



A mourning card for Private William L. Davis, Co. B, 139th Inf., 35th Division, AEF

Online Collections Database, 2006.135.7, [www.theworldwar.org/research/database](http://www.theworldwar.org/research/database). National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

## “In Loving Remembrance:” Personal Memorialization in World War I Poetry

Recommended Grade Levels: 7-12

Course/Content Area(s): English Language Arts

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| <b>LESSON OVERVIEW:</b>     | In this English Language Arts lesson, students read and analyze Aline Murray Kilmer's poem, "Things," which explores topics like memorialization, permanence, and loss. After analyzing the poem, students will create a product (either a poem or an artifact for a student gallery exhibit) inspired by the poem to demonstrate their understanding of the poem's theme.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>OBJECTIVES:</b>          | <i>Students will:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the theme of Aline Murray Kilmer's poem, "Things."</li> <li>Explain how the structure, word choice, and figurative language in the poem contribute to the poem's meaning and theme.</li> <li>Create a product (poem, gallery piece) that demonstrates understanding of the poem's theme.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:</b> | <p><b>Common Core English Language Arts Standards:</b></p> <p><b>RL7.2:</b> Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.</p> <p><b>RL7.4:</b> Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of rhymes and other repetitions of sounds (e.g., alliteration) on a specific verse or stanza of a poem or section of a story or drama.</p> <p><b>RL7.5:</b> Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning.</p> <p><b>L7.5:</b> Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.</p> <p><i>Standards listed are grade 7 standards. For alignment with later grades' standards, please refer to the Common Core English Language Arts standards.</i></p> |
| <b>TIME NEEDED:</b>         | 2-3 60-minute class periods, depending on students' age and independence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>INTERDISCIPLINARY:</b>   | This lesson could be used as part of interdisciplinary units of study focused on World War I. A collaboration between ELA and visual arts could connect the poem and either of the student activities in the lesson to art standards. Pair this lesson with a social studies lesson on the importance of preserving artifacts and how everyday objects can inform us about how past civilizations lived.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:</b>     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students should be familiar with literary terms and devices, such as theme, tone, rhyme scheme, and types of figurative language (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, allusion).</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

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|                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some background on World War I is recommended, but not required for students to comprehend the poem and lesson. See the Museum and Memorial's <a href="#">website</a> for helpful educational resources on the War and its impact.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><a href="#">“Things” poem worksheet</a> (1 per student)</li> <li><a href="#">Student Gallery worksheet</a> (1 per student, if selecting this activity)</li> <li><a href="#">Lesson Slides</a> (includes examples of found poetry)</li> <li>Writing utensils and highlighters in different colors</li> <li>Access to the Museum’s digital exhibit, <a href="#">‘In a Shady Meadow Green’: American Memorials to WWI</a> for the hook and gallery activity</li> </ul> |

# LESSON

## PRE-ASSESSMENT/INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

1. Select images and objects featured in the digital exhibit, “‘In a Shady Meadow Green’: American Memorials to WWI” from the National WWI Museum and Memorial. Either make the following links available to students on their LMS, or print them out:
  - a. [Memorial Card](#) (Object ID: 2006.135.7)
  - b. [French Soil](#) (Object ID: 2000.30.6)
  - c. [Letter](#) (Object ID: 2017.169.1)
2. As students look at the images and objects, ask them why they think someone would keep these items. What purpose might these items serve?
  - a. Students might say that these items might remind the owner of a time, person, or place.
  - b. They may also make the connection between the items and the loss of a loved one.
3. Then, introduce the lesson objectives and pass out the “Things” poem worksheet.

## DIRECTIONS:

### LESSON DAY 1: POEM ANALYSIS

1. Ask students to put their names on the worksheet and take out a writing utensil, as well as two different highlighters.
  2. Ask students to read the poem to themselves at least twice to get the gist of the poem.
  3. Depending on the students in front of you, you may decide to complete the lesson as a whole class or have students work in partners or small groups in a more independent setting.
  4. **Small Group/Partners Protocol (if students are ready for more independence):**
    - a. Ask students to sit next to their partners or with their small groups.
    - b. Instruct them to read the poem with their partner or group and follow the steps on the bottom of their worksheet.
    - c. After they read and annotate the poem, they should use their annotations to complete the discussion questions on the back of the worksheet.
    - d. Tell students that their annotations and responses will be used in a whole class discussion. As students work together, monitor the classroom to keep students on task and answer any questions.
    - e. *For possible answers to the discussion questions, see the teacher notes in the guided whole class protocol below.*
  5. **Guided Whole Class Protocol (if students need more support with analyzing poetry):**
    - a. Project a copy of the poem onto the board, or write it on the board or chart paper using black ink or marker. Use the lesson slides to structure the lesson steps.
    - b. Have a student volunteer to read the poem aloud. You may ask more than one student to read the poem multiple times across the lesson, so that they can hear it repeatedly and in different voices.
- **RHYME SCHEME AND STRUCTURE:** Ask students to identify and label the rhyme scheme. For example, the first stanza is a rhyming quatrain that uses the rhyme scheme ABCB. The rest of the poem follows the same pattern. Depending on students’ prior knowledge of poetry, you

