



# Missing

Frances Itani

**Reading Level: 3–4**

**Interest Level: Adult**

## Book Summary

*Missing* tells the true story of how the lives of a couple in Canada are touched by what happened to a young boy in France. Luc Caron lives in a small village in northern France during World War I. One day, he sees three airplanes fighting in the sky. Luc watches in horror as a plane flips over and the pilot falls to his death. Luc is the only witness to the tragedy. He collects three objects from the crash site and hides them away, sorry that he cannot share the story with the family of the dead pilot. The pilot, Jack, is the son of Will and Peggy Greenwood, who live in Nova Scotia. For eleven years, the Greenwoods try to find out details of Jack's death by sending letters to the War Graves office in Britain. One day, they receive a letter and a package. The package contains the three objects Luc took from the plane crash site; the letter tells the story of Jack's death.

## Author Biography

Frances Itani is the author of fourteen books. Her bestselling, award-winning novel *Deafening* was translated into sixteen languages. Frances taught and practised nursing for eight years. She began to write while studying at university and while raising a young family. She has also worked as a volunteer all her life. Frances lives in Ottawa.

*Note to the educator: The following activities are suggestions only. Please choose and adjust the projects and questions according to the specific needs and level of your students as well as their experience with doing novel studies. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.*

## THINKING ABOUT THE BOOK

### Book Cover and Title

Ask students to look at the book cover and title.

- (a) Ask students to predict what kind of book this will be (adventure, mystery, thriller, etc.).
- (b) Ask students to predict what the book will be about and when the story might be set. Encourage students to expand on their predictions.

### World War I

- (a) Ask students why November 11, Remembrance Day, is a national holiday. Explain that World War I began in 1914, and ended in 1918 on November 11 at 11:00 a.m. Over 100 countries fought in the war on one of two sides: (i) the Allies, which included France, Britain, Russia, Canada, and later (in 1917) the U.S., and (ii) the Central Powers, which included Germany, Turkey (the Ottoman Empire), Italy, and Austria-Hungary. Over 9 million soldiers died in the war. When Britain joined the war in 1914, Canada followed because of its strong ties to Britain at the time, and feelings of obligation. By 1917, though, Canada had shown it was a strong, independent nation capable of playing a major role in the war. More than 65,000 Canadian soldiers died in the war.
- (b) Provide students with a map of the world and assist them in locating Britain, France, and Germany. Explain that Germany invaded and occupied parts of France during World War I and that the Allies were trying to force Germany out of France. Also explain that the U.S. was not a superpower at the time and did not enter the war until April 1917.

## WORKING WITH THE BOOK

### Character: Learning about Characters

Tell students that readers can learn about the characters in a novel in three ways—by (1) what the writer tells us, (2) what the characters say, do, and think, and (3) what others think and say about the characters. As they read the book, have students note how the writer develops the character of Luc's mother. Encourage students to make inferences where possible.

### How do we make inferences?

Active readers use their experience and knowledge to make educated guesses about characters and their motivations. Readers who make inferences use clues in the text together with their own experiences to help them figure out the author's meaning.

Character: \_\_\_\_\_

What the writer tells us

Inference

What the character says, does, and thinks

Inference

What other characters think and say about the character

Inference

**Character: Interesting Characters**

- (a) Ask students to give their opinions on the following statement:

*Some people are good and some people are bad, but most people are good and bad.*

- (b) As students read Chapters 2, 3, and 5, have them take note of the actions and behaviours of the German soldiers. Have students decide where each detail should be placed in the chart—in the Positive or Negative column.

Page	Positive	Negative

- (c) After students have read Chapters 2, 3, and 5, have them share in small groups the actions and behaviours they recorded about the German soldiers. Have students discuss why they think the soldiers acted as they did.
- (d) Explain to students that the portrayal of the German soldiers is interesting because the reader can understand why they acted in both positive and negative ways. This makes the soldiers seem real to the reader. Have students discuss Peggy and Will Greenwood in terms of how real the characters seem, and why.

## Plot

The plot moves forward with the purpose of bringing Luc and the Greenwoods together. As they read, and starting with Chapter 4, have the students note the correspondence that reveals what happened to Jack and ultimately leads to a connection between Luc and the Greenwoods.

Type of Correspondence	Date	Sender	Recipient	Key message
Cablegram	March 8, 1917	War Office in England	Greenwoods	Jack was reported missing on March 4

## Setting

Explain to students that the setting provides details of when and where events take place. These details set the mood. Have students add to the setting details provided for the events in the chart. Have students discuss how the settings make them feel, and why. Then have students discuss how the settings add to the story.

