Red Poppies as a Symbol of Remembrance

Canadian physician and Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, who served as a brigade surgeon for an Allied artillery unit during World War I, wrote the famous poem, “In Flanders’ Fields” which memorializes those who died in war. In the poem, Dr. McCrae found inspiration in the red poppies (Papaver rhoeas) that grew in the war-torn landscape after the Second Battle of Ypres. In the poem, McCrae channeled the voice of the fallen soldiers buried under those hardy poppies.

In 1918, American humanitarian Moina Michael campaigned to make the red poppy the symbol of remembrance of the soldiers who died in World War I. Today, many people in the United States and the United Kingdom wear a red poppy on Memorial Day, Armistice Day, and Remembrance Day. The red poppy, also known as Flanders poppy, corn poppy, or corn rose, has a very wide distribution area – from Africa to temperate and tropical Asia and Europe.

Do we have red poppies in the Presidio?

In the Presidio, our native poppy, Eschscholzia californica, is not red – rather, it has shiny, golden-orange flowers, and is recognizable as the California State flower. It can be found on coastal bluffs, dune flats, grassy hills, and rocky ridges in the Presidio. This annual or perennial native plant has lacy, blue-green leaves, and can be found blooming from February to November.

Materials:

• Glue stick
• Child scissors
• One sheet red, black, and light-blue cardstock or construction paper
• Green marker
• Outline of red poppy flower
• Tape
• Push pin (optional)
INSTRUCTIONS

If you have a printer, print out the red poppy flower outline on the next page. No printer? Draw a poppy flower yourself (you can use our template for inspiration and scale).

1. Cut out the center of the poppy flower outline.

2. Cut a small square of black paper large enough to cover the center of poppy. Tape the square to the back of poppy outline to cover the cut out hole.

3. Tear entire page of red paper into small bits.

4. Apply glue to one section of poppy flower outline and begin to fill it in with red paper bits. Apply glue to red paper to ensure that all pieces are flush with paper. Cover each petal section of the poppy outline this way.

5. Using scissors, cut around the perimeter of the poppy.

6. Glue the poppy to the upper section of the blue paper.

7. *Optional* Place your poppy artwork on a piece of cardboard. Carefully using the push pin, prick holes into just the section of black paper.

8. Using the green marker, draw a stem for the poppy.