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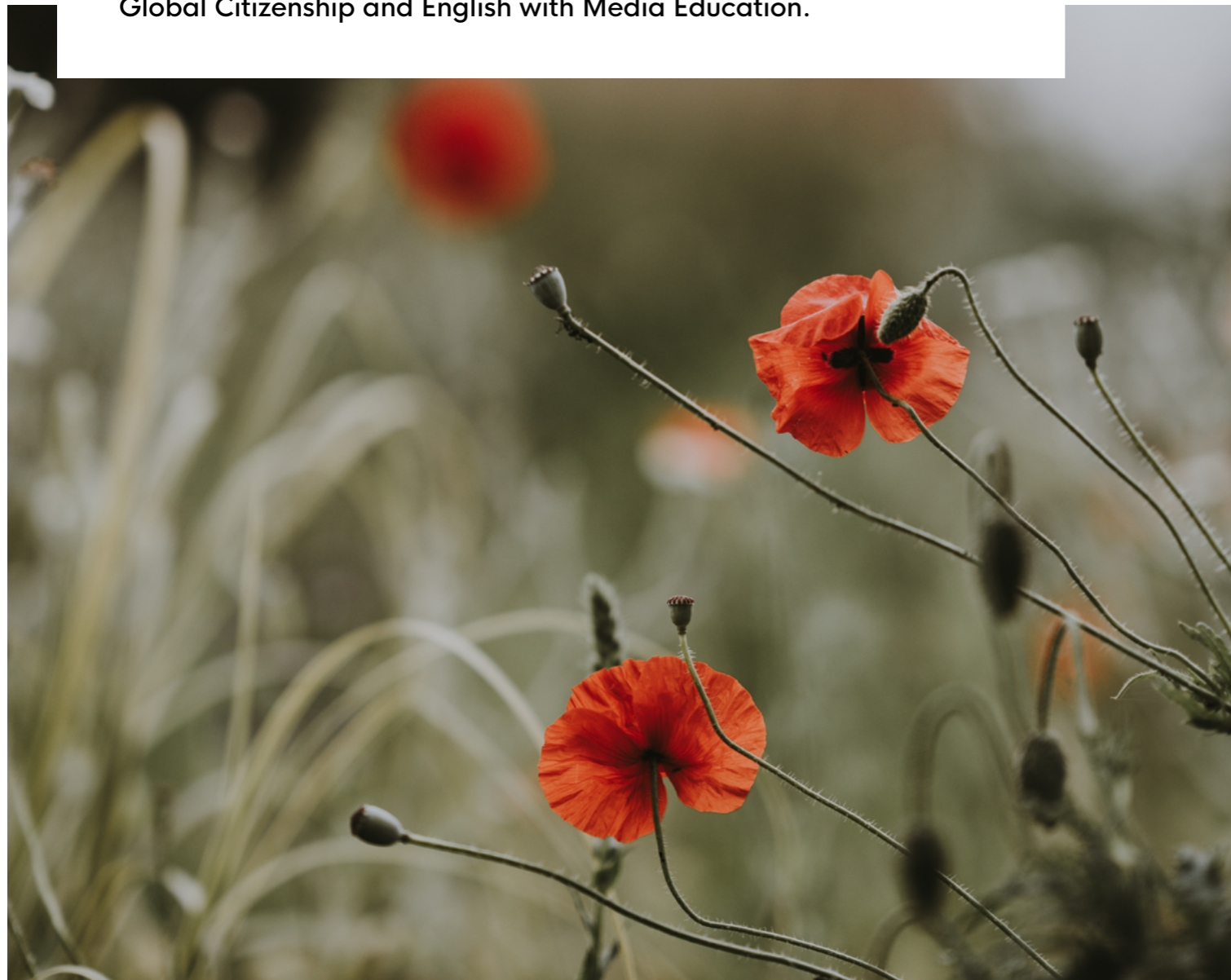
**THE
POPPY**

In situations of conflict, groups and individuals often have a range of symbols and narratives which assume great significance. These can comprise all sorts of things like colours, badges, signs, practices, histories and so much more. People are drawn to defend their signs, symbols and stories from attack, but they also often end up attacking those of their perceived enemies.

