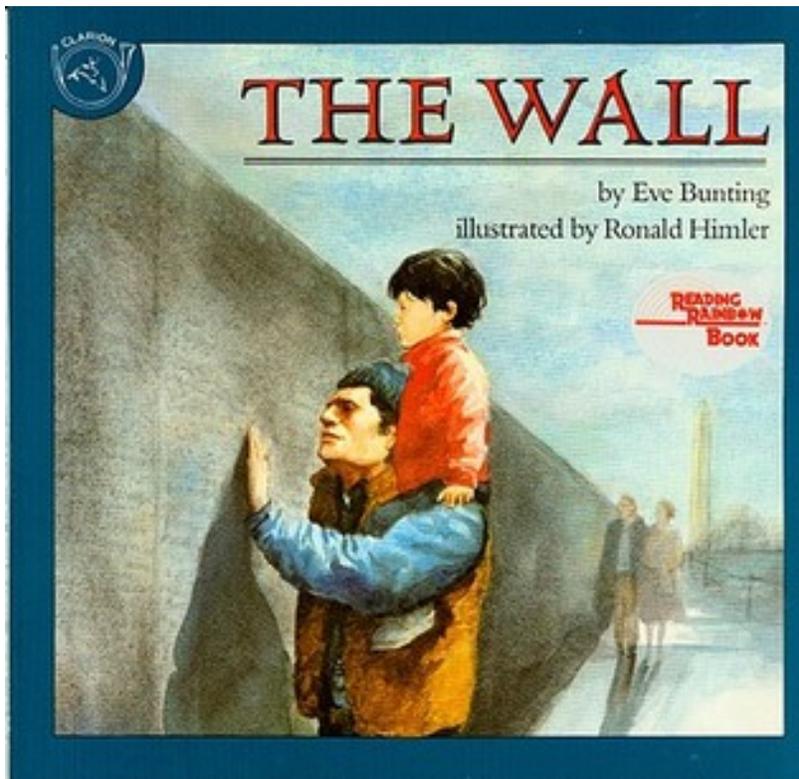


Literature in Context:
Eve Bunting and Ronald Himler's
The Wall



by Robin M. Huntley

Summary

Narrated through the eyes of a child, The Wall is an emotional and thought-provoking story. A young boy and his father – pictured in the cover illustration – visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC to find the name of their grandfather and father, respectively. They've traveled a long distance, and the immense significance of their visit to the dark, reflective memorial is evident. Alongside the pair are many other visitors from all walks of life – students, families, people young and old pass by to, similarly, find a name and pay their respects. Small tokens of remembrance dot the base of the memorial, flags, photographs, and flowers sending unwritten messages to those remembered. Together, the boy and his father honor their family member's life and in doing so, teach readers volumes about the impact that war can have on a generation and a community.

Critical Thinking Questions

Written to support readers in deepening their understanding of the text, these questions will spark readers to think deeply and make connections between the story and their own lives and communities.

- Why does the boy call the wall “his grandfather’s wall?”
- In real life, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is just as reflective as it is depicted as in the book. Why do you think the designer made it that way?
- Why do you think the man in the wheelchair is visiting the wall? What makes you think that?
- The boy compares the older couple at the wall to his own grandfather. Who could the couple be mourning if they are around the age of the boy’s grandparents?
- What do the things left at the wall say about its visitors?
- How long ago was 1967? How old might a person who served in the Vietnam War be today?
- Why does the boy’s father rub his finger of his father’s name so many times? Why do you think they made a rubbing?
- The extra names on the rubbing are symbolic. What could they represent?
- How do you think the boy feels when he sees the other boy with his grandfather? What might he be thinking about?
- The students who arrive don’t seem entirely sure what they’re seeing. Why do you think they’re visiting the memorial?
- Why are the boy and his father proud to find the name they sought out on the wall? Do you think that pride is ever a sad feeling?
- What message do you think the story’s ending sends?

Community-Based Learning Opportunities

While The Wall is centered around remembrance of combat veterans, it's an essential read around Veterans Day - a day that can be used a catalyst for community-based studies of veterans, military service, military history, activism, and more. After using the story to spark discussion of veterans and remembrance, use the ideas and resources below to allow your community to become a curriculum for Veterans Day-themed learning.

Opportunities for Service-Based Learning

<https://www.centralwesternmass.va.gov/giving/index.asp>

The VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System welcomes community support! Community members can engage in service-based learning in many forms with the VA. Volunteers who visit the VA in person can offer their support by providing entertainment, socializing, helping with daily tasks like opening mail, escorting patients to appointments, and more. Service-based learning at your local VA campus is a meaningful and authentic way to engage with local veterans, and not only provides learning opportunities but also provides necessary support and care. Volunteers must meet some age and skill criteria in order to support the VA, but those who are not able to volunteer their time can engage in service-based learning by collecting and donating items for veterans. VA residents can benefit from monetary donations, as well as new clothing, stationery, and toiletries.

Visit a Local Memorial

<http://www.mass.gov/veterans/cemeteries-and-honors/cemeteries/state-cemeteries/agawam.html>

The Massachusetts State Veterans' Cemetery in Agawam includes the graves of over 9,400 veterans and their dependents, the majority of whom were once part of communities across western Massachusetts. Visit the 61-acre cemetery for a humbling and beautiful experience. Walking respectfully amongst the rows of grave markers can be as meaningful as a visit to the memorials of Washington, DC. Looking for someone specific? There's a tool that can be used to search for specific headstones based on first and last name located here:

<https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/1965687>

Pay a Virtual Visit to the Western Massachusetts Vietnam Veterans Memorial

<http://www.springfield50.org>

A Springfield-based project, the WMVVM works to gather information relating to local military servicemen who lost their lives in Vietnam, both in terms of their experiences during war and as members of communities within the city of Springfield. The organization's web-based resources detail casualties by county, as well as the specific branches of the military in which local folks served. This resource can be used to explore the impact that the Vietnam War had on local families and communities.

Explore the Virtual Vietnam Veterans Memorial

<http://www.virtualwall.org>

If you can't get to Washington, DC but want to explore the names etched into the memorial's panels, use this web-based tool! Users can search a complete list of names based on date, panel location, and last name. Even if you don't have a specific name to look for, reading through some of the thousands of names is humbling, eye-opening, and perhaps even fascinating. (And no, George Munoz is not listed.)

Exploring the Experience of Warfare Through Poetry

<https://hilltownfamilies.wordpress.com/2016/11/08/htf-435/>

While Whitman himself did not serve in the military, he spent significant time exploring firsthand the casualties and grave injuries caused by battle during the Civil War. Older readers can relate Whitman's experience (told through the poem *The Wound-dresser*) to the experiences of those who fought in Vietnam.