



**PLAYHOUSE**  
THEATRE COMPANY

**GLYNIS LEYSHON**  
ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



**THE WARS**

**PLAY GUIDE**

## CONTENTS

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Information and Etiquette.....	3
For Students at The Playhouse .....	4
At a Glance .....	5
Synopsis .....	6
About the Playwright .....	11
Director's Notes .....	12
Timothy Findley.....	13
On the Writing of <i>The Wars</i> .....	15
World War I.....	16
Themes and Allusions.....	20
Glossary.....	22
Notable Quotables .....	25
The Poetry of the First World War .....	28
Further Exploration for Students.....	30
Recommended Reading & Viewing .....	31
Internet Sites of Note .....	32

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Several websites, online encyclopaedias, and textbooks were used in the collation of information in this guide. Some of the most relevant sites are included in the section, "Internet Sites of Note"

## WELCOME

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**This booklet was created to help audience members explore the play beyond the actual performance.** If you have any questions, comments or suggestions for the guide please contact Meredith Elliott, Corporate Communications Manager at 604.629.2097 or by email at [melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com](mailto:melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com).

### About the Company

The Playhouse Theatre Company is dedicated to producing live theatre of the highest quality – to presenting a stimulating and challenging repertoire of plays that speak to today’s audiences. This year the Playhouse presents a five-play mainstage subscription series running from October to April.

The Playhouse was founded in 1962 to provide the people of British Columbia with their first professional, live theatre. Since then it has grown from a core of volunteers operating out of basement offices into one of the country’s leading regional theatre companies, presenting an outstanding selection of plays produced by the very best actors, directors, designers and craftspeople from across the country.

## INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

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- The actors can see and hear the audience just as the audience can see and hear them!

Talking during a show (even in a whisper), fidgeting, rustling papers or candy wrappers all disturb the actors’ concentration and disrupt the performance.

Audience responses like laughing or clapping can inspire the actors to do their best work. This interplay is the essence of live theatre.

- Objects of any kind thrown on stage pose a serious hazard to actor safety and are also extremely disruptive to the performance.
- Each school group is assigned specific seats. Please remain in your designated area.

## DID YOU KNOW? MORE ABOUT THE PLAYHOUSE'S EDUCATION INITIATIVES

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### **Talkbacks**

Following every student matinee and select evening performances, students and teachers are invited to remain in their seats to ask questions of the actors. *How does an actor prepare for a role? Do actors rehearse every day? How do the actors personally handle a play's difficult issues?*

***The Wars* runs approximately 2 hours and 20 minutes including one intermission. Please plan to stay for approximately twenty minutes after the end of the performance.**

### **Artists and the Classroom (*Exclusive Benefit to Series Subscribers*)**

A theatre artist from one of several disciplines will come and speak to your class for approximately one hour. Your students will have the opportunity to converse with a professional actor, playwright, designer or director and find out how they are preparing for current Playhouse productions.

### **Production Centre Tours**

Students can take a guided tour of the 25,000 square foot Production Centre where they will explore scenery and prop shops, the wardrobe department and rehearsal halls. The Playhouse recently moved into a new facility on East 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, which will be the company's home until 2010.

### **Salon Saturdays**

The second Saturday matinee of each production features our Salon Saturday pre-show chat. Explore the issues and ideas at the heart of each production with speakers who provide in-depth knowledge about the play, the playwright or the design. The talk begins at 1pm, one hour prior to the matinee performance, and takes place in the salons just off the main lobby.

The Salon Saturday for *The Wars* takes place on Saturday, October 27 and will feature journalist and photographer Jonathan Fowlie, who spent two months in Afghanistan embedded with Canadian Forces this spring. Jonathan will speak about his experience and share some of his extraordinary photographs.

For information about any of our education programmes, please contact Meredith Elliott, Corporate Communications Manager at 604.629.2097 or by email, [melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com](mailto:melliott@vancouverplayhouse.com).

## ***The Wars* AT A GLANCE**

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### **NUTS AND BOLTS**

This is the world premiere of Timothy Findley's *The Wars*.

A co-production with Theatre Calgary, this production ran in Calgary from September 18 to October 6, 2007, before moving to Vancouver. The Playhouse has been involved with this project since February 2004, when it presented a workshop reading of an early draft.

**Running time:** 2 hours and 20 minutes including one fifteen minute intermission

### **WHAT TO LOOK FOR**

#### **Virtual Warfare**

Life in the trenches will be created through a combination of lighting, sound and projection effects, working in concert with the set design. Everything from the fog and mud of Flanders to an artillery bombardment will come to life through imagination. The horses that play such an important part of the story are represented by white light.

#### **Past and Present**

The novel *The Wars* is structured as a historian investigating the story of Robert Ross, and is revealed through narrative, present-day interviews and archival records. The stage adaptation is of course more visually reliant, but Robert's past and present bleed together through his memories of Rowena, and life in Canada and Europe run in parallel.

### **WHAT IT'S ABOUT**

It is 1915 and Canadian troops are on their way to Europe to help England win the "war to end all wars." Robert Ross, a young man from Toronto, enlists and is sent overseas after basic training in Alberta. Through bombardments, gas attacks, and fields of drowning mud, he finds solace with his comrades and the occasional bottle of cognac. But as the months wear on and the war is no closer to ending, he is overwhelmed by the incessant death and brutality, finally taking a shocking, and controversial, stand.

### **WORDS TO REMEMBER**

Rowena: Promise me you will stay forever.

Taffler: Do you know why they call me a hero? Because I was wounded and survived.

Rodwell: Everything lives forever. Believe it. Nothing dies.

Marian: The very elements that can give life and support life can also destroy life.

## SYNOPSIS

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In 1915, a young man, Robert Ross, stands alone at a train station in Lethbridge, Alberta. He has just enlisted in the army and been sent west for basic training. The rest of the company has marched ahead, but Robert has lingered on the platform. The stationmaster directs him to the base and comments that the country must be gearing up for a long war, judging by the number of new recruits, but Robert replies that the politicians promised it would be over by Christmas. The stationmaster thinks that's amusing, but the word "promise" conjures up a memory of Robert's sister, Rowena.

It's the day of her 25<sup>th</sup> birthday and Rowena wants to open her presents. First they want to take a family portrait. Rowena

suffers from hydrocephalus and is confined to a wheelchair. The doctors had said she wouldn't live past 15, so she is the Ross's miracle child.



Christian Goutsis as Robert Ross. Photo by David Cooper

Robert bought her two rabbits for her birthday. Their mother is concerned that Rowena can't care for them, but Robert promises to help. Their father takes a picture of Robert and Rowena, as a remembrance of the moment. Mrs. Ross leaves to go down to the train station to hand out chocolate bars to the departing soldiers. Robert promises Rowena that he'll stay with her forever. His first memory is of her looking down at him in his crib. He thought she was his mother.

Robert is brought back to the present when the stationmaster tells him he can't stay there all night. He decides to walk the two miles to the base.

At the camp, Robert runs into an acquaintance from Toronto, Clifford Purchas. Purchas is surprised to learn that Robert enlisted. They'd been in cadets together, and Robert had never seemed to be the fighting type. They compare parcels from home. Robert's mother has sent him a scarf, even though it's August. She thinks it snows year-round in Alberta.

Robert tells Purchas about how he was running in the coulees when he saw a coyote running ahead. He followed the coyote to its favourite drinking hole, and when it slaked its thirst, the coyote howled and turned to look directly at him, before trotting away. It had known he was there all along.

They watch an officer throwing rocks with pinpoint accuracy at bottles. Captain Eugene Taffler was once an all-star varsity athlete, and is now a war hero. He has already been wounded in France and is now back in Canada training the new recruits. He tells Robert and Purchas that the two opposing trenches are often no more than 100 yards apart. It comes down to man against man, throwing the artillery equivalent of rocks across an empty space.

Two other soldiers, Levitt and MacDonald, come by and ask Taffler if he's planning to go to Lousetown that evening. They want to visit the whorehouse run by a German woman named Maria. Purchas is eager to go along, but Robert is reluctant. Purchas reminds him that now they're using real guns with real bullets. It's all part of his basic training.

That evening, Robert drinks more than he ever has in his life. Taffler introduces the new recruits to Maria, who welcomes them into her parlour, encouraging her girls to dance and mingle with the soldiers. Taffler introduces Robert to Ella and orders him to keep her company. They dance awkwardly, and then Maria sends the couples off to their rooms. Robert doesn't move, so Ella tries to encourage him gently. When she starts to undress him, however, she discovers that he has jumped the gun, so to speak. She tells him that's all right, they still have all night, but when he doesn't respond, she explains that she won't get paid if they don't have sex. He can't just pretend – Maria will know the difference.

She shows him a peephole in the wall and tells him to watch what the others are doing. When she forces him to look, he pulls away and leaves.

A few mornings later, Taffler tells the recruits that they will finish their basic training at the end of the week and will be shipping out to Europe. It's sooner than expected, but he believes they're ready. Taffler sees Robert and asks how he enjoyed Lousetown. Robert prevaricates and says it turned out exactly as expected. He tells Taffler that he's being made a Second Lieutenant – through his father's influence – and wants to know how he can justify this promotion. Taffler tells him that he's only a hero because he was wounded and survived. Now he wants to show that he is. They both have something to prove.

Taffler tells him that the real reason they're shipping out early is because fresh troops are needed as soon as possible. As a last piece of advice, he tells Robert to only jump the gun once.

Two weeks later, the company is in Montreal, preparing to ship out. Mr. and Mrs. Ross have travelled east to say goodbye to Robert, but Mrs. Ross can't face him. Mr. Ross finds Robert and tells him how proud he is. He gives Robert a gun, because officers are expected to supply their own sidearm and uniform. Robert gives him a photograph of the company and Mr. Ross gives Robert a photograph of Robert and Rowena. When the ship's horn sounds, Robert has to leave, but promises to write every day.

