

# Schools Education Pack

UK Tour 2018

## Contents

- Introduction
- Section 1: Turning a Novel into a Play
  - i) About Michael Morpurgo
  - ii) Finding *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo
  - iii) Adapting *Private Peaceful*: an Interview with Director, Simon Reade
  - iv) Questions on Director's Interview
- Section 2: Background Material
  - i) What Started WW1?
  - ii) The Daily Mirror Headlines: War is Declared
  - iii) Recruitment and 'Heroic Ideals'
  - iv) Life in the Trenches and the 'Reality of War'
  - v) Shell-Shock and the True Life Case of Harry Farr
  - vi) WW1 Poets
- Section 3: Quick Drama Ideas

## Introduction

Welcome to the *Private Peaceful* Resource Pack. I hope you find it informative and useful. As you can see, the pack has been broken down into sections to make navigation of the material as easy as possible.

Throughout the pack, there are a number of specific writing and drama activities included that relate to the source material in each section. These activities are further complemented by suggestions for class discussion and research. All these activities are addressed to pupils.

It is important to make a note about **Section 4: Quick Drama Ideas**; this section is less academic with more of a focus on general drama skills and group dynamics, whilst still retaining the theme of war and conflict. You can use the activities as drama warm-ups or as a stimulus for more in-depth pieces of work. This section is addressed to teachers.

### Visiting Ypres

In 2009, I travelled to Ypres in Belgium to get a better understanding of the dehumanising effect of WW1 on the individuals and the society the soldiers believed they were fighting to protect.

As I battled the elements on a cold January day, my discomfort paled into insignificance as I contemplated the thousands of cold, wet and hungry soldiers fighting and dying in muddy trenches for months and years on end. The rows upon rows of white head stones in Tyne Cott Cemetery and the endless lists of names etched into the surrounding walls physicalized in dreadful proportions the enormity of human loss during the war. Tyne Cott is just one of the many cemeteries that haunt the landscape in Ypres.

The Third battle of Ypres, known as Passchendaele, took place between July and November 1917. The British commander-in-Chief, General Douglas Haig, believed that he could end the stalemate that occurred during the first two years of the war by bombarding the German positions with heavy artillery firing, followed by a foot soldier attack against the enemy trenches. After a week of this heavy artillery bombardment, only two miles of territory was seized at a cost of 32,000 casualties.

Battle continued until November, hampered by the unseasonably heavy rain. The final halt was ordered at the village of Passchendaele on 10th November. 'The nation must be taught to bear losses' was Haig's justification for persisting in using a strategy that killed a total of 25,000 soldiers on each side.

With such horror, it is not surprising that soldiers who survived such battles were deeply disturbed by what they had experienced.

The play *Private Peaceful* is set in 1916, just before the Battle of the Somme. Many of the soldiers were fatigued by the war at this point and well aware that they were being sent to an almost certain death when ordered to go 'over the top' to attack the German trenches.

'They say there's soon going to be an almighty push all the way to Berlin. I've heard that before. They say the regiment is marching up the road towards the Somme. It is late June, Summer here and at home'

In the play, a young soldier's refusal to follow his superior's orders - and not leave his wounded brother to go on a suicide mission - lies at the heart of the story and highlights the horrific situation many soldiers found themselves in during the war.

M. Gallagher, Jan 2010



A grave at Ypres

## 1, i) About Michael Morpurgo

Michael Morpurgo was born in 1943 and went to three different schools in London, Sussex and Canterbury. He studied for his degree at London University, taking English and French and went on to become a Primary School Teacher.

“I get many of my story ideas from watching the children and by listening to what they say to each other, as well as what they tell me. I became a writer originally because I was sick of reading the same bedtime stories to my kids. I started making up my own stories and I read them to my class at school. They focused on [the stories] and listened, so I realised there was something in what I was doing. Eventually I wrote a book and got lucky with a publisher.”

Morpurgo and his wife Clare, also a teacher, eventually left their jobs and created Farms for City Children. Groups of children from Inner Cities travel to the Morpurgo’s farm in Nethercott in Devon and spend a week on the farm. The project has now expanded and he has similar projects in Gloucestershire and Pembrokeshire as well as North Devon. Each farm offers children and teachers from urban primary schools the chance to live and work in the countryside for a week and gain hands-on experience. For more information about the work of Farms for City Children, please visit [www.farmsforcitychildren.co.uk](http://www.farmsforcitychildren.co.uk).

