

READING

INSTANT MEETING
AGES: 9 - 11

GOAL: To encourage reading and literacy skills within your group and introduce everyone to a Canadian writer and his well known poem "The Cremation of Sam McGee."

PROGRAM AREAS COVERED:
Reading Badge, Literary Arts Badge

PREPARATION TIME:
10-15 minutes for printing and gathering supplies
Calling ahead to set up a Library Tour (optional)

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Pencil
- Copies of "The Cremation of Sam McGee" on pages 4-5
- Copies of "Write Your Own Poetry Review Worksheet" on page 6

OPENING

(Optional) Arrange a short tour at your local library. Ask the librarian to show the children around while talking about why reading is important as well as introducing them to the section where they can find books appropriate for their age level.

Enjoy your usual Opening.

Afterwards ask everyone to think about who their favorite author is and what types of books they like to read such as the following genres: Science Fiction, Adventure, Western, Fantasy, Poetry, Biography, Natural Science, History, and any others you can think of that your group may be interested in.

Have everyone tell the group their favorite author and why and/or their favorite genre and why. This will help introduce everyone to different types of reading they may never have thought of before.

After everyone has answered ask the group if anyone reads poetry. Let them know today you are going to introduce them to a famous Canadian poet.

ACTIVITIES

BIOGRAPHY OF A CANADIAN POET

Read the following bio to the group so they have some context of who the person was that wrote the poem they'll be reading for the next activity.

(Source: www.robertwservice.com)



Robert W. Service was born January 16, 1874 in Preston, Lancashire, England to Scottish parents. He was the oldest child of 10 and grew up in Scotland. He wrote his first poem on his sixth birthday. The poem went as follows:

***God bless the cakes and bless the jam;
Bless the cheese and the cold boiled ham;
Bless the scones Aunt Jeannie makes,
And save us all from belly-aches.
Amen***

At 13 Robert dreamed of going to sea, but his parents did not support this venture. Robert got his first job in a shipping office any ways. However, the dream did not last long as he one day showed up to work with no furniture, files, or a boss at the office.

He attended the University of Glasgow after high school and studied the English Language and Literature. He emigrated to Canada in 1895 as he had a new dream at 21 of becoming a cowboy in Western Canada. After announcing this to his family his father bought him a circus costume complete with a sombrero, high leather boots, and fringed leather jacket to wear in his new home.

He sailed to Montreal and eventually made his way to the Canadian Bank of Commerce where he was stationed for eight years in Whitehorse, Yukon. It was while in the Yukon that he published his first book of poems that was to make him famous - *Songs of a Sourdough*. He originally only meant for the book to be given to family and friends but the publisher offered him a cheque and terms for publication rights. He took the offer, establishing himself as a published writer.

During his lifetime, Robert published six novels, two autobiographical works, over 45 verse collections and 1,000 poems. After World War I, he married his French wife, Germaine Bougeoin and they spent the remainder of their lives together with their daughter in France.



POETRY READING

1 Have the group sit in a circle. Let them know that now you are all going to read a poem by Robert W. Service. Ask them to all read it with as much enthusiasm as possible.

3 Read the first paragraph. Ask the person sitting to your right to read the second paragraph and then have the next person sitting beside them do the same.

2 Give each person a copy of "The Cremation of Sam McGee." found on pages 4-5.

4 Continue having each individual read a new paragraph until the poem is completed.





WRITE YOUR OWN REVIEW

- Split the groups up into teams of two or three (depending on how large your group is).
- Give each group member a worksheet (found on page 6) and a pencil.
- Ask each group to work together to complete the worksheet.
- Give everyone 10-15 minutes to complete the worksheet.
- Have everyone return to the circle and discuss their poetry reviews.



LETTER TAG

1 If there's time have the group play a different version of tag than they're used to. Regular rules of tag apply, one person is "it" and they have to tap another person in order for someone new to become "it."

2 Explain that in Letter Tag if someone is about to be tagged they can avoid becoming "it" by shouting out a safe word. The first safe word will start with the letter A. The next safe word to be called out will start with the letter B, the next safe word with the letter C and so on and so forth. However, if a child can't think of a word or says a word that starts with the wrong letter then they become "it."

3 To make the game more challenging play the entire game with only one letter and tell the group that no repeat words are allowed. Or try yelling out different categories of safe words such as "Vegetables," "Sports," "Restaurants," "Movies" etc.

