THE POETRY SOCIETY

WWW.POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK

KEY STAGE	AGE
EYFS	3-5
KS1	5-7
KS2	7-11 ✓
KS3	11-14
KS4	14-16
KS5	16-18

AT A GLANCE

- FEELINGS & EMOTIONS
- WAR POETRY
- LOSS
- MEMORY
- SIMILE & METAPHOR

POETRYCLASS: FRESH IDEAS FOR POETRY LEARNING FROM THE POETRY SOCIETY

WORLD WAR I POETRY FROM THE HOME FRONT

This resource explores the poem 'The Wind on the Downs', written by Marian Allen in May 1917. Allen wrote the poem a few days after she heard the tragic news that her fiancé, Arthur Tylston Greg, had been killed in an air battle over France. He was 22 years old.

The poem began life as two unnamed sonnets in Allen's collection called *The Wind on the Downs*. As they appeared one after the other, later anthologists have conflated them into one poem and adopted the title from the collection. Confusingly Allen wrote another poem titled 'The Wind on the Downs' but these two unnamed sonnets have become better known under that title.

The context of the First World War

Begin by discussing with your class how the First World War affected those left behind, as well as the soldiers who went to war. The experience of soldiers in war is vividly documented by poets such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon, who describe their experience in the trenches. However millions of people were left behind and lost sons, brothers, boyfriends and husbands.

The experience of those back home is less well-known: Allen's poem provides a bittersweet insight into their experience. Relatives and friends would suffer long periods where they feared the worst for their loved ones, scared that each letter would bear bad news from the front line.

Above: Arthur Tylston Greg. Right: Marian Allen.
Images ©National Trust, Quarry Bank Archive.

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

© 2014 POETRY SOCIETY & THE AUTHOR/S
DISTRIBUTION AUTHORISED FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
POETRYCLASS@POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK

Stills from Linda Hughes' animation of 'The Wind on the Downs'

Reading the poem

DESCRIPTION AND EMOTION

The poem is about coming to terms with the loss of someone you love. It is a very complicated process and the speaker goes through many different thoughts and emotions. Read through the poem with your class and discuss the different states of mind presented. These might include disbelief, confusion, happy memories, loneliness and hope. Jot your ideas down for later.

As we read through the poem what picture do we develop of Arthur Greg? Allen drops in different descriptions of her fiancé throughout the poem. With the class, pick out some of his particular qualities, described in the poem. These might include: tall, strong, always laughing, and adventurous. Discuss how a poem can build up a picture of someone with little details like these. Your class will be doing something similar later.

If you can, watch the beautiful video Linda Hughes has created of 'The Wind on the Downs'. Look how she uses illustration and animation to reflect the emotions in the poem.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5bfLMt3VoqM
www.vimeo.com/107023488

THE GOLDEN WINGS

Towards the end of the poem, the speaker mentions that she can always see a pair of golden wings in the sky above. Discuss with the class what they think these wings might represent. Remember, this is about a personal response, there are no wrong answers.

Do they represent:
- Arthur Greg's soul?
- His adventurous spirit?
- The plane he was flying when he died?
- The fact that he is keeping watch over her?
- Her own memories?

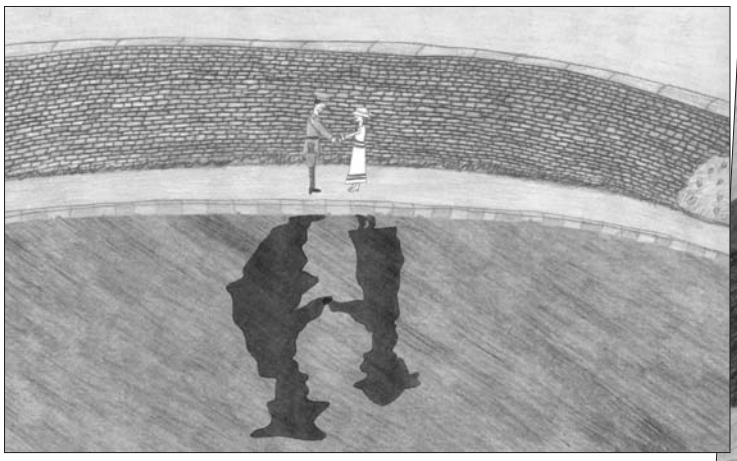
Arthur Greg was a pilot for the Royal Flying Corps (what is now the Royal Air Force), which has wings as part of its insignia. Perhaps they influenced Allen's use of image?

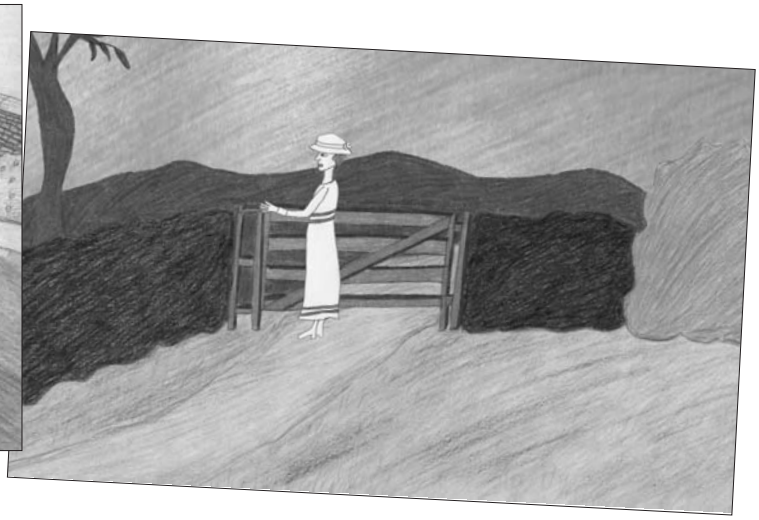
Explain to the class that a symbol such as the golden wings doesn't need to mean one thing – it can contain all these ideas at once. The reader's own thoughts help create the meaning too.