Robert looks back and sees his mother join his father and drink from her flask. She is terrified Robert will end up just like Rowena.

En route across the Atlantic, Robert is put in charge of looking after the horses in the hold. The conditions are terrible. The manure needs to be cleaned up and the hatches opened to let in fresh air. But Robert's commanding officer, Captain Leather, won't allow that. As far as he's concerned, the horses shouldn't even be on the same ship as troops, and he won't do anything that might endanger the health of the human passengers.

Robert spies a young soldier leaning over the side of the ship, watching the water intently. Private Harris of Cape Breton, Nova Scotia is looking for whales in the cold and dark. He has a bad cough, so Robert gives him the scarf his mother sent. They watch for whales together, until Purchas comes to tell Robert that one of the horses has fallen and broken a leg. It has to be put down, and as only officers have guns, Robert has to do it.

Robert is terrified, but he has no choice. An underage soldier is crying in the hold, convinced that they will all drown. When Robert tries to shoot the horse, his arm wavers and he hesitates. He remembers his mother telling him to kill Rowena's rabbits. He can't, and his refusal to kill the rabbits blends with the present, making him unable to shoot the horse. When his father tries to take the cage away from him, they struggle and Robert falls to the ground. Purchas tells him to get up and shoot the horse. He finally fires, but misses, and fires again and again until the horse is dead and he's out of bullets. Harris gently takes the gun away from him.

Now in Europe, Robert's company is advancing to the front through a bank of fog. Robert, Purchas and MacDonald have been separated from the rest of the group. They run into a Flemish woman looking for her cows, but they don't understand what she's saying. Robert wants to find a place to bunk down for the night, but they haven't come across any barns or houses. They're not even sure the rest of the company is still behind them, but they stop to wait. All they can hear is birds splashing in the ditch.

Finally, they hear a voice in the distance. It's Levitt, coming to find them. At some point they've taken a wrong turn and are now on a dike that's slowly collapsing. They need to retrace their steps and get off the dike before the break is too wide to cross. Robert turns back to grab his pack, and the others disappear into the fog. Disoriented, he walks into a sinkhole and is only barely able to pull himself out of the mud. The others find him, and they make their way to safety.

Robert strips down and gets into a tub. His mother enters. She wants to know if he's ready to leave the next day. It's supposed to rain. She's glad it didn't rain during the funeral. She looks at the bruise on his shoulder from when he fell and remembers the time he fell learning to skate. Robert always bruised so easily. The simplest fall would cause him to turn black and blue.

She tells him Rowena never belonged to him. No one belongs to anyone. She's no longer responsible for him, now that he's joined the army. She gave birth to him, but she can't keep him alive. She can't keep anyone alive any more.

The company arrives at the dugout where they'll be bunking. They look around their new accommodations. It's cramped, but the décor is eclectic. There is a stained glass window at the entrance and one of the occupants, Private Coté, is repairing a plaster sheep. Another of the inhabitants, Sergeant Rodwell, rescues injured animals and keeps them in cages that line the walls.

The newcomers have brought a bounty of supplies: eggs, cigarettes, canned food, candles, chocolate, cookies and cognac. Levitt has brought books, much to the others' dismay, including *Clausewitz on War*. The men slowly get acquainted over cookies and peaches. Robert offers to help Rodwell feed the animals. Rodwell, it turns out, is an artist. Back home, he made his living illustrating children's books.

The Germans are bombarding the trenches, but everyone tries to go on with their own business. Robert writes a letter to Harris, who has been hospitalized with pneumonia in England. Harris tells him fanciful stories about whales, while Robert writes about his experiences on the front. Regis plays his bugle to entertain them, and Levitt reads aloud from Clausewitz. He says that war should be conducted as a serious, formal minuet.

Robert remembers how he used to dance in the barn with Rowena, moving her around in her chair to the phonograph. Every Friday, when their parents were at the golf club, they'd go out to the barn and dance with the rabbits. Rodwell wonders who she dances with now, but before Robert can answer, an explosion causes the dugout to collapse.

As act two begins, the men are digging themselves out of the dugout. Rodwell is trapped on top of Robert, and neither of them can move. Only MacDonald is unaccounted for, though Levitt is clearly in shock. He is more interested in keeping his books neatly stacked than helping. Once Robert is freed, he directs the others to dig for MacDonald, only to realize that MacDonald has joined them in their efforts. He went out to relieve himself and was trapped between the dugout and the trench.

Captain Leather finds Robert and tells him to lead his men out to lay down new gun beds. The placement is at the edge of the crater, directly facing the German lines. Robert gathers his men together and sets off with mortars and ammunition, leaving the shell-shocked Levitt behind to make tea. They climb down into the crater and lower the mortars by rope. It's too quiet, however, and Coté notices a cloud of gas drifting over the lip of the crater.

Robert orders his men to put on their gas masks, but Robert is the only one with a mask. Purchas and Regis were never issued one, and MacDonald left his behind at the trenches. He panics and tries to take Robert's away from him. He then tries to climb up the side of the crater, but Robert fires a warning shot. MacDonald falls and hurts himself.

Robert gives his mask to MacDonald and tells the men to tear off their shirttails – they don't have handkerchiefs – and urinate on them. The ammonia in the urine will neutralize the chlorine gas. They lie on the ground and cover their face with the material as the fog of gas covers them. It begins to snow as the gas finally clears away, covering the men in a blanket of white.

Robert sits up cautiously and sees a German soldier peering over the edge of the crater. He doesn't appear to be hostile, however, so slowly the others – except MacDonald, who has died – climb out of the crater while Robert keeps his gun trained on the German. As Robert is climbing out, Rodwell sees the German move and shouts a warning. Robert turns and shoots the German soldier. When he looks through his field glasses, he sees that the German was only reaching for his binoculars. He'd had a rifle by his side all the time, but had chosen to let the Canadians live.

After two months in the trenches, Robert's company has a week's leave in London. Robert, Purchase, Cote and Rodwell visit Harris in the hospital, where he's terribly ill with pneumonia. A nurse, Marian, directs them to his bed. She's glad to see that he has visitors. No one should die alone, she tells Robert.

The others leave Robert and Harris to catch up. Harris thanks him for his letters and Robert tells him that he's received another letter from his parents. He can't stand reading them, however, because they're so empty of any real meaning.

Robert wonders how Harris is doing, cooped inside all the time, but Harris tells him that he's been swimming with the whales in his imagination. He tells Robert that whales sing underwater, and that everyone once came from the ocean. Harris tells him that his sister is watching over him and is proud of him.

Robert tells him what really happened to Rowena. She fell in the barn, trying to reach for the rabbits in the loft, because Robert wasn't there. He'd promised to dance with her, but he was in his room. When he got there, she was already dead. It's his fault she died. If he'd been there like he promised, she'd still be alive. She haunts him. He saw her in the crater, through the gas. Harris thinks she was telling Robert that everything happened for a reason. He promises to teach Robert how to swim with the whales before he drifts off to sleep.

When Robert hears Marian laughing with another patient, he goes over to talk to her. She wants to know what it's like at the front. She sees the results daily, but she needs to understand what her patients have faced. Robert tells her it's worse than she could imagine. It's a nightmare.

When the other patient asks for a glass of water, Robert realises that it is Taffler. He goes in to see him before Marian can warn him, and discovers that Taffler has had both arms amputated. Robert doesn't know what to do, so he excuses himself and runs out.

Robert sits on the steps of the hospital. Marian joins him. Mr. and Mrs. Ross sit on the steps outside of their church. Mrs. Ross can't bear it any longer, all the soldiers smiling, all the muscular Christianity. They said the war would be over by Christmas, but it's Easter and things are no closer to being over. She wonders how many more holidays they'll have to spend without Robert. She asks her husband to send the letter she's written to Robert, telling him exactly how she feels about the war and his absence. Robert, in turn, asks Marian to read aloud the letter he's received, an innocuous message from home. He knows that his father has written it for her. Both men tear up the letters.

Robert returns a few days later with a bouquet of flowers for Marian, only to learn that Harris has died in the night. The hospital hasn't been able to get in touch with Harris's family, so they give his ashes to Robert. Marian suggests he scatter them, and they have a small, informal funeral at the bank of the Thames, where Harris's ashes can return to the sea to sing with the whales.

Back in France, conditions on the front are horrific. Rodwell is sent down the line, where he will almost certainly be killed. He leaves behind a letter for his daughter and his sketchbook, filled with pictures of animals – and Robert. Robert is near breaking point – they've been bombarded non-stop for days, surrounded by death, with no end in sight. He begs Captain Leather to let him take the horses to safety. Leather refuses, saying it would be cowardice, and returns to his rum.

Robert convinces Purchas to help him lead the horses to safety. They open the gates, but the horses are too frightened to move. Leather demands to know what they're doing, and orders them to leave the horses alone. But Robert is determined to save them, not just for the horses, but also for the wounded who will need to be evacuated after the battle. Leather tells them that if they don't stop, he'll shoot. He kills Purchas. Robert snaps. He pulls out his gun and shoots Leather and two soldiers, then runs away with the horses.

Later, Robert has barricaded himself in a barn with the horses. A squadron has tracked him down, and the major in charge orders Robert to release the horses. Robert replies that they are not going back, leading the soldiers to believe that he is no longer alone. They set fire to the barn, intending to smoke them out. But Robert can't open the door to let the horses out, and by the time the soldiers realize what's happening and break down the door, Robert has been engulfed by the fire.

At the hospital in London, Marian receives her latest patient, a man under military guard, who has been terribly burned. He is expected to stand trial for killing his superior officer once he recovers, but Marian knows he is dying and can't understand why he would need a guard. She realizes that it is Robert, and knows that whatever he did, he had a good reason. She sends the guard away to get supplies, and when they are alone, she tells Robert that she will release him from his agony if he wants. He pauses and tells her, "Not yet."

