

The Forgotten Front: Landscapes, Labour, and the Memory of War



Figure 1. Alfred Munnings, *Ruined Chateau at Ennemain, near Athies*, 1918, oil on canvas. Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.



Figure 2. Alfred Munnings, *A Grey Team, and Forest of Dreux*, 1918, oil on canvas. Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

Curriculum Connections:

Aligned with Alberta Social Studies 10–12 outcomes:

Grade Level	ELA Outcome	Connection to Assignment
Grade 10 (-1 and -2)	2.1.1 Discern and analyze context	Students examine historical and artistic context of WWI paintings to understand how war narratives are shaped.
	2.3.2 Evaluate significance of nonprint texts	Students analyze Munnings' war art to assess its effectiveness and meaning as historical and artistic texts.
	2.3.3 Appreciate effectiveness and artistry	Students consider the emotional, symbolic, and visual power of nonprint texts in communicating war memory.
Grade 11 (-1 and -2)	2.2.2 Relate techniques to created effects	Students evaluate how motif, symbol, colour, and visual structure in Munnings' paintings convey meaning.
	2.3.2 Evaluate verisimilitude and significance	Students critique the realism, emotional authenticity, and importance of artworks as historical evidence.
Grade 12 (-1 and -2)	2.1.1 Analyze how societal forces shape texts	Students examine how war art reflects cultural, political, and ideological values of its time.
	2.3.3 Appreciate artistry and purpose	Students assess the effectiveness of visual storytelling in shaping national memory and challenging dominant narratives.

Essential Inquiry Question

Should Canada expand its WWI remembrance to include the landscapes and labourers depicted by Alfred Munnings?

Learning Objectives

- Analyze nationalism during times of conflict, including how art contributes to national memory
- Appreciate contrasting historical narratives tied to national identity
- Examine how visual culture (e.g., official war art) shapes Canada's wartime identity
- Develop persuasive writing and historical argumentation skills

Writing Prompt

Canada's WWI identity has often been centred on battles like Vimy Ridge or the heroism of trench warfare. But Munnings' war art presents an alternative view: destroyed villages, deep forests, supply teams, and shelter builders.

In a 750–1000 word position paper, argue:

“Commemorations of war often glorify battle, but ignore the environmental destruction, infrastructure collapse, and labour that sustained the war effort. Should Canada expand its narrative of WWI to include the landscapes and labourers Alfred Munnings painted?”

Essay Requirements

Your position paper should include the following sections:

1. Introduction:
 - Hook, Context, and Thesis
2. Body Paragraphs:
 - Visual Analysis
 - Historical Context & Research
 - Counterargument & Rebuttal
3. Conclusion:
 - Restate the thesis and reflect on the importance

Suggested Sources

Primary & Archival:

- Letters or reports from the Canadian Forestry Corps (Library & Archives Canada)
[The Canadian Letters and Images Project](#)
- Veterans Affairs Canada – WWI Forestry Units

[Yeoman of the Woods: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps During the Great War 1916-1919](#)

- Photographs of ruined French villages (Imperial War Museum, LAC, CBC archives)

[Library and Archives Canada Blog](#)

[Lauier Centre for the Study of Canada](#)

Secondary:

- Articles on Alfred Munnings as a war artist

[Beauty in desolation: Munnings and the First World War](#)

Assessment Criteria

Grade 10 Social Studies (10-1 / 10-2)

Curricular Outcome & Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Beginning
1.4 - Identity Expression	Thoroughly examines how Canadian identity is reflected in overlooked wartime contributions.	Clearly explains how identity is shown in labour and the environment.	Attempts to link identity to labour and setting.	Little or no connection to identity expression.
2.3 - Historical Thinking	Effectively applies contextual knowledge to reframe war memory with a clear understanding of environmental and labour roles.	Applies some historical knowledge to discuss overlooked roles.	Provides limited historical context or understanding.	Shows minimal historical knowledge of the topic.

Grade 11 Social Studies (20-1 / 20-2)

Curricular Outcome & Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Beginning
2.7 - Conflict and Nationalism	Insightfully analyzes how nationalism excludes non-combat war efforts; strong critique of commemorative narratives.	Discusses how nationalism may overlook alternate narratives of war.	Touches on nationalism but lacks deep exploration.	Minimal engagement with the concept of nationalism.
4.1 / 4.2 - Narratives of Identity	Critically evaluates differing national narratives using artwork and historical sources as evidence.	Compares traditional and alternative war stories with some evidence.	Describes alternate war experiences with limited analysis.	Mentions narratives without explanation or proof.

Grade 12 Social Studies (30-1 / 30-2)

Curricular Outcome & Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Developing	Beginning
1.3 - Influence of Ideology	Sophisticated insight into how ideology shapes national memory and commemorative choices.	Clearly connects ideology to selective remembrance.	Basic understanding of the role of ideology in memory.	Minimal or no knowledge of ideological influence.
4.5 - Symbols of National Identity	Thorough analysis of how imagery and symbols (paintings, ruins, uniforms) shape national identity.	Explains how symbols contribute to national identity.	Identifies symbols with limited explanation.	Little or no reference to symbols or imagery.

Cross-Curricular Links

Grade Level	Outcome	Connection to Assignment
Grade 10 (-1 / -2)	2.1.1	Discern and analyze context (e.g., describe how societal forces influence the creation of texts).
Grade 10 (-1 / -2)	2.3.2	Evaluate the verisimilitude, appropriateness, and significance of print and nonprint texts.
Grade 11 (-1 / -2)	2.2.2	Relate elements, devices, and techniques to created effects in print and nonprint texts.
Grade 11 (-1 / -2)	2.3.2	Evaluate the realism and significance of print and nonprint texts.
Grade 12 (-1 / -2)	2.3.3	Appreciate the effectiveness and artistry of print and nonprint texts.