might discuss why the poet chose a more traditional rhyme scheme (for clarity, striving for order in a chaotic time).

- **WORD CHOICE AND TONE:** Next, students should take out one of their highlighters. Ask students to highlight five words in the poem that stand out to them. These could be words they know or don't know, words that are full of emotion, or just words that caught their attention as they read the poem. Challenge them to only highlight five words; this will make them more selective.

Once students have selected their five words, tell students that they will share one of their five words (ideally their top choice). Explain that it's okay if they say the same word as someone else in the class. As students share their word, underline the word on the board or chart paper. If a word is repeated, underline it twice.

Once everyone has shared, ask the class if there are any words they are unfamiliar with and go over those, eliciting any background knowledge from the class. Then, ask what students notice about the words they chose. This can lead to a discussion about the poet's tone, as well as the possible theme.

- Students may pick up on Kilmer's bitter and resentful tone through her use of words like *insolent*, *flame*, *hatred*, and *terrible*.
- Students could start to understand the theme of remembrance through words like *death*, *permanence*, and *forgotten*.
- **FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND REPETITION:** Have students take out a different color highlighter. Instruct students to find and highlight any examples of figurative language and repetition present in the poem. They can do this independently or with a partner, if preferred. Once students have completed their highlights, ask students/partners to share their findings with the class. As with the word choice section, mark up the class poem on the board.
  - **Personification:** Personification takes center stage in this poem. Kilmer uses personification to give life to several objects ("daffodils nod," "dust corrupt," describing the cup and spoon as "insolent", a note "leaping" to her eyes), which contrasts with how "still and cold" her loved one will be when he dies.
  - **Simile and Metaphor:** Kilmer uses a simile to compare finding a "careless note" to a "flame" leaping into her eyes to show that it is a painful reminder of her lost love. She also uses a metaphor to compare life to a "shuddering breath" and a "smothered, desperate cry" to emphasize the impermanence of people.
  - **Allusion:** Kilmer alludes to a Leonardo da Vinci painting of the "Virgin" Mary smiling down at her. This allusion could highlight the permanence of a work of art over centuries, versus the fleeting nature of the human life depicted in the painting. The religious allusion could also bring up discussions of questioning religion and faith in times of war.
  - **Repetition:** While there is not much repetition in this poem, students may notice that the poet repeatedly addresses someone with the word "you." Students will likely

speculate about who this person is, or if the poem was based on someone that she lost (her husband Joyce Kilmer died in battle in 1918).

- **MOST IMPACTFUL LINE**: Instruct students to use a pen or pencil to underline or put a box around the line(s) that has the greatest impact on them. There are no wrong answers: it could be the most important line, the most emotional line, or the one that sticks with them the most. Then, they should write down why they chose that line. Have students share with a partner first, then call on volunteers to share with the whole class. Discuss why those lines stood out to different students and which lines most students in the class chose.
- After going through the poem as a class, you can decide to have students work on the discussion questions together or take the worksheet home and complete the questions for homework.

## **LESSON DAY 2: WHOLE CLASS DISCUSSION**

1. Using the annotations and discussion questions on the worksheet, have a whole class discussion on the poem. This can be as structured or unstructured as is appropriate for your class. If students are more independent and are familiar with the Socratic Seminar discussion structure, this may be a good format for a discussion of the poem. If students completed the questions on their own for homework, they should compare answers with a partner or small group before discussing the poem with the whole class.
  - a. How do the poet's word choice and tone contribute to the meaning of the poem?
  - b. How does the poet's use of figurative language and repetition contribute to the meaning of the poem?
  - c. Which line(s) from the poem stand out to you the most? How does this line help you understand the poem?
  - d. Based on your interpretation of the poem, what do you think the theme of this poem is? What does the poet want you to know or understand?
2. Students may respond that the theme of the poem is how objects are permanent while the people we love eventually die.
3. They may also connect this message to the poet's tone, concluding that she finds the permanence of objects and the impermanence of humans unfair.
4. At the end of the discussion, collect students' papers.