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

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Dennis Garnhum was appointed Artistic Director of Theatre Calgary in September of 2005. In addition to writing and directing this world premiere of *The Wars*, Dennis directed *Trying*, *Of Mice and Men* and *A Christmas Carol* over the past two seasons.

Prior to his appointment at Theatre Calgary, Dennis spent three years in New York City, where he directed *Rat In The Skull* at the Berkshire Theatre Festival, and the premiere of the musical *Two Orphans* by Pulitzer-prize nominated playwright Theresa Rebeck in Boston. Dennis was the Special Projects Producer at the Long Wharf Theatre where he worked on the development of the opera *Brundibar* (Tony Kushner/Maurice Sendak).

Prior to his move to New York, Dennis directed plays at almost all the major theatre companies in Canada. For the Stratford Festival of Canada, Dennis directed *The Hunchback Of Notre Dame*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and premieres of two plays by Timothy Findley, *Shadows* and *The Trials of Ezra Pound*. Dennis directed at the Shaw Festival for six seasons, including productions of *The Mystery Of Edwin Drood*, *Still Life*, *Sorry*, *Wrong Number* and *S.S. Tenacity*.

In Calgary, he was part of the 2004 PlayWrites Festival at Alberta Theatre Projects, directing *Down The Main Drag*. He was dramaturge and director of Maureen Hunter's new play *Vinci*, which was produced at the National Arts Centre, Manitoba Theatre Centre, and CanStage in Toronto. At the Tarragon Theatre, he directed *Skylight* and *Slavs*, receiving Dora nominations for best direction. Other directing credits include *To Kill A Mockingbird* and *Of Mice And Men* for MTC and the Citadel Theatre, *Closer* and *Three Tall Women* for MTC, *Blue/Orange* for the Belfry Theatre and Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg; *Of Mice And Men* at Neptune Theatre in Halifax, *Sleuth* at the Saidye Bronfman Centre in Montreal, and *A Christmas Carol* at Theatre New Brunswick.

Dennis has also enjoyed working closely with theatre students, directing *The Laramie Project* at the National Theatre School of Canada, and *Arcadia* at the University of British Columbia.

Dennis' concert versions of *Beethoven Lives Upstairs* and *Hallelujah Handel* have toured across North America. In 2002, *Beethoven Lives Upstairs* debuted internationally in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Dennis also conceived a one-night celebration of Stephen Sondheim at Harbourfront's World Stage in Toronto, with the musical theatre legend in attendance. In Great Barrington, MA, Dennis developed a one-night celebration for the 100th anniversary of the newly restored Mahaiwe Theatre.

Dennis spent three summers in the Opera Program at the Banff School of Fine Arts working as Assistant Director to acclaimed opera director Colin Graham. He received a BFA from the University of Victoria, and an MFA in directing from the University of British Columbia.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

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Many years ago I received a call from the Stratford Festival to direct the premiere of *The Trials Of Ezra Pound* by Timothy Findley. I was immensely honoured, excited and more than a little terrified to have the opportunity to work alongside such a renowned playwright and novelist.

Rehearsing that play was one of the highlights of my life. Tiff (as we were asked to call him) attended most rehearsals. The sound of his great laugh always filled the theatre – it was mighty contagious, warm and welcoming.

He never failed to support and encourage my efforts. My terror eventually disappeared. We were midway through developing another project for the following Stratford season when he died suddenly. Tiff's death was an extraordinary loss, for those who were familiar with his work, and for those who knew him. At the time I remember feeling that I was not ready or willing to end our creative collaboration. It was then that the idea for a stage version of *The Wars* was born.

Thirty years ago, Tiff wrote this courageous story of a young Canadian going off to war. As I began the adaptation, I was drawn to the eloquent way in which he illustrates the cost of war and the elements that define heroism. We all face many wars throughout our lives. It is how we move through them that this play hopes to consider.

While writing the final draft this summer, a butterfly landed on my pen. "Tiff?" I asked. This little creature allowed me to touch its beautiful wings and sat with me for what seemed to me an extraordinary amount of time. I do believe Tiff is with us as we bring this play to life.

And that unmistakable sound of his laugh still brings a smile to my face.

For Tiff.

*Dennis Garnhum*

## TIMOTHY FINDLEY

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Actor/playwright/novelist Timothy Findley was one of a handful of writers that put Canada on the literary map in the 1980s and '90s. Along with Margaret Atwood, Robertson Davies, Mordechai Richler and Alice Munro, he formed the vanguard of Canadian novelists who achieved international success.

Timothy Findley was born in 1930 and raised in the wealthy Toronto suburb of Rosedale – the home of Robert Ross, the protagonist of *The Wars*. Nicknamed Tiff for his initials (Timothy Irving Frederick Findley), he was drawn to the arts at an early age, despite the reservations of his family, and studied first dance and then acting. He enjoyed early success as an actor, performing in the very first season of the Stratford Festival alongside Sir Alec Guinness. He later studied at London's Central School of Speech and Drama on Guinness's sponsorship, where he met playwright Thornton Wilder and actress/playwright Ruth Gordon. They encouraged him to take up writing after reading one of his short stories in *The Tamarack Review*.

Literary success was slow in coming, however. His first two novels, *The Last of the Crazy People* (1967) and *The Butterfly Plague* (1969) were published in Britain after being rejected by Canadian publishers. But his next book, *The Wars*, was Findley's breakthrough novel, winning him the Governor-General's Award for Fiction in 1977.

In the meantime, Findley had married actress Janet Reid briefly, but the marriage was annulled. He spent the rest of his life with William Whitehead, whom he had met in 1951. Whitehead was not only his life partner, but also, on occasion, his writing partner. The two won a joint ACTRA Award for writing *The National Dream*, a 1974 CBC miniseries based on the Pierre Berton book, and co-wrote *Dieppe 1942* in 1979, for which they received a Genie nomination.

In all, Findley wrote eleven novels, three collections of shorts stories, nine plays, and several memoirs and works of non-fiction. In 1986, he was invested to the Order of Canada with the following citation:

In the course of a successful acting career in theatre and on television in Canada, England and the USA, he turned to writing, which eventually became his main interest. From his base in Cannington, Ontario, he has written award-winning radio and television scripts, plays, magazine articles and the novels for which he is best known, including *Famous Last Words*, and *The Wars*.

Active in the writing community, Findley was one of the founders of the Writer's Union of Canada and served as the President of the Canadian chapter of P.E.N. International. He received a second Governor General's Award for his play *Elizabeth Rex*.

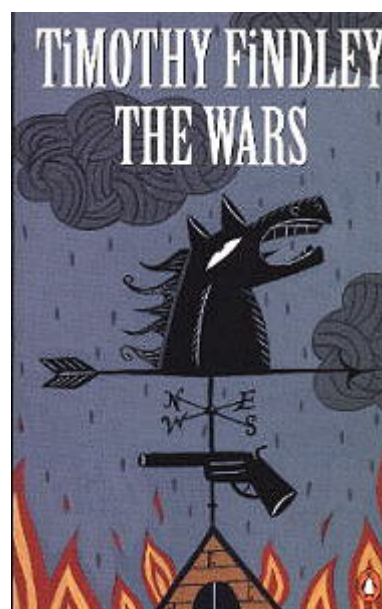
For many years, Findley and Whitehead divided their time between a farm in southern Ontario, Stone Orchard, and the south of France. They sold Stone Orchard in the mid-1990s and moved their Canadian residence to Stratford. His final novel, *Spadework* (2001), was set in the theatre world of Stratford.

In 1996, the French government bestowed upon Findley their highest literary honour, the Chevalier de l'Ordre des arts et des lettres. He was also a member of the Order of Ontario and was inducted into the Canadian Walk of Fame in 2002. Findley passed away on June 20, 2002 in Provence, France from congestive heart failure and complications from a fall.

In the introduction to his collection of short stories, *Dinner Along the Amazon*, Findley wrote: “It came as something of a shock, when gathering these stories for collective publication, to discover that for over thirty years of writing my attention has turned again and again to the same unvarying gamut of sounds and images. They not only turn up here in this present book, but in my novels, too. I wish I hadn't noticed this. In fact, it became an embarrassment and I began to wonder if I should file A CATALOGUE OF PERSONAL OBSESSIONS. The sound of screen doors banging; evening lamplight; music held at a distance – always being played on a gramophone; letters written on blue-tinted note paper; robins making forays onto summer lawns to murder worms; photographs in cardboard boxes; Colt revolvers hidden in bureau drawers and a chair that is always falling over. What does it mean? Does it mean that here is a writer who is hopelessly uninventive? Appallingly repetitive? Why are the roads always dusty in the man's work – why is it always so hot – why can't it RAIN? And my agent was once heard to moan aloud as she was reading through the pages of a television script I had just delivered: "Oh God, Findley – not more rabbits!”

Many of these “obsessions” can be found in *The Wars*, where rabbits – and animals in general – play a profound role. The novel's structure is fascinating in that it employs first, second and third-person narrative. Using the device of a researcher investigating the story of a young soldier in World War I, it examines a crucial period in Canadian history through the experiences of one individual. The researcher sorts through photos and letters, interviews people who knew Robert Ross, and tries to piece together the events that led up to and beyond a shocking “act of madness.” It is up to the reader to decide if it was an act of destruction, or one of affirmation.

The novel is dedicated to Findley's uncle, who served in World War I, and is based in part on letters and photographs he sent home from the front. Findley allegedly named his main character after Robert Baldwin Ross, best known as the friend, lover and literary executor of Oscar Wilde, and a member of a prominent Ontario family.