4 Have the children play the game till they become tired, the alphabet is finished, or it's time for the meeting to end.





CREMATION OF SAM MCGEE

By Robert W. Service

***There are strange things done in the midnight sun
By the men who toil for gold;
The Arctic trails have their secret tales
That would make your blood run cold;
The Northern Lights have seen queer sights,
But the queerest they ever did see
Was that night on the marge of Lake Lebarge
I cremated Sam McGee.***

Now Sam McGee was from Tennessee, where the cotton blooms and blows.
Why he left his home in the South to roam 'round the Pole, God only knows.
He was always cold, but the land of gold seemed to hold him like a spell;
Though he'd often say in his homely way that "he'd sooner live in hell."

On a Christmas Day we were mushing our way over the Dawson trail.
Talk of your cold! through the parka's fold it stabbed like a driven nail.
If our eyes we'd close, then the lashes froze till sometimes we couldn't see;
It wasn't much fun, but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee.

And that very night, as we lay packed tight in our robes beneath the snow,
And the dogs were fed, and the stars o'erhead were dancing heel and toe,
He turned to me, and "Cap," says he, "I'll cash in this trip, I guess;
And if I do, I'm asking that you won't refuse my last request."

Well, he seemed so low that I couldn't say no; then he says with a sort of moan:
"It's the cursed cold, and it's got right hold till I'm chilled clean through to the bone.
Yet 'tain't being dead—it's my awful dread of the icy grave that pains;
So I want you to swear that, foul or fair, you'll cremate my last remains."

A pal's last need is a thing to heed, so I swore I would not fail;
And we started on at the streak of dawn; but God! He looked ghastly pale.
He crouched on the sleigh, and he raved all day of his home in Tennessee;
And before nightfall a corpse was all that was left of Sam McGee.

There wasn't a breath in that land of death, and I hurried, horror-driven,
With a corpse half hid that I couldn't get rid, because of a promise given;
It was lashed to the sleigh, and it seemed to say: "You may tax your brawn and brains,
But you promised true, and it's up to you to cremate those last remains."

Now a promise made is a debt unpaid, and the trail has its own stern code.
In the days to come, though my lips were dumb, in my heart how I cursed that load.
In the long, long night, by the lone firelight, while the huskies, round in a ring,
Howled out their woes to the homeless snows— O God! how I loathed the thing.

And every day that quiet clay seemed to heavy and heavier grow;
And on I went, though the dogs were spent and the grub was getting low;
The trail was bad, and I felt half mad, but I swore I would not give in;
And I'd often sing to the hateful thing, and it hearkened with a grin.

Till I came to the marge of Lake Lebarge, and a derelict there lay;
It was jammed in the ice, but I saw in a trice it was called the "Alice May."
And I looked at it, and I thought a bit, and I looked at my frozen chum;
Then "Here," said I, with a sudden cry, "is my cre-ma-tor-eum."

Some planks I tore from the cabin floor, and I lit the boiler fire;
Some coal I found that was lying around, and I heaped the fuel higher;
The flames just soared, and the furnace roared—such a blaze you seldom see;
And I burrowed a hole in the glowing coal, and I stuffed in Sam McGee.

Then I made a hike, for I didn't like to hear him sizzle so;
And the heavens scowled, and the huskies howled, and the wind began to blow.
It was icy cold, but the hot sweat rolled down my cheeks, and I don't know why;
And the greasy smoke in an inky cloak went streaking down the sky.

I do not know how long in the snow I wrestled with grisly fear;
But the stars came out and they danced about ere again I ventured near;
I was sick with dread, but I bravely said: "I'll just take a peep inside.
I guess he's cooked, and it's time I looked"; ... then the door I opened wide.

And there sat Sam, looking cool and calm, in the heart of the furnace roar;
And he wore a smile you could see a mile, and he said: "Please close that door.
It's fine in here, but I greatly fear you'll let in the cold and storm—
Since I left Plumtree, down in Tennessee, it's the first time I've been warm."

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Write Your Own Poetry Review Worksheet
The Cremation of Sam McGee

By: _____

Date: _____

List 3 lines you liked from the poem:

1)

2)

3)

What did you like about the poem?

What didn't you like about the poem?

Would you change anything about the poem? The ending? The whole story?

CLOSING

Thank everyone for being such great readers today and for sharing their thoughts on the “Cremation of Sam McGee” poem. Make sure they have their review worksheet and the poem to take home to recite and talk about with their parents.

Also, ask them to continue reading different types of books whenever they visit the library.

Enjoy your regular Closing.