This learning module invites the student to look behind the symbol of the poppy, to ask what it means to different groups and how they feel about it, and to understand why it is so important to some and not to others.

On completion of the module, students can be expected to have a deeper understanding of the significance of the poppy and of the conflicting views about it. They should also be able to articulate the importance of commemoration and remembrance and the signs, symbols and feelings around it.

This learning module will fit with Key Stage 3 History, Local and Global Citizenship and English with Media Education.



WHY IS THE POPPY A CONTROVERSIAL SYMBOL? HOW DO WE REMEMBER SIGNIFICANT EVENTS IN THE PAST?

OPENING EXERCISE

TO CONSIDER THE VARIETY OF SYMBOLS IN EVERYDAY LIFE. THIS EXERCISE CAN BE CONDUCTED INDIVIDUALLY OR IN SMALL BUZZ GROUPS.

1 Think of some groups you are part of, such as clubs or societies, church groups or sports teams. Think also of some looser groups based on factors like age, race, religion, gender, politics.

In what ways is membership of that group important to you? How does membership make you feel special or set apart from others? From whom are you set apart? You may have both positive and negative feelings about being part of that group, for example you may feel proud, anxious, oppressed, special, discriminated against.

2 Now think about the symbols that represent your group? How do you feel about these symbols? Where did they come from? Why are they important?

3 What is the history of your group? What are the key events of the past for your group? Have any of those events become important symbols?

IDENTITY CHART OF THE REMEMBRANCE POPPY

FOR MANY, THE POPPY IS A SIGNIFICANT SYMBOL AND AN IMPORTANT WAY TO REMEMBER THE SACRIFICES OF TROOPS IN WAR. FOR OTHERS, IT CAN BE A VERY AMBIGUOUS SYMBOL AND ONE WHICH THEY FIND VERY DIFFICULT TO ENDORSE.

Using the template for the poppy which is included here (and which is available to download from [THIS LINK](#)), encourage the group to draw on it and around it an identity chart for the poppy. This might involve the student in research on the internet, or some may be able to do it from their own personal experience. Students can work individually and then in twos where they will explain their chart to their partner. As each pair feeds back to the full group a more complete picture should emerge of the key issues. Use the following questions as possible areas of research.

Where and how did the poppy as a symbol originate?

What reasons might people have for wearing a poppy? How might this be different in Northern Ireland? e.g. politics, religion, conflict, where you live, asserting identity?