## **POST-ASSESSMENT:**

To give students the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the poem and its theme, select one of the following creative projects to assign to the class:

### **Option 1: Found Poetry**

Provide students with a second copy of the poem (they can still refer to their annotations on the other page). Students can use this poem to create a found poem of their choice that addresses the themes of remembrance and memorialization:

- **Cut and Remix:** Students select the words or pieces of the poem and rearrange them to write their own poem. They can glue the words or pieces they cut out onto another piece of paper. Encourage the students to be creative in how they shape and structure their poem and add illustrations, if they so choose.
- **Blackout Poetry:** Students circle or box the words they'd like to keep and "black out" the rest of the words with a black marker. This form offers a little less freedom in terms of structure and the order of the words, but the contrast on the page is striking. Students can also use illustrations or shapes on the page to convey their message.

Show students the examples of both types of poetry in the lesson slide deck.

### **Option 2: Student Gallery**

Using the digital exhibit, "'In a Shady Meadow Green': American Memorials to WWI" from the National WWI Museum and Memorial as inspiration, have students create their own exhibit of "things" that remind them of someone or something they remember.

- The object does not necessarily have to relate to a death; students could find an object that relates to something from their own past that feels "lost" to them (a card that an old friend sent them, a souvenir key chain from a past trip, a childhood toy).
- It also does not have to be very personal: students could focus on objects that commemorate something in their community (a tree planted in memory of a resident, a memorial bench).
- You could ask the following question: What is an object you possess that is a tangible representation of something or someone that is no longer present in your life?

Once students have brainstormed an object, they should fill out the "Student Gallery" worksheet:

- **Title:** Name of the object.
- **Image:** either a drawing or photo of the object they chose.
- **Caption:** describe the object and who or what it commemorates.

Display the students' work alongside a copy of Kilmer's poem to create a "gallery" in your school! Leave blank copies of the "Student Gallery" worksheet nearby so that members of the broader school community can participate.

**Other Ideas for the "Student Gallery" Experience:**

- **Make it digital:** create a website, use social media, or utilize a site like Padlet to create a digital gallery of students' work. This also allows for members of the school community to view students' work and even contribute to the gallery.
- **Real objects:** if students are able to bring in the object for the gallery, omit the drawing or photo part of the worksheet. Ask your school if there is a display case available to showcase these objects, and display them with students' captions.

### MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS

This lesson already includes several different options to suit a wide variety of learners and grade levels. Other modifications and accommodations include:

- Use digital copies instead of printed worksheets so that students can use accessibility features (text-to-speech, voice typing).
- Read the poem aloud to the class before having them read on their own.
- Use “think-alouds” to model steps of the annotation process.
- Select groups or partners prior to the class to ensure thoughtful student groupings (heterogeneous groups, utilizing student role models).
- Provide sentence frames for students to use during whole class discussions.

### OPTIONAL EXTENSION

This lesson could be used to introduce or complement the short story collection, [\*The Great War: Stories Inspired by Items from the First World War\*](#). Each short story uses an object from the War as inspiration; in some stories, the object serves as a reminder of someone who has passed away.

Pairings from this collection that deal with the same topic are “Our Jacko” by Michael Morpurgo, in which a boy learns of his late uncle’s service after finding his helmet, and “Another Kind of Missing” by A.L. Kennedy, which explores a different kind of loss through a boy’s visit to his severely injured father. Any of the stories would inspire thoughtful discussion about personal remembrance and the significance of objects in remembrance of those lost. Alternatively, students could choose a story from the collection to compare thematically with the poem.

## Bibliography:

Kilmer, A. M. (n.d.). *Things by Aline Murray Kilmer - Famous poems, famous poets*. All Poetry. Retrieved March 16, 2026, from <https://allpoetry.com/poem/8585065-Things-by-Aline-Murray-Kilmer>

Kilmer, A. M. (1921). *Vigils*. George H. Doran Company.

<https://archive.org/details/vigilsaline00kilmrich/page/n15/mode/2up>

***Photos and scans of found poetry examples are from Ms. Walker's classes. Student names have been redacted for privacy.***