

VSB - INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

ABORIGINAL VETERANS DAY REMEMBRANCE DAY IS NOT THE ONLY DAY WE COMMEMORATE VETERANS

Indigenous people in Canada have reason to be proud of their wartime contributions. More than 7,000 First Nations, Inuit and Métis members served in the First and Second World Wars, as well as the Korean War. One Veterans group estimates that 12,000 Indigenous men and women served in all three wars.



There are many Aboriginal-Canadian Veterans who have helped protect peace and freedom over the years. To honour them, the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument was unveiled in Ottawa in 2001. It has a large eagle on top, four men and women from different Aboriginal groups in the middle and sculptures of a grizzly bear, a caribou, a wolf and a bison around the outside. These animals have special symbolism in many Aboriginal-Canadian cultures.

Indigenous Languages

Indigenous languages played a unique and crucial role in the wars. Often messages came from military officials to provide orders and instructions for troop movement, supply lines and other specifics. It was vital that they remained secret from enemy ears. After the coded messages had been received at their proper destination, they were translated back into English from Cree by another Indigenous "code-talker" and given to military officials to read.



We commemorate Indigenous Veterans on both Remembrance Day and Aboriginal Veterans Day

Did you know - Indigenous people that served in the military were enfranchised. This meant that they had to surrender their Indian Status in order to serve. Being enfranchised meant they signed away their culture, ancestry and heritage. They also could not live among their Indigenous family upon return from service.

RESOURCES (click on title to open / download on web browser)

- [Canada Remembers Indigenous Veterans](#)
- [Veterans Affairs Canada - Indigenous Veterans Page](#)
- [Remembrance Dog Tags \(Lesson Plan ages 12-18\)](#)
- [National Aboriginal Veterans Monument Activity](#)

Adapted from veterans.gc.ca

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INDIGENOUS REMEMBRANCE DAY POETRY

Offered for assembly and classroom use

**"I Love This Land" by Chief R. Stacey LaForme
of the Mississaugas of New Credit First Nation**

*The poem, presented in full below, is written in the voice of a
First Nations soldier who is speaking to a fellow soldier, after returning to Canada.*



You were and always shall be my brother
We were all the same color wrapped in the flag of this nation
My blood flowed as freely as yours, mixed in the fields one could not be distinguished from the other
Yet when we came home, when the nation's colours were removed
Difference became apparent, not between you and me, God willing never
But in the eyes of those for whom we laid down our lives.

Oh, we still stood shoulder to shoulder in the parades, but the government thought that your life was more
valuable than mine
So you were given land, property, while I waited and I waited,
I know what you were given was not enough for what we endured
Still it was much more than I.

I am not envious of you brother, I believe you deserve even more than you received
But it hurt me very badly, I am not ashamed to say I cried and why not
I bled, I died, I killed, why does my country think I am unworthy
The enemy I fought could never be as cruel as the people I came back to embrace.

I gave so much, lived through so much and then you,
you who I would give all for, you pushed me aside as if I was inconsequential
I feel as if I have been spit upon by one I honored.

Do I feel good, having to ask you for what should have been given long ago, no?
In fact, I am a little ashamed to ask for justice in this
For I never went to war for money, for glory, for reward, I went because it was the right thing to do and God forgive
me, I would go again.

This may seem an old wound to you but it is a wound that never heals
For it is a wound to my people's heart and soul and insult to our pride
And we deserve so much better, especially from you.

**"Indian Veterans" by Solomon Ratt,
associate professor of Indigenous Education
at First Nations University Canada**

After talking with his niece – a Regina teacher who wanted to add an Indigenous angle to talking about Remembrance Day in the classroom, Ratt penned a poem to recognize Indigenous veterans in Canada.

We were the forgotten
of the ‘lest we forget.’

We were the invisible
ghosts from The Rez

We had no obligation to join.

We had to give up our treaty status.
We fought, we died,

our language was used
for secret messages.

We stood side by side with
the other soldiers in our victory.

We were cast aside when
we came back home;

we didn’t get the benefits
allotted other veterans;

we didn’t know where to live
since we gave up our treaty status.

We were the forgotten
of the ‘lest we forget.

We were the invisible
ghosts from The Rez.



Credit: Poppy Image by Andy Everson, K'ómoks First Nation.

The Drum beat steady and deeply resonant
reaches into the past, present and future:

Pulsing with medicines the drum is our heartbeat,
a golden glow that always moves
beneath the surface of all that takes place.

Everywhere there is war,

But streaming from the four directions,
the sky is filled with legions of thunderbirds young
and old sacrificing life to restore peace and love.

By Anonymous Indigenous Author