Event	Setting
The Greenwoods learn that Jack is missing. (pages 31–32)	<i>warm kitchen;</i>
The Greenwoods grieve Jack's death. (page 43)	<i>Will spends time outside working in the orchard;</i>
Luc meets the officer from the War Graves office. (page 56)	<i>churchyard;</i>

**TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK**

1. “When they left the church, they hurried back to their homes to take up their hard lives again.” (page 9)
  - (a) How did the war affect the villagers’ lives? What stayed the same? What changed? What changes do you think affected the villagers most? Give reasons for your answer.
  - (b) How did the war affect Luc’s family?
  - (c) Imagine you lived in a community where all the able-bodied young men and women were forced to leave and work elsewhere. How would your community change?
  
2. “He was looking for small treasures. Stones that glistened of silver, old birds’ nests, shiny buttons that had fallen from uniforms.” (page 10)
  - (a) Why do you think Luc considered these small objects treasures?
  - (b) Do you have an object that you consider a treasure? Why do you consider it a treasure? Do you think others would consider it a treasure?
  
3. “Luc was overcome by what had just happened, and he began to sob.” (page 15)
  - (a) What did Luc just see?
  - (b) What do you think “overcome” means? Why do you think Luc was overcome?
  - (c) Have you ever been a witness to an event such as a car accident or someone being badly injured or an animal being in distress? What did you do? How did you feel? Explain why. Were you the only witness? How did this affect your feelings or actions?
  - (d) What do you think are the responsibilities of a witness to an event? Why do you think some people take on these responsibilities while others reject them (i.e., walk away and do nothing)?
  
4. “That is why all of Jack’s letters started with the words Somewhere in France.” (page 31)
  - (a) Why did Jack’s letters start with these words?
  - (b) Do you think Somewhere in France would be a good title for the book? Explain why or why not.

5. “The pilots on both sides of the war had a special code of honour.” (page 37)
- (a) What was the pilots’ special code of honour? Describe in your own words what a code of honour means in this context.
  - (b) Why do you think enemies respected such a code of honour?
  - (c) People carry out acts of respect that are not bound by law all the time. For example, giving up your seat on the bus to an elderly person is an act of respect, not a law. In what other ways do people show respect for each other in everyday life?
6. Reread Chapters 6 and 7. Take note of the ways the Greenwoods grieve for their son, Jack.
- (a) Compare how Will and Peggy grieve for Jack. What was the same? Different?
  - (b) Why did the Greenwoods continue to grieve?
  - (c) Do you think there are healthy ways of grieving and not-so-healthy ways of grieving? Use examples to explain your answer.
7. “When I picked up the piece of card, I saw a name, but the edge of the card was torn. I tried to keep that, too, but a German soldier grabbed it out of my hand.” (page 59)
- Imagine that Luc had been able to hide the torn card away with his other treasures from the crash site. How would the story have changed?
8. “‘Yes,’ he said. ‘It’s time for me to part with the souvenirs that have meant so much to me.’” (page 64)
- (a) What were the souvenirs? Why did the souvenirs mean so much to Luc?
  - (b) Find details that show how the pilot’s death affected Luc (i) at the time of the tragedy and (ii) in later years.
  - (c) Why do you think Luc was so anxious to show his souvenirs and tell his story to the War Graves officer?
  - (d) At what point do we know that Luc has come to terms with Jack’s death?
  - (e) Have you ever experienced a time when you had to wait before being able to tell someone something special? How did you feel as you waited? How did you feel after sharing what you had to tell?

9. “‘Here we go again,’ he said. ‘Another letter from the War Graves office.’”  
(page 66)
- (a) What do you think the Greenwoods were expecting the letter to say?  
Explain why.
- (b) How do the contents of the package and letter help the Greenwoods? To what extent do you think the Greenwoods will now come to terms with the death of their son?
10. Some sentences take on a deeper, more important meaning after you know the whole story. Explain how the meaning of each sentence below changes after readers know the whole story.
- (a) “You are a good boy to watch over the pilot’s body,” he said. (page 23)
- (b) “He knew only that he wanted to keep them, and that they were important.” (page 25)
- (c) “Peggy understood the rule, but she still wished she knew exactly where her son was.” (page 31)