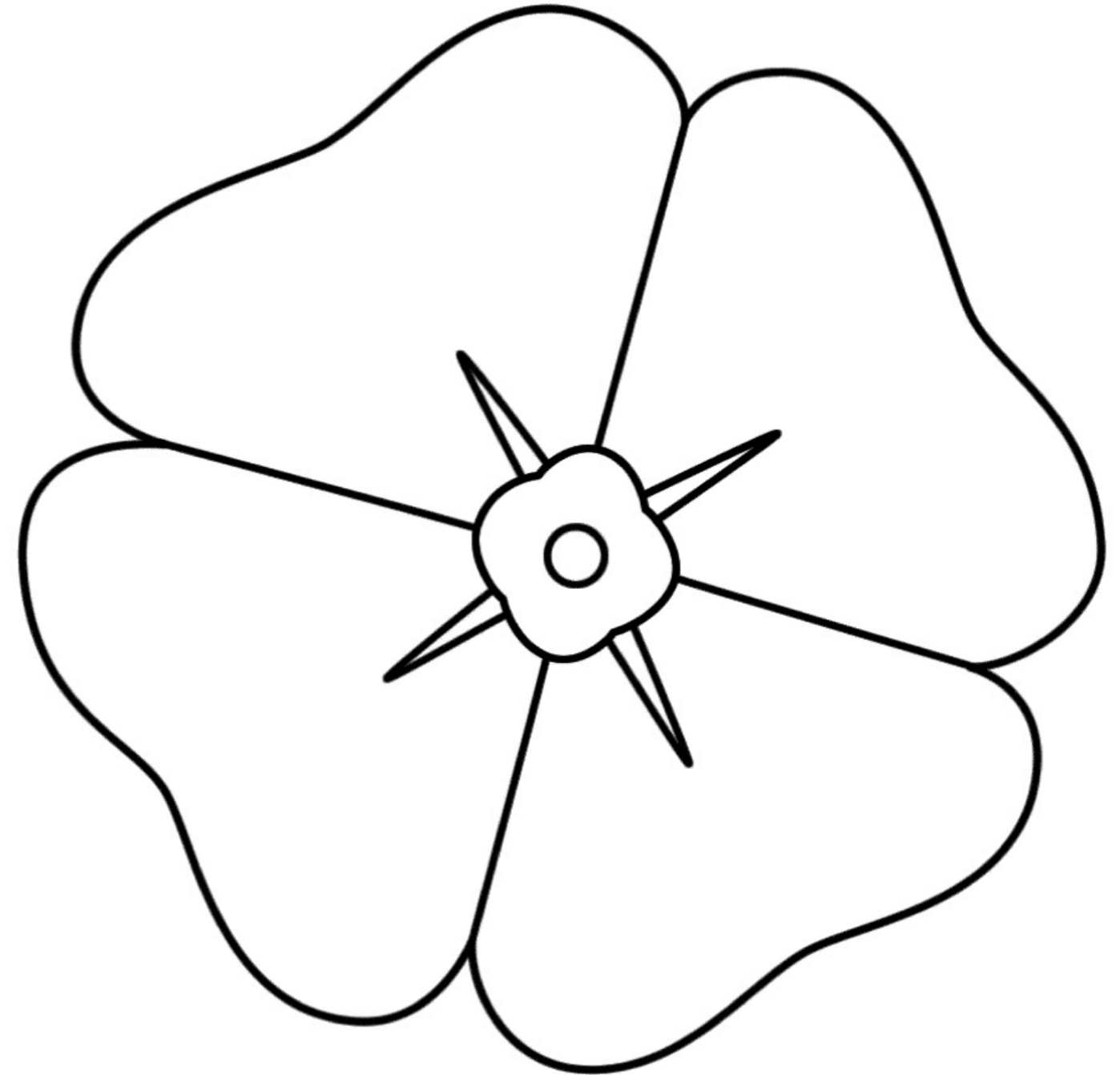
What feelings/emotions/attitudes does the symbol arouse in you?

How might these characteristics change by location? Is the poppy as controversial in other places or less so? Why?

What different attitudes do people hold in relation to the poppy? Where are the conflicts?

The poppy as a symbol comes to us 'pre-loaded' with ideas and understandings. Name some of them. What additional 'local' ideas are added?

What alternatives are there?





THE POPPY IN POETRY THROUGH TIME

HERE ARE TWO POEMS WHICH ARE CONCERNED WITH POPPIES AND WITH HOW WE REMEMBER.

The first poem, 'In Flanders Fields' by John McCrae, is credited with originating the tradition of the red poppy as a symbol of remembrance. It is widely believed that McCrae wrote this poem in the second week of the second Battle of Ypres in May 1915, and that the circumstance which drove him to the writing was the death of his friend Alexis Helmer. One account says that he wrote it sitting at the back of an ambulance overlooking Helmer's grave around which was a stand of red poppies. It is said that McCrae originally discarded the poem which was later retrieved by fellow soldiers.

The poem was published by Punch magazine in December 1915. Interestingly, the first line of the version in Punch has the word "blow", but other versions, both handwritten and printed have the word "grow". The poem was immediately popular and parts of it were used to recruit as well as to sell war bonds to help finance the war.

The second poem is a contemporary work called 'Poppies' by Jane Weir. It was commissioned by the poet laureate Carol Ann Duffy as part of a collection of ten contemporary war poems which were published in the Guardian in 2009. It was written as part of a response to the escalating conflict in Afghanistan and the Iraq enquiry. Weir has commented that she deliberately wrote the poem from a woman's perspective, which is rare since most war poetry is written from the point of view of men.

The poem is about the imagined pain and loss of a mother as her son leaves to go to war. Weir claims that subliminally she was thinking about Susan Owen, the mother of WW1 poet Wilfred Owen. Weir says the poem addresses female experience and is consciously a political act.

This exercise is an opportunity for connected learning with English.

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.

Poppies, Jane Weir

Three days before Armistice Sunday
and poppies had already been placed
on individual war graves. Before you left,
I pinned one onto your lapel, crimped petals,
spasms of paper red, disrupting a blockade
of yellow bias binding around your blazer.