## ON THE WRITING OF *THE WARS*

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Every so often, during our forty years together, the author of *The Wars* would muse aloud: “I don’t understand why I waited so long to write about the Great War. I was brought up on it. The stories of Uncle Tiff’s World War I experiences were repeated endlessly around our dining-room table. His letters home were enshrined in a leather-covered binder. Why wasn’t it my first novel? How on earth did it get to be my third?”

Thus spoke Timothy Irving Frederick Findley – known to family and friends by his initials: Tiff – and so named in honour of the family war hero, his father’s elder brother, Thomas Irving Findley – “Uncle Tiff”. Though badly wounded, he survived the war but died young, when his namesake was only three.

Whatever the reason for the delay in writing about World War I, once the work began in 1976, it was completed in less than six months. And those family letters proved to be invaluable. Uncle Tiff had been a faithful correspondent, giving his family a vivid account of day to day life overseas – while also providing a probably unintentional sense of how a tender-hearted young man from Toronto was gradually transformed into someone who could report the daily number of Germans he killed as casually as he would describe his battlefield rations.

Tiff was fascinated by whatever he gleaned from his uncle’s accounts – and made good use of the details of everyday life at the Front. In order, as well, to gain whatever he could of firsthand experience, in the frosty early spring of 1976 the author of *The Wars* even spent a harrowing time living in the cattle-churned mud of the lower fields of our Ontario farm, Stone Orchard – eating, sleeping, trying – and failing – to stay warm and clean. He had planned on staying there for three days and nights, but after twenty-four hours of tremendous discomfort, he retreated to his own bed and bath – with a new appreciation of the villainous role mud could play in the life of a soldier.

As part of the preparation to write the novel, Tiff read extensively about the various campaigns of 1914-1918, filling several notebooks with the facts he gleaned. Once there was a complete manuscript of the story, it was decided to send a copy to a military historian – just to make sure that no errors had crept into the writing, in spite of the research efforts of the author and the proofreading and typing provided by me, his partner. The opinion we received back was encouraging – the military history, as presented in *The Wars*, was completely accurate. There were, however, two other errors. One was connected to a character who was presented as a varsity sports star. Contrary to what Tiff had assumed, the forward pass did not enter Canadian football until the 1930s. The other error concerned the hero’s train journey from Toronto to a military base in Alberta, which entailed a stop in Sault Ste. Marie. In spite of the fact that we had both just done a television adaptation of Pierre Berton’s history of the Canadian Pacific Railway – *The National Dream* – neither of us had remembered that the CPR’s main line, in the early years of the 20th century, completely bypassed Sault Ste. Marie. There were two very red faces, then, on our farm.

It was inevitable that Tiff would see certain symbolisms in the factual accounts recorded in his uncle’s letters. Some of them told of Canadian soldiers being billeted in a partially abandoned asylum – which fed in nicely to the concept that waging any war is an act of insanity.

Ultimately, Timothy Findley’s tale of World War I was a triumph. It won the Governor General’s Award for fiction, was translated into over twenty languages and remains his best-selling work. It was made into an award-winning feature film, and now can be seen, for the first time, on the stage.

I know that Tiff always hoped that *The Wars* would one day become a theatre piece. Given how delighted he was with a Stratford Festival production of his play, *The Trials of Ezra Pound*, I believe he would have been equally delighted to know that the director of that production, Dennis Garnhum, has become the one to adapt and direct *The Wars*.

*William Whitehead*

# FIRST WORLD WAR

## The Beginning:

Known as the Great War, World War I, and “the war to end all wars,” the First World War was fought between July 28, 1914 and November 11, 1918, primarily in Europe and the Middle East, though there was fighting in Africa, the Indian subcontinent, and the South Pacific. Four years of unprecedented bloodletting resulted in nine million dead, four empires destroyed, and vast social and political transformations that continue to resonate today.

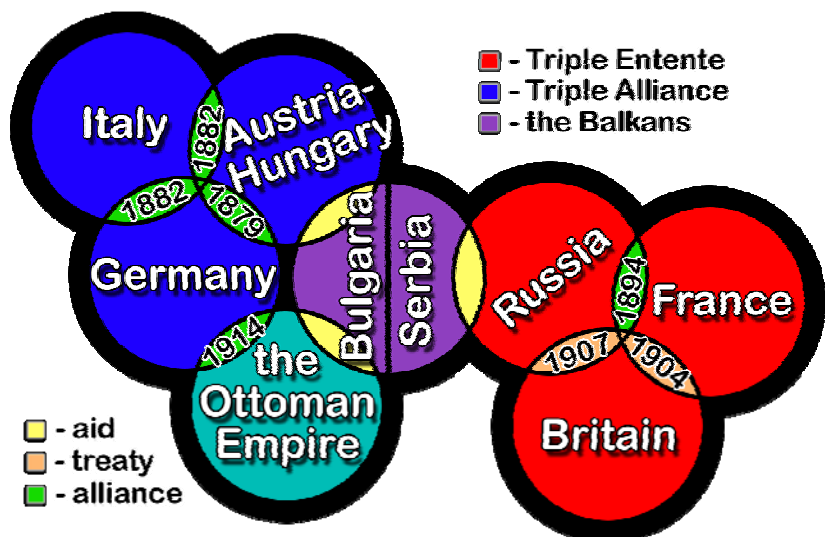
Towards the end of his life, Otto von Bismarck, the “Iron Chancellor” of the German Empire, predicted that the next war in Europe would be caused by “some damned foolish thing in the Balkans.” A region of south-eastern Europe, comprised today of Albanian, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Montenegro, Greece, Macedonia, Serbia and parts of Turkey, the Balkans were a hotbed of nationalism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires began to disintegrate, and varying political forces scrambled to fill the vacuum of power and territory.

Bismarck’s prediction came true, less than two decades after his death, when a Serbian nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. When Serbia refused to investigate the incident, Austria-Hungary, with the support of Germany, put political pressure on Serbia, issuing what became known as the July Ultimatum. Serbia accepted the demands, but only in part on the advice of Russia. When Serbian reserve troops accidentally crossed into Austro-Hungarian territory, Austria declared war on July 28, effectively starting World War I.

While Franz Ferdinand’s assassination was the *casus belli*, the roots of the war were tangled and deep. Entangling alliances, rising nationalism, an arms race, and an unstable balance of power conspired to create a political situation in Europe where a single match could set the continent afire.

With the match struck, it was up to the great powers – Britain, France, Russia, Austria-Hungary and Germany – to either blow it out or fan the flames. Russia, who had both pan-Slavic sympathies and a long-standing desire to obtain warm water ports, pledged their support to Serbia. Austria-Hungary’s ally, Germany, pledged to support Austria against Russia. Following Austria’s declaration of war and initial attack on Belgrade, Russia mobilized along the Austria border. On July 31, Germany issued an ultimatum to Russia to demobilize within 12 hours. When they received no reply, Germany ordered general mobilization. The terms of a treaty between France and Russia in 1892 meant France was bound to mobilize as well. Regardless of French mobilization, German war plans called for a dual attack on Russia and France. The Schlieffen Plan was developed in 1905 as a response to Germany’s increasing diplomatic isolation, and the belief that any war would have to be fought on two fronts. Designed to knock France out of the war before Russia had the opportunity to fully mobilize, it had the fatal flaw of requiring the German army to advance through neutral Belgium.

The Treaty of London, signed in 1839 by Britain, France, Russia, the Netherlands, Austria and Prussia, officially recognized the Kingdom of Belgium and guaranteed its neutrality. On August 2, 1914 the German Ministry in Brussels delivered an ultimatum to the Belgian government. Allow the German army to pass through Belgium to meet a nonexistent French advance, or be regarded as an enemy. Belgium was given 12 hours to respond. The Belgian king, Albert I replied famously that he ruled a country, not a road, and rejected the German ultimatum. Germany declared war on France on August 3 and invaded



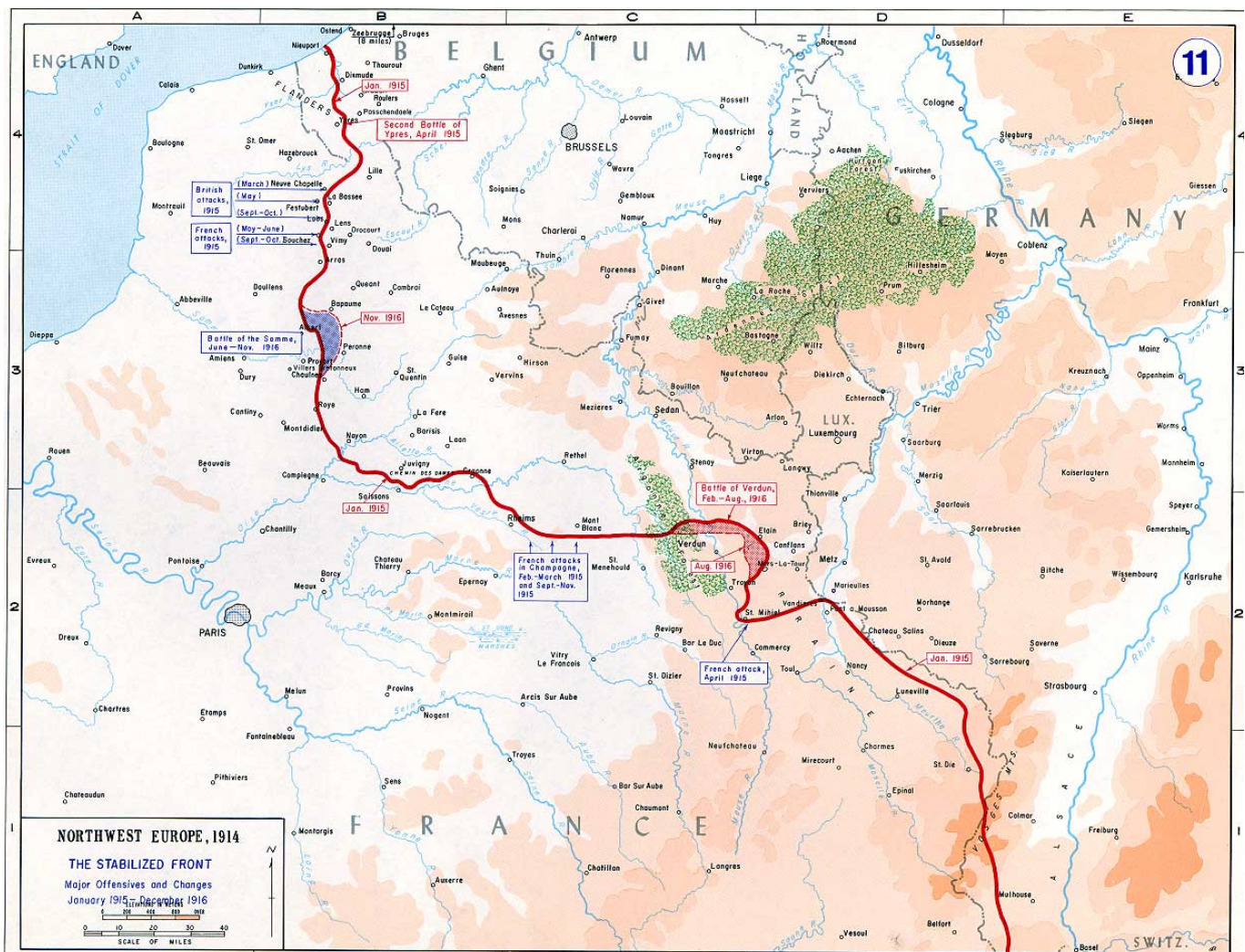
Belgium the next day. That act gave Great Britain the excuse it needed to declare war on Germany, bringing the full force of the British Commonwealth, including Canada, into the conflict.

