

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Cognitive Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Paper Poppies

Text by Lesley Fleming, HTR

Photos by iheartcraftythings.com

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Materials

Templates for poppy parts,
pencils, scissors, glue

Red, black & background
paper

Optional: poster paper

Wipes

ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will make paper poppies simulating the live flowers as an activity involving discussions on Veterans Day, service to country, complexities of war, trauma or grief.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore complexities of war, service, sacrifice, grief, trauma

Physical: Use fine motor skills; maintain hand dexterity

Psychological/Emotional: Expand tolerance of others; consider sacrifices military members make during conflicts

Sensory: Sensory integration of hand-eye coordination

Social: Undertake community service making/donating paper poppies to local organizations; interact with veterans

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Make a sample paper poppy & consider the abilities of your participants. Pre-cutting items may be appropriate, or have templates ready. If available, have live poppies to display.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing the paper poppy & providing some short background information on the significance of poppies, their symbolism of world wars, and brief horticultural facts.
3. Distribute the materials and lead the group/individuals through a step by step method of making the poppy beginning with tracing the red petal parts & black stamen parts. Cut these items out.
4. The petals, shaped like figure 8s in red, with 2 pieces for each flower, can be rolled/curled up at the ends to create some dimension.
5. To shape the stamen, the black 4x1" rectangle piece (1 per flower) should have 1/2" slits cut along the 4" length (see photo below). Form a circle & glue.
6. Cut 2 small slits/flaps in the circle, at the end opposite of the cut slits & glue it to one flower petal. Use fingers to separate & slightly curl the stamens.
7. Glue 2 of the paper poppy flower petals together to form the flower. Glue the completed black stamen to the flower (see photos).
8. Optional next step is to glue poppies to paper, attaching green stems to flowers, or form a poster gluing everyone's poppies onto poster banner.
9. Discuss topics of relevancy to group: military service & sacrifice to country, Veterans Day, complexities of war, trauma, grief and communal mourning.

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: The red poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) has symbolic meaning for many veterans and populations familiar with world wars. These beautiful flowers emerged from the war-torn landscapes of World War I in northern France and Flanders (northern Belgium). Growing atop the graves of soldiers, the poppy symbolized renewal and resiliency. In the poem *In Flanders Fields*, Canadian Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae

juxtaposed the atrocities and human toll of war and the beauty of the resilient poppy, this flower becoming a powerful symbol of remembrance.

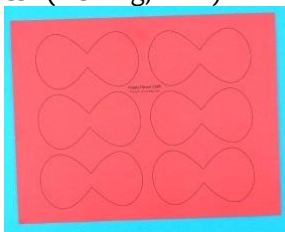
Veteran and active military populations may not find making paper poppies something they want to do, but some may. In settings where there is a mixed population of veterans, seniors, family members, perhaps school children, doing this activity, demonstrating people are still concerned and reverent for military members, may invite participation and discussion of service and sacrifice (not necessarily horrific details of war). Discussions with various populations can focus on their personal sacrifices and service to others, perspectives on physical violence (relevant to at-risk youth?), peace, trauma (survivors of trauma), grief, and communal mourning.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Some populations may have restrictions on using scissors. Pieces can be pre-cut by facilitator. People with post-traumatic stress, trauma or other complex health conditions may have unexpected reactions; involvement of mental health, grief counselors or trauma specialists may be appropriate.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: This paper/plant activity can include hands-on gardening like planting poppy seeds, integration of history lessons with horticulture influences, community service making paper poppies donated to local facilities or organizations, and exploration of nature connections to healing and nature-based therapies.

Background: “Military personnel throughout history have connected with nature. Examining experiences... helps to understand why and how certain nature elements—plants and nature-based interventions—have contributed to healing, stress reduction and therapeutic outcomes for soldiers, military staff, veterans, their loved ones and communities. World War I is synonymous with the red poppy (*Papaver rhoeas*) growing on battlefield graves of the fallen soldiers in Flanders Field. This symbol of remembrance, embraced worldwide, is perhaps best understood as a form of communal grief, along with complex meanings of mourning, resilience and patriotism, evident each year with the wearing of poppies (McNab, 2014). World War II military and civilian populations continued to use the fabric poppy as a symbol, evoking the complexities of war and freedom, sacrifice, and hope for a peaceful future. It was during World War II that gardening as a form of occupational therapy for U.S. veterans began being used, delivered by members of garden clubs across the country (Simson, 1998). This formalized use of *contact with nature* as a treatment modality continues to this day....

Post 9/11 conflicts brought a different meaning to the poppy. Growing in Iraq and Afghanistan fields, poppies were used for the opium drug trade. The intermix of war, terrorism, military missions involving the control and destruction of poppy fields, and substance abuse among military members has had devastating impact within and beyond the military community. Horticultural therapy, along with other nature-based therapies have been implemented as health strategies for active military and veterans as alternative treatments to traditional therapies” (Fleming, 2020).



REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Caroline. (2018). Pretty paper poppies craft. IHeartCraftyThings.

[Pretty Paper Poppies Craft - I Heart Crafty Things](#)

Fleming, L. (2020). Veterans, poppies and connections to nature. *Digging In* 6(4).

McNab, C. (2014). *The Book of the Poppy*. The History Press

Simson, S. & Straus, M. (1998). *Horticulture as Therapy: Principles and Practice*. Hawthorne Press.

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