Sellotape bandaged around my hand,
I rounded up as many white cat hairs
as I could, smoothed down your shirt's
upturned collar, steeled the softening
of my face. I wanted to graze my nose
across the tip of your nose, play at
being Eskimos like we did when
you were little. I resisted the impulse
to run my fingers through the gelled
blackthorns of your hair. All my words
flattened, rolled, turned into felt,

slowly melting. I was brave, as I walked
with you, to the front door, threw
it open, the world overflowing
like a treasure chest. A split second
and you were away, intoxicated.
After you'd gone, I went into your bedroom,
released a song bird from its cage.
Later a single dove flew from the pear tree,
and this is where it has led me,
skirting the church yard walls, my stomach busy
making tucks, darts, pleats, hat-less, without
a winter coat or reinforcements of scarf, gloves.

On reaching the top of the hill I traced
the inscriptions on the war memorial,
leaned against it like a wishbone.
The dove pulled freely against the sky
an ornamental stitch. I listened, hoping to hear
your playground voice catching on the wind.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

How do the poets express their feelings about death in their poems? What differences can you detect, if any, between the experience of women and men?

What role do poppies play in both poems?

Why do you think the John McCrae poem would have given rise to the poppy symbol which has endured for so long?

Can you detect any change in attitude in the Jane Weir poem from the sentiments in John McCrae's? In what ways might this be connected to the person 'speaking' in the poem?





THE POPPY TODAY

THE WEARING OF A POPPY CAN BE CONTROVERSIAL TODAY.

In 2014 Scottish comedian Frankie Boyle wore a white poppy on the Jonathan Ross show and attracted considerable criticism. Newsreaders like ITV's news presenter Charlene White and Channel 4's Jon Snow refuse to wear a poppy while on screen and receive criticism annually for their positions.

Another recent and particularly local controversy about the wearing of a poppy was stirred by footballer James McClean. Consider the newspaper/online reports in the following links (full transcripts available in appendices).

<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/james-mcclean-s-poppo-stance-praised-at-remembrance-event-1.3289180>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/why-james-mcclean-doesnt-wear-poppo-west-brom-remembrance-poppo-appeal-a8037391.html>

<https://www.joe.ie/sport/pic-james-mcclean-pens-open-letter-to-wigan-chairman-explaining-why-he-wont-be-wearing-a-poppo-tonight-474522>

SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

What is the popular understanding of James McClean's position that gives rise to the booing?

How do you feel about McClean's stance?

How do the newspaper reports add nuance to his position?

Should footballers/newsreaders be required to wear the poppy?

THE WHITE POPPY

NOT EVERYONE FEELS COMFORTABLE WEARING THE RED POPPY AND THEIR REASONING IS OFTEN COMPLEX.

For some they feel we should be remembering all victims of war and not just 'our' troops. This dilemma about poppies began very soon after the war ended and the white poppy was introduced for those who wanted to choose a different option but continue to wear a poppy.

There are three elements to the meaning of white poppies according to those who advocate for them: they represent remembrance for all victims of war, a commitment to peace and a challenge to attempts at glamorising or celebrating war.

The white poppy is distributed by the Peace Pledge Union and worn by thousands of people around Remembrance Day in the UK and further afield. They have been in existence now for over 80 years.

Watch the following video
<https://youtu.be/OTVRTiCq27U>

SOME QUESTIONS FOR CONVERSATION

What might it mean to "work harder for peace than we do for war?"

What are the challenges in commemorating all the victims of war?

What new thing or additional idea does the white poppy option offer?



NOTES

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APPENDICES

Irish Times

JAMES MCCLEAN'S POPPY STANCE PRAISED AT REMEMBRANCE EVENT

FOOTBALLER SHOWS 'GREAT RESTRAINT AND INTEGRITY IN ENDURING THESE ANNUAL TAUNTS'

Ireland international soccer player James McClean "is a national hero" because "he chooses not to wear a poppy", the annual Service of Remembrance at Dublin's St Patrick's Cathedral was told on Sunday. "I admire him for that," said Canon Peter Campion in a sermon. Precentor of St Patrick's Cathedral he recalled how "my grandfather and his two brothers fought in World War I". It was why he wears a poppy each year "to remember him and his brothers, adding" I don't expect people to admire me for wearing the poppy, but I hope they will respect my choice."