What should have been a minor regional conflict – one of many that flared in Europe following the Napoleonic wars – exploded into a global war that consumed and destroyed a generation.

### Canada at War:

In 1914, Canada was part of the British Empire, and its foreign policy was still directed by London. When Britain declared war on Germany and Austria-Hungary, Canada was automatically at war alongside the rest of the Empire.

In the beginning, countries on both sides of the conflict reacted with enthusiasm. It was widely believed that the war would be over by Christmas at the latest, and many young men saw it as an opportunity for high adventure. Although the German and French chiefs of staff, Helmuth von Moltke and Joseph Joffre, foresaw an extended conflict, only Lord Kitchener, the British War Minister, planned for years of war.



Canadians from across the country rushed to answer the call to war. From a peacetime force of just over 3000 soldiers, the Canadian army swelled to 35,000 in just a few weeks. The first contingent of the newly formed Canadian Expeditionary Force set sail for Europe in the fall. Members of the Princess Pats (Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry) were the first Canadians to see action, serving with the British 27<sup>th</sup> Division on the Western Front.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division arrived in France in February 1915 and in April was moved into the Ypres Salient, a bulge in the Allied line near the city of Ypres in Belgium. On April 22, 1915, the Germans

launched the Second Battle of Ypres. In an attempt to eliminate the Salient, they released 160 tons of chlorine gas towards the northern Allied trench, held by two French divisions. This was the first time gas had been used on the Western Front, and thousands of French soldiers were killed or blinded instantly. The survivors were forced to retreat, leaving a four-mile gap in the line. The Germans were unable to take full advantage of this breach, however, and Canadian troops held the line, preventing the German forces from flanking and cutting off the Salient. Over the next two days, the Canadians mounted several counter-attacks, including a reckless charge into *Kitchener's Wood*, which resulted in varying degrees of success and heavy casualties. On April 22, the Germans released another gas attack, this time on the Canadian lines near the village of St. Julien. Although the Germans occupied the village, the Canadians managed to hold on long enough for reinforcements to arrive. In 48 hours, one third of the Canadian troops were killed or wounded, but Canadians established themselves as a formidable force.

Over the next two years, Canadian forces participated in several attacks against German positions on the Western Front. Two more divisions were formed from recruits, forming a Canadian Corps in France, and a fourth division was added in April 1916. The first three divisions saw action at the Battle of the Somme, one of the bloodiest battles in human history. Newfoundland, then a self-governing dominion, formed its own regiment, which had already seen action at Gallipoli in 1915. On July 1, 1916, the first day of the Battle of the Somme, the Newfoundland Regiment was called into action at Beaumont Hamel, losing two-thirds of its strength in a single hour. Of the 801 men who started the day, only 68 survived unharmed, shattering a generation in one day.

The Battle of the Somme continued throughout the summer, and Canadian forces were moved from Flanders to a section of front line at the Somme near the village of Courcellette. The Canadians suffered heavy casualties even before participating in the main offensive. The Battle of Flers-Courcellette began at dawn on September 15 with the Canadian Corps advancing to take and hold the village. They continued to press forward, gaining an additional 1,000 yards past the village until fighting stalled for the winter. British War Minister (and shortly to become Prime Minister) David Lloyd-George said of the Canadian forces: "The Canadians played a part of such distinction that thenceforward they were marked out as storm troops; for the remainder of the war they were brought along to head the assault in one great battle after another. Whenever the Germans found the Canadian Corps coming into the line they prepared for the worst."

In 1917, the Germans retrenched on the Western Front, creating the supposedly impregnable Hindenburg Line, heavily reinforced and defended. The Battle of Arras began in April with the Canadian Corps slated to assault a heavily fortified region near the town of Vimy. Vimy Ridge was of significant strategic importance to the Germans, and the Allies had already suffered heavy casualties in failed attempts to take the ridge. The Germans, in response, had reinforced their defences with tunnels, bunkers, barbed wire and machine gun nests.

Plans for the assault began in the fall of 1916, with Canadian commanders crafting a detailed strategy, built on the French successes at Verdun. Troops practiced every step of the advance on simulated grounds, and engineers dug tunnels into the ridge to facilitate the build-up of troops and supplies at the front line. A heavy artillery barrage began on March 25, shelling the German trenches for two weeks prior to the actual attack. On Easter Monday, April 9, 1917, all four Canadian Divisions went into battle together for the first time. The sound of the guns could be heard 100 miles away in southern England. By mid-afternoon, the Canadians had achieved most of their objectives, and within three days controlled the entire ridge. Canada, as an independent nation, came of age in the sleet, and mud, and blood of Vimy Ridge.



The next major offensive was planned for the devastated fields of Flanders, a third attempt at breaking through the line at Ypres. The first attempt to capture strategic railheads and submarine ports on the Belgian coast became bogged down in a deadly swamp created by heavy rain. In September, the ground dried out and the Allies began a series of “bite and hold” campaigns, small gains that could be realistically held against counter-attacks. The Canadian Corps was brought in to replace ANZAC forces with the objective of taking the village of Passchendaele.

Again, the Canadian forces prepared meticulously for the assault, under the command of Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie, the first Canadian-born general. Currie predicted it would cost 16,000 casualties to achieve the objective, but the British Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig considered that acceptable losses and ordered the attack. On October 26, 1917, the Canadians began inching their way forward, moving from shell crater to shell crater. The Third and Fourth Canadian Division, supported by two British divisions captured the town on October 30 and managed to hold it against brutal counter-attacks until the First and Second Divisions could arrive as reinforcements. By November 10, the Canadians held the high ground of Passchendaele, but the Allies had achieved an essentially Pyrrhic victory at a high cost to Canada. The breakthrough hoped for occurred further down the line at the Battle of Cambrai, when a surprise tank attack achieved a larger advance in just a few hours than had been managed in four months at Passchendaele. But because of the heavy losses, there were not enough reserve troops to hold the advance.

In 1918, Russia signed a separate peace treaty with Germany, allowing Germany to shift their forces from the Eastern Front for a major offensive in the West. In March 1918, they advanced 100 miles in just two days, nearly breaking the British and French forces in two, but failed to turn these gains into any kind of strategic advantage. They continued to attack throughout the first half of 1918, advancing to the Marne River, but never managing to divide the Allied army. In the process, they bled away nearly 1 million men. The Allies suffered similar losses, but with the United States now in the war and American troops ready for battle, they had far greater reserves. The Allies counter-attacked in July and forced the Germans to withdraw from the Marne.

Canada’s Hundred Days – the final 100 days of the war – began on August 8, 1918 with a surprise attack on Amiens, spearheaded by the Australian and Canadian Corps. It resulted in a 15-mile gap in the German line and allowed the Canadians to advance twelve miles in three days. A series of follow-up attacks by British, American, and Australian troops forced the Germans back to the Hindenburg Line, eliminating almost all their gains in less than a month. The Canadians broke through the Drocourt-Queant Line by Canal du Nord on September 2, and regrouped for a final assault on the Hindenburg Line. By the end of September, Allied forces were ready to breach the Line.

The Canadian Corps broke through at Canal du Nord and captured Bourlon Wood, breaching three lines of German defences, and later captured Cambrai. Combined with other Allied successes, this broke the German defences and morale for good. The end was finally nigh. On November 11, 1918 at 11am, an armistice was signed, ending the war.

Canada began the war as a dominion of the British Empire, its soldiers subservient to British command, but over four bloody years proved itself a formidable force, both in battle and in international affairs. Canada played a major role in negotiating the Treaty of Versailles, and was the only Dominion to sign as an independent nation.

## THEMES AND ALLUSIONS

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**“He died for life. The thing that moved me in writing that book was that Robert Ross believed, above all else, in life. If you couldn’t save people, but you could save the horses, you were, in fact, saving life. You were making a statement about life. The whole point of life is that life itself is the embodiment of hope.”**

*Timothy Findley on what Robert Ross stands for.*

### War

The title of the novel and play is *The Wars*, and while it is set during World War I, it is about more than just a single conflict. The wars fought by Robert Ross are external and internal, as well as timeless and universal. They encompass military battles and family tensions, but Robert is a casualty of each one, just as each one of us is ultimately the casualty of all the conflicts in our lives.

