



LEGIONS KEEP REMEMBRANCE ALIVE

Through Art and Literacy in the Schools

By Lorraine Payette

“Lest we forget” – important words. How can we honour all those who served? How can we guarantee our future generations will never forget?

The “Remembrance Contests” of the Royal Canadian Legion keep these memories alive. It combines art, literacy, public speaking and history into one cohesive unit for students from grades 1-12. They involve young people across Canada, whether traditionally or home schooled, in a competition culminating in national recognition and awards.

They advance through branch, zone, district, provincial and federal levels. They learn the history of Canada and the wars while doing drawing, paintings, writing, public speaking or videos. Prizes are awarded at every level as they move up. National senior first prize winners see their works on display at the Canadian War Museum during the annual Remembrance Day period, with second place winners and honourable mentions shown in the foyer of the House of Commons.

Tom Eagles, Dominion President of The Royal Canadian Legion, is quoted at <http://www.legion.ca/article/legion-selects-winners-of-poster-and-literary-contests-2/> as saying, “Since 1960, the Legion has been sponsoring Poster and Literary contests in its efforts to perpetuate Remembrance among all Canadians. I am pleased to report that this past

year approximately 100,000 primary, junior, intermediate and senior students participated in these national contests... Participants represent youth from all areas of the country, in both official languages, and span the various cultural mixes that make up the family mosaic of Canada... ”

Students are encouraged to write poems about remembrance, to make posters, present speeches and create videos as part of the program. This is still school work, and they are expected to produce high quality pieces.

“Regarding the Literary Contest, participants are asked to submit an essay/composition or a poem with a Remembrance theme,” states the official website. “Submissions are accepted in either French or English and are marked on the basis of originality of thought, expression, presentation, grammar and spelling.

“The Poster Contest participants are asked to submit their work in either black and white or colour format with the theme of Remembrance and what it represents to them. Similar to the Literary Contest, submissions are marked based on originality, expression and presentation.”

“We encourage them to get to know their local veterans,” said Janet Gaylord Youth Ed Chairperson of Branch 92 Gananoque, On. “It is a time for Remembrance, to reflect and honour all who served. What did they do? What were their sacrifices? What did they give us? Students

learn about their past and how that reflects on the future. The veterans feel pride when the students honour them for what they did. It gives meaning to the sacrifices they made when they are remembered and respected. Students can join the Poppy Campaign as volunteers, visit the vets in the local seniors’ residences, and bring them in as special speakers at their schools. The program encourages them to do research, to really learn about these people and everything they did for all Canadians.”

In 2014, seven-year-old Thomas Elkins of Gananoque drew a black and white poster for the competition. His art and message were so well done that he took awards at local, district, zone and provincial levels for 2015. While not all students will do that well, all will collect knowledge and memories that are theirs to keep forever.

For them, “Lest we forget” is a phrase that means something, something they will pass on to their children and grandchildren. They will proudly remember the vets talking to them about what it was really like. For this group one thing can be assured. They will never forget. **LH**

To learn more about the program, please go to <http://www.legion.ca/honour-remember/contests/>