

Silences, an elementary lesson for Remembrance Day

Goals:

- to appreciate the moment of silence held on Remembrance Day
- to 'hear' the sounds of silence in one's imagination
- to differentiate among layers of sound and levels of silence in one own's environment

Background

Students live in a sound layered environments where they are often unaware that there are many different sounds coming in at once. The family could have on a TV, conversation going on, with traffic/cleaning noises overlaying that, yet, the child is reading a book where he or she hears only the sounds of the imaginary story. A young person may think that someplace is 'silent' just because there are not many different LAYERS of sound present. This lesson on silences lays the groundwork for appreciating the meaning of the reflective 60 seconds of silence on Remembrance Day.

First steps

1. Ask for silence in the room in whatever way you use to cue the children. Note down how many minutes it takes to get silence and what various things need to shut down to get it. (i.e. some students needed to be quiet before you could ask others to be quiet)
2. When you have silence tell the students that you have to 'test their ears' to see if they know what silence means. Your test will be one minute, 60 seconds of silence. Ask the children to shut their eyes and LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS OF SILENCE FOR THE NEXT 60 SECONDS. They may hear feet shuffling, air conditioning, sounds in the hallway, distant traffic, the clock ticking. You may not want to take a whole 60 seconds before you ask them what they heard.

After you've listened to their list of sounds, tell them about what you noticed about getting silence for them to try the test. Tell them that It took xx minutes to get silence and you had to get through xx layers of sound to get to what appeared to be silence and even then, IT WASN'T SILENCE!

Silences

1. What is true silence? If you are out in the woods with no one else to talk to, is that silence? What would you hear in the woods?
2. If you are in your bed, with no one else around, is there silence? What do you hear when you are quiet and all by yourself?
3. If you are reading a book and your imagination has shut out the whole world, do you hear anything in your mind as your read or think?
4. Read stanza one of "In Flanders Fields" twice asking the youngsters to note what sounds they hear. Prepare them for the reading:

Before the reading:

1. What flowers do we wear for Remembrance Day?
2. Crosses and grave stones are in cemeteries. Have you ever been to a cemetery? Why do people go to cemeteries?
3. Imitate the sound of the wind. If the wind were blowing on flowers would the sound be any different?
4. Larks are common birds that you've heard wherever you live. You often don't even hear them because of all the other sounds. Are birds singing right now? Would you notice? Has bird song become invisible to you?
5. Would the sound of guns drown out the sounds of birds?
6. What are all the layered sounds you would hear on a battlefield

Read the following stanza twice:

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.

After the reading:

These five lines are the start of a very important Canadian poem that everyone in Canada, and perhaps, even the world, knows. In five lines that you heard there are at least three sounds. Even though it was silent while I read,

1. What three sounds could you hear while the poppies were blowing among the crosses?
2. What sounds did your imagination add?

In a moment of silence:

After there is quiet in the room, and you are thinking of those who went to fight in wars for you and your safety,

1. What sounds do you hear in your mind when everything else is as quiet as it can be?
2. What sounds seem to be there always, even when you try to drown them out?
3. What sounds would have to stop for you to feel true silence?

After the reading:

1. The poem "In Flanders Fields" for which you read stanza one has another stanza where the dead speak to all of us. Imagine the voices of the dead speaking with you. What do you imagine the voices of the dead would sound like?
2. The voices or sounds in your head or imagination are always quiet to the outside world yet they speak to us in our heads. When is your inner voice likely to make the most sounds?
3. Now that you know that sounds are LAYERED in the places where you live and work, take apart the sounds in one place to get a better understanding of the sounds that surround us. For example, in your school playground, what are the up close and far off sounds? How many layers of sounds are there?

Conclusions:

What is true silence? Is there such a thing?

What are the best silences?

What is good about the silences of reflection and remembrance?

WHAT DID YOU THINK ABOUT AND HEAR DURING YOUR SCHOOL'S MOMENT OF SILENCE?