**WRITING ABOUT THE BOOK**

1. Choose a character or event from the novel that you connected with in some way. For example, did the character or event remind you of something in your life? Cause an emotional reaction in you? Teach you something? Describe what, how, and why.
2. Reread Jack's letter to his parents on pages 29–30. Imagine you are Mr. or Mrs. Greenwood. Write a reply to Jack. Talk about how you spend your days. Include your thoughts and feelings.
3. Imagine you are one of the German soldiers in Luc's village. Reread Chapters 2 and 3. Write an entry in your log that describes the event of the pilot's death, including your encounters with the little village boy (Luc) and the pilot's funeral.
4. Luc cherished the items he took from the plane crash site. Think of an item that is dear to you. Write about how that item is a part of your story. Write about how the item came into your life, what it meant to you at the time, how it's been a part of your life, what it means to you now, and under what circumstances, if any, you would give up your item.
5. When Jack was only four years old, he began to fold and cut paper into the shapes of airplanes. He showed at an early age that he had a passion for planes and flying. Think of a passion you had as a child. Write about this passion. Do you still have this passion? How is it still a part of your life? Or, has the passion fallen away? If so, why? Would you like to regain this passion? Why or why not? How could you regain this passion?

## PROJECTS and ACTIVITIES

### 1. Canadian War Museum Website

**Note:** The specific website can be accessed using the search phrase “Canadian War Museum Remembrance Day Toolkit.”

The collections on the Canadian War Museum website offer photos, audio clips, and images of authentic, personal documents written by those serving in World War I, including letters, journal entries, postcards, and telegrams. The collections also include war art created during and depicting scenes from World War I. Here are four suggestions for using the resources on the site:

(a) Have students look through the photos and paintings of World War I. As students view the photos and paintings, have them choose a few that stand out for them and tell you (i) one thing they learn about World War I from each of the images, (ii) how each image makes them feel, and (iii) what they think the artist’s or photographer’s message is about the war.

(b) Read through some letters, postcards, and telegrams with the students. Have students discuss how each document would impact family and loved ones at home.

(c) Read through a soldier’s journal entries with the students. Have the students identify any experiences they can empathize with, and any experiences they could not imagine going through.

(d) If students have completed the previous activities, have them complete the following sentences:

One thing I already knew about World War I was \_\_\_\_\_ .

One word I would use to describe being a soldier in World War I is \_\_\_\_\_ .

The most surprising thing I learned about World War I was \_\_\_\_\_ .

The saddest thing I learned was \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think the fighting conditions for soldiers were \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_ .

I think the loved ones of soldiers \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_ .

Fighting in World War I was different from fighting in wars today because

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Fighting in World War I was the same as fighting in wars today because

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## 2. Illustrate a Poem

Provide students with a copy of the poem “In Flanders Fields.” Explain that the poem, written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian, is one of the most popular poems written about World War I. Divide students into groups. Depending on the number of students in the class, assign each group a verse (or a few lines) of the poem. Have each group discuss the meaning of and then illustrate their portion of the poem. Depending on the resources on hand, encourage students to be as creative as possible when illustrating the poem.

As a follow-up, provide students with a copy of the poem “We Shall Keep the Faith.” Explain that the poem was written by Moina Michael, a U.S. professor, as a response to “In Flanders Fields.” She came up with the idea of using the red poppy as a symbol of remembrance for those who fought in World War I. Read the poem together with the students. Have the students underline phrases that they especially like in the poem, and explain their choices.

## 3. Flowers and Symbols

The red poppy has become a symbol of remembrance for those who fought in World War I. According to some sources, the red poppy symbolizes imagination. Have students brainstorm a list of names of flowers. Then have students make a list of close friends and family. Have students research flowers and their symbolic meanings, and then decide which flowers they would attribute to friends and family members.

As a follow-up, students can create and send a greeting card illustrated with the flower of choice, or search for and send an e-card that features the flower.

## 4. Create a Personal Time Capsule

The Greenwoods cherished mementos and memories of Jack. Have students think about and make a list of mementos that symbolize their lives and memories they would like people to have of them when they are gone. Then have the students create a personal time capsule in the form of a collage that includes images, photos, and illustrations that represent their chosen mementos and memories.

**FURTHER READING available from Grass Roots Press**

If students liked this book, they might also enjoy:

*Shipwreck*, Maureen Jennings, Good Reads

*The Day the Rebels Came to Town*, Robert Hough, Good Reads

*The Hangman*, Louise Penny, Good Reads

*The Stalker*, Gail Anderson-Dargatz, Good Reads

*One Good Turn*, Chris Ryan, Quick Reads

*Dead Man's Island*, John Escott, Oxford Bookworms

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