Over the last 10 years "everyone on British television" was "ostentatiously wearing their poppies" so someone "not wearing a poppy stands out like a sore thumb. James McClean falls into that category," he said.

Playing for West Bromwich Albion, "he came on as a substitute last week only to be booed" by Huddersfield Town fans and some of his own team's fans and "that is disgraceful," said Canon Campion.

James McClean "has never made an issue of it but others have made it an issue. When questioned about his decision not to wear the poppy, he says that being from Derry, Bloody Sunday is still a reminder to him of the painful presence of British soldiers at that time." McClean "shows great restraint, strength and integrity in enduring these annual taunts, but it must be very difficult and hurtful for him nonetheless," he said.

Scorned

The Canon recalled how his grandfather, "upon returning from World War I, did not receive a hero's welcome in Ireland, quite the opposite. He was often derided and scorned for his decision to enter the British Army".

When a Service of Remembrance was held at St Patrick's Cathedral "at the end of the War, protestors outside the entrance to the Cathedral voiced their opinions strongly". His grandfather found it all "very hurtful". Fortunately, "as a nation we have moved on a great deal". There were "no longer protests outside the Cathedral doors. It is always a privilege to welcome the President of Ireland to this service which would have been unheard of not so long ago."

Due to the poem In Flanders Fields by Lieutenant John McCrea, with "its references to the red poppies that grew over the graves of fallen soldiers, that the remembrance poppy has become one of the world's most recognised symbols for soldiers who have died in conflict," Canon Campion said.

He believed John McCrea would be horrified to think the poppy "could become a symbol of division, or national identity, or even a fashion statement. It is quite simply a symbol of memorial, of the grim reality of the terrible loss of life, the heroic and the selfless as well as the needless and the thoughtless."

The President Michael D Higgins attended the Service and laid a wreath at the memorial in the Cathedral's north transept. Lessons during the service were read by Minister for Justice and Equality Charlie Flanagan and Ceann Comhairle Séan Ó Feargháil.

Irish Times, <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/religion-and-beliefs/james-mcclean-s-popy-stance-praised-at-remembrance-event-1.3289180> accessed 31 August 2018

WHY DOESN'T JAMES MCCLEAN WEAR A POPPY ON REMEMBRANCE WEEKEND?

The West Brom man has chosen not to wear a poppy each and every year he has played in England. Here we explain why.

West Brom player James McClean has refused to wear the traditional Remembrance Day poppy on his shirt each and every year since first moving to England to join Sunderland in 2011. He will again choose not to wear a shirt emblazoned with the poppy when his current side West Bromwich Albion take on Manchester City this weekend.

But why does McClean object to wearing a poppy on his shirt?

The history of the poppy

In the aftermath of the First World War, the poppy emerged as a potent symbol of commemoration, redolent of the swathes of red poppies that filled the battlefields of Northern Europe where so many gave their lives between 1914 and 1918. And since 2012, each and every Premier League club has worn poppies sewn into specially made shirts during the month of November. The special shirts are usually then auctioned as part of the annual Poppy Appeal organised by The Royal British Legion.

McClean's objection

McClean was born and brought up in city of Derry, in Northern Ireland. He grew up on Creggan estate, where six of the people killed on Bloody Sunday in 1972 came from. Bloody Sunday was one of the most significant events of The Troubles conflict in the country, when British soldiers shot 28 unarmed civilians during a peaceful protest march. McClean objects to wearing the poppy because the symbol commemorates military personnel who have died in war – and not just soldiers who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

What has he said on the topic?

In 2015, McClean explained his stance in the West Brom matchday programme. "People say I am being disrespectful but don't ask why I choose not to wear it," McClean wrote. "If the poppy was simply about World War One and Two victims alone, I'd wear it without a problem. "I would wear it every day of the year if that was the thing but it doesn't. It stands for all the conflicts that Britain has been involved in. Because of the history where I come from in Derry, I cannot wear something that represents that."

What has been the reaction to his stance?