Badge of the Royal Flying Corps (now the Royal Air Force)

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

© 2014 POETRY SOCIETY & THE AUTHOR/S
DISTRIBUTION AUTHORISED FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
POETRYCLASS@POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK





Stills from Linda Hughes' animation of 'The Wind on the Downs'

Remembering someone in a poem

BUILDING A CHARACTER

Explain that students are going to write their own poems, imagining someone they love has gone to war. Get them to choose a character: for example, it could be their father, mother, friend, sibling, or an imagined son or daughter.

Using the worksheet below ask them to describe the person who has gone to war, using Marian Allen's line 'I like to think of you...' Encourage them to be specific in what they describe. Like Allen's descriptions of Arthur Greg, personal details help build a rounded picture.

Using the list of emotions you created when reading through the poem, get them to pick a few and describe how their character feels. The speaker might hope for a letter or a visit home. The speaker might be confused because they love the person who has gone away, but also feel angry or powerless being left behind. The speaker might feel lonely when doing a particular activity, because they used to do this together.

INTRODUCING SYMBOLISM

Remind your students about the golden wings, and how they are a symbol for something about the speaker, her fiancé and their relationship. Ask them to choose a symbol that represents something about their relationship with the person who has gone away. Maybe they were free as a bird, or sang like one? Perhaps the speaker and the person who has gone to war used to play football, read or bake together? Ask them to write about their symbol either using the prompts provided on the worksheet, or in their own free text.

Once your students have written down their ideas, encourage them to shape them into a poem. Allen's poem mixes the emotions up – she moves from hope, to disbelief, to loneliness, to hope again. Ask your students to think about how they are going to order their lines.

Displaying the poems

Linda Hughes' beautiful video shows one artist's response to the emotions of the poem. Ask your class to write their poems out and illustrate them, using Linda's animation as inspiration. They could draw scenes of happy memories, or the speaker's current loneliness, or the symbol they have created.

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

© 2014 POETRY SOCIETY & THE AUTHOR/S
DISTRIBUTION AUTHORISED FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
POETRYCLASS@POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK

WORKSHEET *WORLD WAR I POETRY*

First you need to choose your character and their relationship with the person who has gone off to war.

I am .....

My ..... has gone to war

Now try to describe the person who has gone away in the same way that Marian Allen does in her poem. Think about what they look like, what are their favourite things? What did you used to do together? How did they make you feel?

I like to think of you .....

.....

I like to think of you .....

.....

I like to think of you .....

.....

I like to think of you .....

.....

Now think about how you feel now they are gone. Write about your feelings and thoughts.

I feel .....

because .....

I feel .....

because .....

I feel .....

because .....

Marian Allen uses golden wings as a symbol of her relationship with Arthur Greg. Choose your own symbol for your relationship with the person who has gone away. There are lots of different ways you could present this. You could use one of the templates below or just write your ideas down in the space below.

It always reminds me of you when I see .....

.....

It makes me think of .....

.....

My dreams are filled with .....

.....

When I wake up I think .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

You're nearly there. Think about how you are going to order the ideas in your poem and write the poem out in full on a separate piece of paper. You don't necessarily need to use all of your sentences; pick your favourites and continue to edit them as you go along.

Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

© 2014 POETRY SOCIETY & THE AUTHOR/S
DISTRIBUTION AUTHORISED FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
POETRYCLASS@POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK

THE WIND ON THE DOWNS

I like to think of you as brown and tall,
As strong and living as you used to be,
In khaki tunic, Sam Brown belt and all,
And standing there and laughing down at me.
Because they tell me, dear, that you are dead,
Because I can no longer see your face,
You have not died, it is not true, instead
You seek adventure some other place.
That you are round about me, I believe;
I hear you laughing as you used to do,
Yet loving all the things I think of you;
And knowing you are happy, should I grieve?
You follow and are watchful where I go;
How should you leave me, having loved me so?

We walked along the towpath, you and I,
Beside the sluggish-moving, still canal;
It seemed impossible that you should die;
I think of you the same and always shall.
We thought of many things and spoke of few,
And life lay all uncertainly before,
And now I walk alone and think of you,
And wonder what new kingdoms you explore.
Over the railway line, across the grass,
While up above the golden wings are spread,
Flying, ever flying overhead,
Here still I see your khaki figure pass,
And when I leave meadow, almost wait,
That you should open first the wooden gate.

MARIAN ALLEN

Khaki: a light brown colour, the colour of army uniforms
Sam Brown belt: a belt with a strap that goes over the shoulder, used as part of some military uniforms
Towpath: a track or path that runs alongside a canal

Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material. The publisher apologizes for any errors or omissions and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions.

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

© 2014 POETRY SOCIETY & THE AUTHOR/S
DISTRIBUTION AUTHORISED FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY
POETRYCLASS@POETRYSOCIETY.ORG.UK