The novel and play are a condemnation of the horror and terrible waste of wars, while still honouring the men and women who must fight them. Taffler tells Robert that he is a hero, not because of anything he’d done, but because he was wounded and survived. And yet, in the face of absolute destruction, staying alive, and keeping others alive, is an act of heroism. When Robert can no longer protect his men, he does the next best thing and tries to save the horses. But in the madness and confusion of war, what should have been a heroic act is bitterly condemned.

Nothing – and nobody – survives war intact. Mrs. Ross, who once believed the government’s assurances that the troops would be home by Christmas, who left her daughter’s birthday party to hand out chocolate to the departing soldiers, loses her faith in everything and is lost and blind by the end of the play.

### Family

World War I was, to some extent, a deadly family squabble that consumed the whole of Europe (and the rest of the world by association). Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany, and George V of England were grandsons of Queen Victoria, and Tsar Nicholas II of Russia was married to one of her granddaughters. In the end, it changed millions of lives irrevocably, and shattered an entire generation.

This destruction is paralleled in the fate of the Ross family. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the catalyst, if not the cause, of global warfare; Rowena’s death drove Robert to join the army. The bond between mother and son is shattered; Mrs. Ross feels abandoned by Robert, and knows, before he has even left Canada, that she has lost him. Robert creates new bonds, with his men, going so far as to give Harris the scarf his mother sent him, a statement of allegiance and connection.

Mrs. Ross articulates the tragic reality of war; that it is the children who fight and die for the decisions of their parents. “What does it mean – to kill your children?” she asks. “Kill them and then...go in there and sing about it!” Her question echoes the final couplet of Wilfred Owen’s poem, “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young,” in which Abraham refuses to substitute the ram for his son Isaac in the demanded sacrifice.

*But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.*

## Animals

From start to finish, animals play an important role in the play, from Rowena's rabbits to the horses Robert tries to save. They are symbols of purity and freedom, but also of death, of the innocence that cannot survive or must be sacrificed. The birds that fly free in the sky also feed on the bodies of dead soldiers.

The most sympathetic characters in the play – Robert, Harris, Rowena, Rodwell – are all associated in a positive way with animals. Rodwell is an illustrator of animals, who tries to shelter wounded animals. Harris is a child of the ocean, and even in his hospital bed consoles himself by imagining that he is swimming with the whales. Rowena loves her rabbits, almost as much as she loves her brother Robert. Robert is designated as the protector of horses, and runs in the coulee with a coyote.

But each character's ultimate doom is also associated with these animals. Rowena falls trying to reach the rabbits in the loft. Harris contracts pneumonia watching for whales on the transport ship to England. When Rodwell is sent on a suicide mission, he leaves behind his sketchbook filled with pictures of animals – and Robert.

When Robert realises that he can no longer protect his men, he tries to save the horses instead. But in the end, he is so deeply connected to the horses that he speaks of them as if they were his comrades, confusing the soldiers sent to apprehend him, and leading to a fiery destruction.

## Fire

Fire is a symbol both of passion and destruction in Timothy Findley's novels. It is the spark of creation and the final conflagration that reduces everything to ash. Ashes, though, provide a new beginning, in the endless cycle of life.

When Harris dies, he is cremated, and Robert scatters his ashes into the Thames. "Everyone who's been born has come from the sea," Harris told Robert, and so Robert returned him to the sea, from whence we all emerged.

The characters are also "under fire" constantly: literally from artillery barrages and bombardments, and figuratively from the expectations of superior officers, too often fatally flawed. In the end, the situation acts like a crucible with Robert, burning away everything but his commitment to life. In the end, of course, he is physically destroyed by fire, and yet that essential part of him remains.

## GLOSSARY

### “Abide with Me”

A popular Christian hymn composed by Henry Francis Lyte in 1847. It was composed just three weeks before Lyte died of tuberculosis and is a plea for God’s presence in life. The first verse is traditionally sung before kick-off at the FA Cup Final.

### Bailleul

A town in France near the Belgian border. During World War I, it was an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre, and served as a corps headquarters until July 1917. In April 1918 it was captured by the Germans, but retaken by the Allies at the end of August 1918.

### Beanstalk

In the fairy tale “Jack and the Beanstalk,” a young boy trades the family cow for a handful of magic beans. When his mother throws the beans away in disgust, they grow into a giant beanstalk that Jack climbs. It leads to a castle in the sky



owned by a giant. Over three visits, Jack steals some gold coins, a hen that lays golden eggs, and a golden harp. When the giant chases him, Jack cuts down the beanstalk, killing the giant.

### Cablegram

A message sent by a telegraph operator using Morse code. Also known as a telegram, or shortened to cable or wire. The first successful transatlantic telegraph cable was completed in 1866, connecting North America to Europe, and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was the primary mode of high-speed international communications. In 1929, 20 million telegrams were sent worldwide, but other means of electronic communication have now made telegrams obsolete.



### Cape Breton

Cape Breton is an island on the Atlantic coast of Canada. Part of the province of Nova Scotia, it is separated from the mainland by the Strait of Canso. First settled by ancestors of the Mi'kmaq Nation, it was actively colonized by France in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Called Ile Royale by the French, Cape Breton Island was ceded to Britain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763 and merged with the colony of Nova Scotia. During the Highland Clearances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more than 50,000 Highland Scots settled in Cape Breton. Their descendents dominate Cape Breton culture, particularly in rural areas.

### Chlorine

A naturally occurring gas, whose chemical symbol is Cl and atomic number is 17. It is used for water purification, disinfecting and bleaching and as part of many useful compounds. It is poisonous if inhaled or ingested, and was used during World War I as a weapon in gas attacks. It was first used by Germany in the Second Battle of Ypres on April 22, 1915. Before gas masks were widely available, Canadian troops fought through chlorine gas attacks by holding a urine-soaked cloth over the face. It was believed, at the time, that the ammonia in the urine would neutralize the chlorine. In fact, ammonia and chlorine react to produce toxic fumes. Chlorine, however, is water soluble, so it was actually the liquid in the urine that reduced the effects of the gas.

### Clausewitz on War

Carl von Clausewitz (June 1, 1780-November 16, 1831) was a Prussian military historian and theorist, most famous for his treatise *On War* (*Vom Kriege*). It was written after the Napoleonic Wars, and published posthumously in 1832. Although unfinished, it is one of the most important works on military strategy ever written and is still studied in many military academies

### Cognac

A brandy produced exclusively in the Cognac region of France. It is made from Ugni Blanc, Folle Blanche or Colombard



grapes, and is double distilled in copper pot stills and aged in oak barrels. The distilling process produces *eaux-de-vie* (waters of life), a colourless spirit that is roughly 70% alcohol. In order to be called Cognac legally, it must be aged for a minimum of two years in barrels, during which time a large percentage of the alcohol evaporates. After aging, the final product is diluted to 40% alcohol content with water.



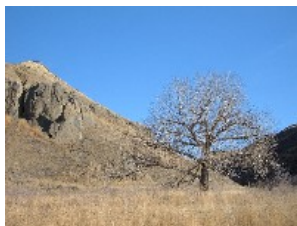
### Covent Garden

A district in Central London known for its entertainment and shopping facilities, including the Covent Garden Market and the

Royal Opera House. The geographical centre of the area is Covent Garden Piazza, which was once the site of a major London market. The land was redeveloped in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the Earl of Bedford and designed by the landscape architect Inigo Jones.

### Coulee

A coulee is a deep gulch or ravine with sloping sides. It often contains a stream, but may run dry in the summer months. Many coulees were formed by erosion at the end of the last ice age, due to the rapid melting of the glaciers. The word



“coulee” comes from the French-Canadian word “coulée” derived from the verb *couler* – to flow.

### Cyclone

A large area of low atmospheric pressure that is characterised by inward-spiralling winds. It describes a wide variety of weather phenomena, including hurricanes, tornados, typhoons or depressions.

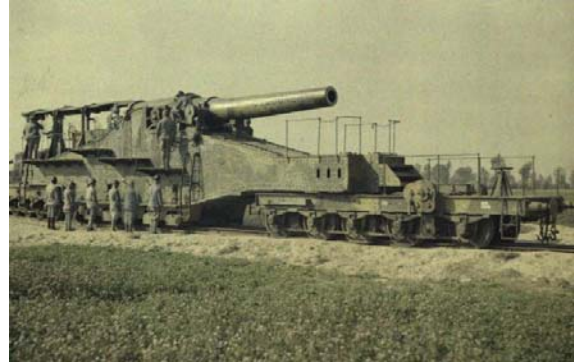
### Dike

An embankment built to prevent flooding from a body of water onto adjacent lowlands.

### Dugout

An underground shelter, often reinforced with concrete, built in or near the front line trenches. Soldiers sheltered in dugouts during artillery bombardments and barrages.

### Field Artillery



Movable artillery used by armies in the field in support of front-line troops. Artillery consists of large guns or canons that are too heavy to be carried. During World War I they were transported on wheeled carriages called limbers, which were pulled by a team of horses. Artillery tactics developed during World War I included the creeping barrage, in which shells were fired just ahead of ground troops, allowing them to advance under cover of fire.

### Field Marshal

In armies where it is in use, Field Marshal is the highest military rank. Its naval equivalent is Admiral of the Fleet and its air equivalent is Marshal of the Air Force.

### Flemish/Flanders

Flanders is a region that has historically overlapped parts of France, Belgium and the Netherlands, while Flemish refers to the region and its language and people. The name evolved from the word *Vlaanderen* or flooded land. Canadians perhaps best know the name in reference to John McCrae’s poem “In Flanders Fields,” for the area saw some of the heaviest fighting during World War I, specifically during the three battles of Ypres.