Mixed. McClean has previously been booed by supporters of opposition clubs as well as fans of his own team. He has also received sectarian abuse and loyalist threats. However he has received support from various players and managers, including Tony Pulis, who said he respects McClean's decision but added he did not believe in it himself, according to the Telegraph.

Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/premier-league/why-james-mcclean-doesnt-wear-popy-west-brom-remembrance-popy-appeal-a8037391.html>

JAMES MCCLEAN PENS OPEN LETTER TO WIGAN CHAIRMAN EXPLAINING WHY HE WON'T BE WEARING A POPPY TONIGHT

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND INTERNATIONAL, JAMES MCCLEAN, WROTE AN OPEN LETTER TO DAVE WHELAN EXPLAINING HIS REASONS FOR NOT WEARING A POPPY IN TONIGHT'S GAME AGAINST BOLTON

McClean has faced criticism in the past for not wearing a poppy during the annual Remembrance Day commemorations that take place in November in the UK and Commonwealth nations. According to wiganlatics.co.uk, McClean wrote an open letter to Latics Chairman Dave Whelan earlier this week before the two met face to face to discuss the issue.

Here's a look at McClean's letter to Whelan.

Dear Mr Whelan

I wanted to write to you before talking about this face to face and explain my reasons for not wearing a poppy on my shirt for the game at Bolton.

I have complete respect for those who fought and died in both World Wars – many I know were Irish-born. I have been told that your own Grandfather Paddy Whelan, from Tipperary, was one of those.

I mourn their deaths like every other decent person and if the Poppy was a symbol only for the lost souls of World War I and II I would wear one.

I want to make that 100% clear. You must understand this.

But the Poppy is used to remember victims of other conflicts since 1945 and this is where the problem starts for me.

For people from the North of Ireland such as myself, and specifically those in Derry, scene of the 1972 Bloody Sunday massacre, the poppy has come to mean something very different. Please understand, Mr Whelan, that when you come from Creggan like myself or the Bogside, Brandywell or the majority of places in Derry, every person still lives in the shadow of one of the darkest days in Ireland's history – even if like me you were born nearly 20 years after the event. It is just a part of who we are, ingrained into us from birth.

Mr Whelan, for me to wear a poppy would be as much a gesture of disrespect for the innocent people who lost their lives in the Troubles – and Bloody Sunday especially – as I have in the past been accused of disrespecting the victims of WWI and WWII.

It would be seen as an act of disrespect to those people; to my people.

I am not a war monger, or anti-British, or a terrorist or any of the accusations levelled at me in the past. I am a peaceful guy, I believe everyone should live side by side, whatever their religious or political beliefs which I respect and ask for people to respect mine in return. Since last year, I am a father and I want my daughter to grow up in a peaceful world, like any parent.

I am very proud of where I come from and I just cannot do something that I believe is wrong. In life, if you're a man you should stand up for what you believe in.

I know you may not agree with my feelings but I hope very much that you understand my reasons.

As the owner of the club I am proud to play for, I believe I owe both you and the club's supporters this explanation.

Yours sincerely,
James McClean

Wiganlatics.co.uk goes on to report that Mr Whelan accepted McClean's decision and it was both their wish that the letter is published in full.

Joe.ie, <https://www.joe.ie/sport/pic-james-mcclean-pens-open-letter-to-wigan-chairman-explaining-why-he-wont-be-wearing-a-popy-tonight-474522>

This learning module will fit with Key Stage 3 History, Local and Global Citizenship and English with Media Education.

CROSS CURRICULAR SKILLS		
KEY ELEMENT		THINKING SKILLS & PERSONAL CAPABILITIES
Personal Understanding		a. Managing Information
Mutual Understanding		b. Thinking, Problem Solving, Decision Making
Moral Character		c. Being Creative
Cultural Understanding		d. Working with Others
Citizenship		e. Self-Management
Media Awareness		

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

Further resources and ideas on Remembrance for assemblies in school are available on the Wales for Peace website
www.templeofpeace.wales/wfp/index.html

The Teach Peace Pack from the Peace Education Network includes resources and ideas for classrooms and assemblies and is available to download here <http://peace-education.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Teach-Peace-updated-Front-cover.jpg>

There is a World War One Assembly Pack available on the BBC website here <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25269805> which contains access to video, images and text to help schools and classrooms explore issues of remembrance and commemoration.



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