A. Mackintosh (1893-1917)

So you were David's father,  
And he was your only son,  
And the new-cut peats are rotting  
And the work is left undone,  
Because of an old man weeping,  
Just an old man in pain,  
For David, his son David,  
That will not come again.

Oh, the letters he wrote you,  
And I can see them still,  
Not a word of the fighting  
But just the sheep on the hill  
And how you should get the crops in  
Ere the year get stormier,  
And the Bosches have got his body,  
And I was his officer.

You were only David's father,  
But I had fifty sons  
When we went up in the evening  
Under the arch of the guns,  
And we came back at twilight –  
O God! I heard them call  
To me for help and pity  
That could not help at all.

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

Oh, never will I forget you,  
My men that trusted me,  
More my sons than your fathers',  
For they could only see  
The little helpless babies  
And the young men in their pride.  
They could not see you dying,  
And hold you while you died.

Happy and young and gallant,  
They saw their first-born go,  
But not the strong limbs broken  
And the beautiful men brought low,  
The piteous writhing bodies,  
They screamed 'Don't leave me, sir,'  
For they were only your fathers  
But I was your officer.

*Ewart Alan Mackintosh was born in Brighton, to a Scottish father and an English mother. He studied at Oxford and in 1914, when his contemporaries were joining up, tried to enlist. Initially rejected on the grounds of poor eyesight, he was accepted into the Seaforth Highlanders in 1915. In March 1916, he and his men took over from the French at Arras where the opposing trenches were close together. In May he led a successful raid on German trenches, during which he brought back two of his men who had lost limbs, whilst under heavy fire. For this action, he was awarded the Military Cross, though he wrote that he would 'rather have the boys' lives'. He was unable to bring back the body of David Sutherland, whose death inspired this poem. Mackintosh was killed in November 1917 at the Battle of Cambrai and is buried in France.*

From ***Poems from the First World War***, selected by Gaby Morgan  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# The Colour of Your Skin

by Roger Stevens

You would have thought  
That in a war  
The colour of your skin  
Would make no difference

But in the Great War  
Only white American soldiers  
Were allowed  
To die in glory

The Harlem Hellfighters  
So brave they would have faced the Devil himself  
Won the Croix de Guerre

But returned to America to find  
Their deeds of heroism  
Ignored

Today you might find this story  
Hard to believe

*More than 200,000 African-Americans served in the First World War. The majority of men worked in labour divisions although about eleven per cent fought in combat forces. They served in segregated divisions (the 92nd and 93rd) and trained separately.*

From ***What Are We Fighting For?*** by Brian Moses and Roger Stevens  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**



# When Your Name's Not on the List

by Roger Stevens

Every week  
The names  
Of the dead  
And missing  
Are pinned up  
On the church noticeboard

And Mum  
Gives me a lovely safe squeeze  
Because Dad's name  
Is not there

From *What Are We Fighting For?* by Brian Moses and Roger Stevens  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# Luke and Jessie

by Brian Moses

Luke was nineteen when he died.  
His gravestone gives no information  
about where or how and signals just one of a million deaths that year.  
His fiancée Jessie was sixteen when the news came back, along with her photo  
from his tunic pocket where he'd kept her close to his heart.  
The love of her life,  
she grieved his passing, never quite found  
anyone else who triggered the feelings she had for her soldier boy.  
She visited his grave, laid flowers.  
She grew old,  
as he never did.  
One hundred years when she died, knowing again she'd be with him. Together  
then, together now,  
for eternity.

*Private Luke Leadbetter was killed in 1917. His grave can be seen in the Aeroplane Cemetery near Ypres. His fiancée Jessie arranged for her ashes to be laid on his grave when she died eighty-four years later.*

From ***What Are We Fighting For?*** by Brian Moses and Roger Stevens  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# The Animal Victoria Cross

by Roger Stevens

And to Simon  
Who served  
On HMS Amethyst  
Who survived cannon shell  
Raised morale  
And despite injury  
Dealt very well  
With an infestation of rats  
We award  
The Dickin Medal  
For bravery  
For being  
An exceptionally cat-like  
Cat.

*HMS Amethyst was a Royal Navy warship that was deployed on anti-submarine and escort duties during World War II. The Dickin Medal for animal bravery was the animal equivalent of the Victoria Cross. It was awarded to thirty-two pigeons, eighteen dogs, three horses and one cat.*

From ***What Are We Fighting For?*** by Brian Moses and Roger Stevens  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**

# Spoils of War

by Roger Stevens

Imagine, after humans have left the planet  
And the new owners of Earth  
Are digging about for signs of our past

There will probably be a TV programme  
*Intergalactic Time Team*  
Beamed across the universe

Aliens, delicately sifting soil  
Looking for ancient artefacts  
Trying to discover what our race was like

Excitement as the first items are found  
An ancient sword, bullets, a rusted flamethrower  
An unexploded mine

From ***What Are We Fighting For?*** by Brian Moses and Roger Stevens  
Reproduced with kind permission of **Macmillan Children's Books**