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REMEMBRANCE DAY

SPEECH BY MR MARLER

Each year, when I speak at our Remembrance Service and see our school gathered like this, I am always taken back to my own time at school, standing on a playground in Bristol, "remembering". What I was meant to be remembering, I was never entirely sure, and I often left those services feeling slightly confused. I understood, to an extent, why they were important, but I wasn't always certain how I was supposed to feel or what I was supposed to be remembering.

On Monday, I spoke to the children about Remembrance Day in our weekly Huddle and posed a few questions ahead of today's service:

What is Remembrance Day? Why do we wear poppies? Why do we remember on the 11th November at 11 o'clock? I was impressed and reassured by their answers. As a school, I think we do a good job of understanding why this day matters.

I also asked some slightly tougher questions: Is Remembrance Day a sad day? What should we think about during the two minutes' silence? How do we honour people we have never met?

Through those discussions, we realised that today is not simply about remembering. It is about gratitude, respect and understanding the sacrifices made by those who came before us.

Hearing about Freya's conversation with her grandfather and Thomas' with his dad reminded us that stories and memories are passed from one generation to the next. At Pennthorpe, those stories continue to live on, as they should and as they deserve to.

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As a child, Remembrance Day can feel quite abstract. In many ways, that is a reflection of how fortunate most of us are. We cannot fully relate because we have never experienced those circumstances ourselves. So today, I encourage our children not to worry about recreating feelings for events they have not lived through. Instead, let us focus on being thankful for those whose courage, sacrifice and resilience helped shape the world we enjoy today.

This half term's Core Value at Pennthorpe is Resilience and, in our Huddle at the start of term, we defined resilience as "our ability to cope with challenges". We talked about how resilience is not about being OK all the time; it is about continuing when things are difficult. We demonstrated this by building a tower and then rebuilding it each time it was knocked down.

I wonder how many times the people we remember today felt as though their own tower had been knocked down. How many times they had to start again. How many times they chose hope over despair, courage over fear and perseverance over giving up.

It was not only those fighting on battlefields who showed such resilience. It was the families waiting anxiously at home, the medics caring for the wounded, the children evacuated from their homes and the communities that rebuilt cities, towns and villages after the devastation of war.

The men and women we remember today faced challenges far greater than most of us are ever likely to encounter, yet they continued to serve, support others and hold on to hope. While our lives at Pennthorpe are very different, resilience remains just as important. It helps us persevere when learning feels difficult, put our hand up when we are unsure, stand up for what is right when it would be easier to stay silent, and show kindness when someone else is struggling.

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We honour those we remember not only through today's silence, but through the choices we make every day. Each time we show courage, determination or kindness, we reflect the very qualities that so many displayed in extraordinary circumstances.

During today's service, our Academic Prodigies will share the stories of men and women who lived in Rudgwick and lost their lives during the First and Second World Wars. These were ordinary people from our local community who lived only moments from where we stand right now.

As you listen to those stories, I encourage you simply to be thankful. Thankful for the courage, resilience and selflessness of those who came before us, and mindful of how we might demonstrate those same qualities in our own lives.

In doing so, we ensure that their stories continue to be told, their sacrifices continue to be valued, and the lessons they leave us continue to shape the way we live today.