### Gout

A rheumatic disease caused by high levels of uric acid in the blood. It results in the deposit of uric acid crystals in the joints or connective tissues, which causes painful inflammation and swelling. It primarily affects men between the ages of 40-55 and is exacerbated by protein rich foods and alcohol intake.

### **Gunner**

Gunner is a rank in the British Army Royal Artillery and other Commonwealth artillery corps. It is equivalent to that of private in other army units. Colloquially, it refers to any member of an artillery unit.



### **Hedgehog**

A small, nocturnal animal covered with spines, members of the Erinaceinae sub-family. These spines are defensive feature and are actually hollow hairs stiffed by keratin. There

are 16 species of hedgehogs – also known colloquially as urchins, hedgepigs or furze-pigs – found in parts of Europe, Asia, Africa and New Zealand. There are no species native to the Americas. Hedgehogs are not related to porcupines, which are rodents.

### **Lethbridge**

A city in Alberta, southwest of Calgary, Lethbridge is the largest city in southern Alberta and the fourth largest in the province. In August, the temperature generally ranges between 10-25°C, with a record low of -1°C in 1992.

### **Mauser**

The manufacturer of bolt-action rifles designed for the German armed forces. The Karabiner 98a was used by cavalry and assault units during World War I, while the Gewehr 98 was the standard infantry rifle. It wasn't particularly well suited for trench warfare, but was favoured by snipers.



### **Minuet**

A dignified pattern dance in triple time that originated in France and was popularized at the court of Louis XIV. The name is derived from the French phrase *pas menu* or small step, and features couples performing choreographed figures with stylized curtsies and bows.

### **Moby-Dick**

A novel by Herman Melville, published in 1851, about an obsessed sea captain in search of the whale that cost him his leg, it is a classic novel of revenge and madness. Captain Ahab leads his crew to destruction in a single-minded quest to destroy the great white whale Moby-Dick. The novel originally received unfavourable reviews, but now is considered a masterpiece of American literature.

### **Nestlé's chocolate**

Nestle is a multinational packaged food company headquartered in Switzerland. It was founded in 1860 by Henri Nestlé to sell infant food products for babies unable to breastfeed. Nestlé worked with Swiss chocolate pioneer Daniel Peter to combine sweetened condensed milk and cocoa powder to create milk chocolate. By 1904, Nestle was in chocolate production itself, having come to an agreement with the Swiss General Chocolate Company. It was a major government contractor during World War I for condensed milk products and, of course, chocolate.

### **Phonograph**

A machine for playing back audio recordings. Sound waves are stored on a phonograph record as a series of undulations in a groove inscribed on its surface by a recording stylus. The recording is played by when another stylus is placed on the rotating groove and reconverts the sound. Phonographs, or record players, were the primary means of listening to audio until vinyl was replaced by audiocassettes, and then CDs.



### **Pneumonia**

Pneumonia is a lung infection that can be caused by viruses, fungi, bacteria, parasites or aspirated food particles. In developing countries it is the most common cause of death (tied with diarrhoea). Symptoms include high fever with chills, a productive cough, chest pain, shortness of breath, and rapid respiration.

### **Regina**

A city in southern Saskatchewan, Regina is the capital and largest city in the province. It was the administrative capital of the Northwest Territories until Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, and the headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police until 1920. It is a major centre for distribution, transportation and manufacturing, and a processing centre for the rich mineral and agricultural resources of the region.

### **St. Eloi**

Also known as St. Eligius, St. Eloi is the patron saint of goldsmiths and metalworkers. Eligius (c. 588-660) trained as a goldsmith, but became the chief counsellor to Dagobert I, a Merovingian king of France, and the bishop of Noyon-Tournai. He helped convert the population of Flanders to Christianity, where he is particularly honoured.



### **Sea legs**

Gaining one's sea legs, refers to someone becoming accustomed to the rocking motion of a boat, or recovering from sea sickness.

### **Suffrage**

The inalienable right to vote. The term was enshrined in the American Constitution under Article 5, which states in part that, "no State, without its consent, shall be deprived of its equal suffrage in the Senate."



The term was deliberately adopted by the women's movement in seeking to extend the

voting franchise to women. In Canada, women first received the right to vote provincially in Manitoba in January 1916, closely followed by the other western provinces and Ontario. In 1917, women with a close relative serving in the military received the federal vote, which was extended to all women in 1918. The last province to extend the franchise to women was Quebec in 1940.

### **Trench**

A series of long, deep ditches in which men sheltered and lived. They characterised the First World War, particularly on the Western Front. The classic trench system comprised three parallel trenches. Closest to the enemy was the front-line or fire trench. The fire trench was separated from No Man's Land by rows of sandbags and barbed wire. Several hundred yards behind was the support trench, whose occupants could rush to the fire trench in the event of a surprise attack. Farthest to the rear was a reserve trench. Between the allied and enemy front-line trenches was No Man's Land. Many trenches were given the names of familiar hometown streets. Capturing enemy trenches was a very common objective in battles.

### **Wascana**

A region in south-central Saskatchewan, Wascana is a federal electoral riding. The city of Regina is located on Wascana Creek and Wascana Centre is a 2,300 acre park built around the man-made Wascana Lake. The name Wascana comes from the Cree word *oscana*, which means "pile of bones."

### **Webley Mark Six**

A military revolver first introduced in 1915, it was the most popular sidearm amongst British soldiers during World War I.

Webley revolvers were first adopted for use by the British armed forces in 1887. The Mark VI was a double action top-break revolver that held six .455 cartridges and had an automatic ejector. It could also be fitted with a bayonet and a stock to convert it to a carbine. It was replaced in service in 1932 by the Enfield No. 2 38 calibre revolver, but was still used widely by British troops during World War II.



## NOTABLE QUOTABLES

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“Never has there been a good war or a bad peace.” Benjamin Franklin

“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed.” Dwight D. Eisenhower

“We have to face the fact that either all of us are going to die together or we are going to learn to live together and if we are to live together we have to talk.” Eleanor Roosevelt

“All men are brothers, like the seas throughout the world; So why do winds and waves clash so fiercely everywhere?” Emperor Hirohito

“Never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified, is not a crime.” Ernest Hemingway

“They wrote in the old days that it is sweet and fitting to die for one's country. But in modern war, there is nothing sweet nor fitting in your dying. You will die like a dog for no good reason.” Ernest Hemmingway

“What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy?” Gandhi

“I'm fed up to the ears with old men dreaming up wars for young men to die in.” George McGovern

“Older men declare war. But it's the youth who must fight and die!” Herbert Hoover

“Naturally, the common people don't want war ... but after all it is the leaders of a country who determine the policy, and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is to tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.” Hermann Goering

“War is the continuation of politics by other means.” Karl Von Clausewitz

“Once and for all the idea of glorious victories won by the glorious army must be wiped out. Neither side is glorious. On either side they're just frightened men messing their pants and they all want the same thing - not to lie under the earth, but to walk upon it - without crutches.” Peter Weiss

“In peace the sons bury their fathers, but in war the fathers bury their sons.” Croesus

“I know war as few other men now living know it, and nothing to me is more revolting. I have long advocated its complete abolition, as its very destructiveness on both friend and foe has rendered it useless as a method of settling international disputes.” General Douglas MacArthur

“It is well that war is so terrible, or we should grow too fond of it.” Robert E. Lee

“In war, truth is the first casualty.” Aeschylus

“Distorted history boasts of bellicose glory . . . and seduces the souls of boys to seek mystical bliss in bloodshed and in battles.” Alfred Adler

**From the play:**

Robert: When I was just a baby, you were the first person I remember seeing. I was lying in my crib and as I woke I saw you glide your chair across the room to rest beside me. We stared and stared at each other.

Rowena: I don't remember.

Robert: I do. I remember thinking you were my mother.

Rowena: Promise me the rabbits can stay forever.

Robert: Of course, Rowena

Rowena: Promise me you will stay forever.

Purchas: It's a compliment, Ross. It's hard to dislike a man who blushes.

Robert: My mother thinks everything north of Toronto is cold. And if it's west, it must be freezing. She thinks I've stepped outside the bounds of civilization where people don't wear clothes or eat cooked meat.

Taffler: All you get in this war is one man against another.

Taffler: Do you know why they call me a hero? Because I was wounded and survived.

Mrs. Ross: Funny how most people fall down and nothing happens. Some people bruise like apples. But most people...nothing.

Mrs. Ross: You think Rowena belonged to you. Well I'm here to tell you, Robert, no one belongs to anyone. We're all cut off at birth with a knife and left at the mercy of strangers.

Mrs. Ross: Birth I can give you – but life I cannot. I can't keep anyone alive. Not any more.

Cote: Hard to believe you even left Canada, don't you think? Close one eye, throw dirt in the other and look around. Just like home.

Rodwell: There's nothing wrong with fairy tales. Sometimes, I wouldn't mind a good old-fashioned beanstalk to get me out of all this mud.

Cote: Young man, play us a song. The peaches have made me sad.

Levitt: Clausewitz says an excess of artillery leads to a passive character in war. He says artillery must seek out great natural obstacles so that the enemy's forces must come themselves and seek their own destruction. That way, he says, the whole war can be carried out as a serious, formal minuet.

Robert: We'd pretend we were waltzing by the seashore. The rabbits would watch – the horse too – and I could swear all the creatures were smiling back at us.

Rodwell: Who does she dance with now that you're over here?

Regis: I ain't seen a place with so few trees since I left home.

Levitt: I can have tea ready. Everything will be neat. Tidy. Clean. Safe.

Robert: Who would have thought that something I learned in school would come in handy? Chemistry class. Piss neutralizes chlorine. Piss. Who would have thought?

Robert: His hands are nowhere near his gun. He was only reaching for his binoculars. He had a Mauser rifle with him. He could have killed us all. Why?

Purchas: To think he came all this way and he's not even seen any battle yet.

Marian: If I may say so, maybe he's the fortunate one.

Harris: Today I swam with a pod of whales. The water was a bit cold but it was worth every minute of it. It was wonderful.

Harris: You must believe me. Everyone who's born has come from the sea. We're all creatures of the ocean – walking on land.

Harris: Everything has a purpose.

Mrs. Ross: I was afraid I was going to scream. I do not understand. I don't. I won't. I can't. Why is this happening to us? What does it mean – to kill your children? Kill them and then...go in there and sing about it!

Robert: Men are being used up. One by one. And I tell her nothing.

Marian: If words could heal...if kindness could cure...Harris would be alive and with you today.

Robert: Harris, this river will take you out away from the city, to the channel, and then out to the ocean. I know you will find the way. Be well. And go in peace, my good friend, and sing with the whales.

Rodwell's letter:

To my daughter, Laurine.

Love your mother.

Make your prayers against despair.

I am alive in everything you touch.

Touch these pages and you have me in your fingertips.

We survive in one another.

I am your Father always.

Everything lives forever.

Believe it.

Nothing dies.

Robert: It's one thing to force men to be here, but the horses don't have a choice. Fenced in like that. It's madness. No one's protecting them.

Leather: In war, Lieutenant, these are simply the facts of life.

Robert: It feels more like a fact of death.

Robert: All this life is at stake!

Robert: If an animal had done this – if an animal had done this – we would call it mad and shoot it!

Marian: Where is he going to escape to, might I ask? To a few brief hours of sleep? To death?

Marian: The very elements that can give life and support life can also destroy life.

Marian: I want to tell you, after all that I have seen; I am ashamed to be alive.

Marian: I want grace for you.

## THE POETRY OF THE GREAT WAR

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The poetry of the Great War tells the story of its times: the early innocence and patriotism, the dawning disillusionment and horror, and the terrible price paid to posterity.

Perhaps the most famous poem to come out of the First World War was written by a Canadian surgeon, John McCrae. “In Flanders Fields” was written in May 1915 after McCrae had spent 16 days treating casualties from the second battle of Ypres and witnessed the brutal death of a friend and former student.

Written in the form of a rondeau during a short break between patients, the poem is reproduced on the Canadian \$10 bill and is recited each year on Remembrance Day. The poppy has become the symbol of the war dead, inextricably associated with the First World War and McCrae’s poem.

“In Flanders Fields” was just one of thousands of poems that were written during and about the war. And as literature so often does, they reflected the attitudes and ideals of the world at the time.

The first poems written during the war celebrated the glory of heroic death and reflected the deep sense of duty that drove many to enlist. Poets such as Rupert Brooke wrote about sacrifice with a romantic sensibility that was common in the first waves of young men who went in search of adventure in a war that was supposed to end before the leaves turned. As Philip Larkin, a poet born four years after the war, wrote: “Never such innocence again.”

Brooke died in 1915 en route to Gallipoli. Had he lived to see the horror of the trenches, his poetic sensibilities might have shifted to match the gritty realism of his fellow Georgian poets, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon.

Sassoon joined the army out of a sense of patriotism, and later revenge after his brother’s death, but soon became disillusioned with the conduct of the war and the endless casualties. While on leave in England in 1917, he sent a public letter of protest and refused to return to active service. His friends were able to convince the military authorities not to court-martial him. Instead, he was declared temporarily insane and sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital to be treated for shell shock. There, he encountered Wilfred Owen, a promising young poet. This meeting resulted in some of the greatest war poetry of all time. Sassoon both encouraged and edited Owen’s first attempts at chronicling the horrors of trench warfare in poetic form.

The First World War resulted in nearly 9 million deaths. Among the voices silenced forever was John McCrae, who died of pneumonia and meningitis in January 1918. Wilfred Owen was killed in action on November 4, 1918, one week before the armistice.

**IN FLANDERS FIELDS – John McCrae**

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.



**ATTACK – Siegfried Sassoon**

At dawn the ridge emerges massed and dun  
In the wild purple of the glow'ring sun,  
Smouldering through spouts of drifting smoke that  
shroud  
The menacing scarred slope; and, one by one,  
Tanks creep and topple forward to the wire.  
The barrage roars and lifts. Then, clumsily bowed  
With bombs and guns and shovels and battle-gear,  
Men jostle and climb to meet the bristling fire.  
Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear,  
They leave their trenches, going over the top,  
While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists,  
And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists,  
Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!



**THE SOLDIER – Rupert Brooke**

If I should die, think only this of me;  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is for ever England. There shall be  
In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;  
A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.  
And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less  
Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
Her laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.



**ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH – Wilfred Owen**

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
-Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle  
Can patter out their hasty orisons.  
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;  
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,-  
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;  
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.  
What candles may be held to speed them all?  
Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes  
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.  
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;  
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,  
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.



## FURTHER EXPLORATION FOR STUDENTS

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### Remember

Most of the soldiers who served in World War I are gone now. Only one known veteran of the Canadian Expeditionary Force survives, John Babcock aged 107. Veterans Affairs Canada, however, has a series of video interviews with WWI veterans archived on their website (transcripts also available). Listen to their stories, explore some of the other learning tools at Heroes Remember (<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/hrp>), and continue research on your own as you discover interesting individuals and events.

Timothy Findley was inspired to write *The Wars* by the wartime recollections and letters of his uncle. Did any of your relatives fight in World War I, or serve in the military during other wars or peacekeeping efforts? Are there family stories that have been passed down through the generations? Write down or record some of those stories, so that you can share them with your children and grandchildren.

### Understand

*“Those who do not remember the past are doomed to repeat it.” George Santayana*

What lessons can be learned from the World War I, both the years leading up to the conflict and four years of fighting? Is there evidence that any lessons have been learned?

What might have been done to prevent the outbreak of global conflict? Look at various root causes of the war and discuss with your classmates what, if any, opportunities were missed to avert the war. What factors led to the massive loss of life in battles such as the Somme and Ypres? Look at the elements that made fighting in World War I different from previous wars. How were the lessons that were learned in the First World War applied to tactics in the Second World War and subsequent conflicts?

### Commemorate

This October marks the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the 3rd Battle of Ypres (July 31-November 10, 1917). Canadian forces were assigned the task of capturing the town of Passchendaele, which they did on November 6, 1917, though at the cost of 16,000 casualties.

How will you commemorate this anniversary? Some ideas could include:

- Create a website about an aspect of the war that interests you.
- Write a story about an event or battle.
- Make a collage from historical images, or draw your own scene.
- Visit the cenotaph on November 11 and participate in a Remembrance Day ceremony.

### Imagine

When you watch the play, don't just pay attention to what the actors say and do, look at how elements of the design (set, costumes, lighting, sound, projection) help tell the story. After the play, try to remember one or two specific effects and discuss with your classmates how they added to your understanding of what was happening in that scene.

### Adapt

Choose a short story or a chapter from a novel you know well and draft a script adapting it to a live theatre performance. What are the challenges of shifting a story from the page to the stage? How much of inner monologue can be revealed by an actor and how much needs to be rendered into dialogue? How could long descriptive passages be illuminated through aspects of design? Are there scenes that simply won't work onstage and how would you eliminate them without losing the essence of the story?

## RECOMMENDED READING & VIEWING

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### FICTION

#### **World War I**

*Three Day Road*, Joseph Boyden

A novel about two young Obi-Cree snipers in World War I.

*Another World*, Pat Barker

A World War I veteran deals with painful memories at the end of his life.

*All Quiet on the Western Front*, Erich Maria Remarque (also on film)

A classic World War I novel from the point of view of a young German soldier.

*Parade's End*, Ford Maddox Ford

Four novels set in England and on the Western Front during World War I.

*Gallipoli* (on film)

A movie about the Anzac troops in World War I and the failed 1915 Allied offensive in the Dardanelles.

#### **Other Wars**

*A Separate Peace*, John Knowles (also on film)

A tragic incident at a New England prep school shatters the innocence of a group of young men at the beginning of World War II.

*The Red Badge of Courage*, Stephen Crane (also on film)

A soldier in the American Civil War comes to his own understanding of courage.

*Platoon* (on film)

An American soldier experiences the horrors of war in Vietnam.

*Saving Private Ryan* (on film)

A story of the events following D-Day, featuring a stunningly realistic opening battle scene.

### NON-FICTION

*The Guns of August*, Barbara Tuchman

A historical analysis of the events leading up to World War I and the first month of the war.

*Goodbye to All That*, Robert Graves

In part, an unromantic account of Graves' experience in the trenches during World War I.

*They Called it Passchendaele*, Lyn MacDonald

An account of the Passchendaele campaign based on eyewitness accounts.

*Vimy*, Pierre Berton

## INTERNET SITES OF NOTE

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### **The Playhouse Theatre Company**

[www.vancouverplayhouse.com](http://www.vancouverplayhouse.com)

Sign up for the latest news and offers at the Playhouse

### **A Multimedia History of World War One**

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/>

An overview of the First World War

### **The Great War and the Shaping of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/>

A companion website for a PBS/BBC series about World War I

### **History – World War One**

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/>

The causes, events and people of the conflict dubbed the “war to end all wars”

### **Veterans Affairs Canada:**

#### **Canada and the First World War**

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=history/firstwar/canada>

A breakdown of Canada’s participation in World War I

#### **Canadian Virtual War Memorial**

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/virtualmem>

A database with records of all Canadians who have given their lives their lives for their country

#### **Heroes Remember**

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/hrp>

Veterans of World War I talk about their experiences.

### **The World War I Document Archive**

<http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/>

Transcriptions of primary documents relating to the First World War. Includes treaties, letters, dispatches, photos, articles, and analyses.

### **Timothy Findley: The World of “Tiffness”**

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/obit/findley/>

Memorial to Canadian author Timothy Findley, including obituaries and archival interviews