Between 2003 - 2005, Michael Morpurgo was the Children’s Laureate, a post he helped create with the then Poet Laureate Ted Hughes. The award aims to celebrate and champion children’s literature and the role it plays in promoting literacy. Morpurgo is passionate about children reading, and he spent much of his time as Laureate on the road, meeting children and talking with passion and enthusiasm about the work he does and the way he does it.

“Reading is the most interactive medium there is. On television or film, you’re given a face, a place and all the information. With reading, you’re simply given the skeleton, from which you can interpret this funny code we call words yourself.”

He was awarded an OBE for services to Literature in the Queen’s Birthday Honours in 2007. In the same year, his novel *War Horse* was adapted into a play that performed to critical acclaim at the National Theatre. The play returned to the National in 2008. For more about Michael Morpurgo, visit [www.michaelmorpurgo.org](http://www.michaelmorpurgo.org)

### Literary Awards and Prizes

#### Shortlisted

- 1991 Carnegie Medal: *Waiting for Anya*
- 1995 Carnegie Medal: *Arthur, High King of Britain*
- 1996 Carnegie Medal: *The Wreck of the Zanzibar*
- 2002 W. H. Smith Award for Children’s Literature: *Out of the Ashes*
- 2003 Blue Peter Book Award: *The Book I Couldn’t Put Down: Cool!*
- 2003 Carnegie Medal: *Private Peaceful*

- 2004 Whitbread Children's Book Award: *Private Peaceful*
- 2010 Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis: *Waiting for Anya*

#### Awarded

- 1993 Prix Sorcières (France): *King of the Cloud Forests*
- 1995 Whitbread Children's Book Award: *The Wreck of the Zanzibar*
- 1996 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (Gold Award): *The Butterfly Lion*
- 1999 Prix Sorcières (France): *Wombat Goes Walkabout*
- 2000 Red House Children's Book Award: *Kensuke's Kingdom*
- 2001 Prix Sorcières (France): *Kensuke's Kingdom*
- 2002 Nestlé Smarties Book Prize (Bronze Award): *The Last Wolf*
- 2004 Red House Children's Book Award: *Private Peaceful*
- 2005 Blue Peter Book of the Year Award: *Private Peaceful*
- 2005 Hampshire Book Award: *Private Peaceful*
- 2007 California Young Reader Medal: *Private Peaceful*<sup>[11]</sup>

#### Bibliography

- *It Never Rained: Five Stories* (1974)
- *Living Poets* (compiler with Clifford Simmons) (1974)
- *Long Way Home* (1975)
- *Thatcher Jones* (1975)
- *The Story-Teller* (compiler with Graham Barrett) (1976)
- *Friend or Foe* (1977)
- *Do All You Dare* (1978)
- *What Shall We Do with It?* (1978)
- *All Around the Year* (with Ted Hughes) (1979)
- *Love at First Sight* (1979)
- *That's How* (1979)
- *The Day I Took the Bull By the Horn* (1979)
- *The Ghost-Fish* (1979)
- *The Marble Crusher and Other Stories* (1980)
- *The Nine Lives of Montezuma* (1980)
- *Miss Wirtle's Revenge* (1981)
- *The White Horse of Zennor: And Other Stories from below the Eagle's Nest* (1982)
- *War Horse* (1982)
- *Twist of Gold* (1983)
- *Little Foxes* (1984)
- *Why the Whales Came* (1985)
- *Words of Songs* (libretto, music by Phyllis Tate) (1985)
- *Tom's Sausage Lion* (1986)
- *Conker* (1987)
- *Jo-Jo, the Melon Monkey* (1987)
- *King of the Cloud Forests* (1988)
- *Mossop's Last Chance* (with Shoo Rayner) (1988)
- *My Friend Walter* (1988)
- *Albertine, Goose Queen* (with Shoo Rayner) (1989)
- *Mr. Nobody's Eyes* (1989)
- *Jigger's Day Off* (with Shoo Rayner) (1990)
- *Waiting for Anya* (1990)
- *And Pigs Might Fly!* (with Shoo Rayner) (1991)
- *Colly's Barn* (1991)
- *The Sandman and the Turtles* (1991)
- *Martians at Mudpuddle Farm* (with Shoo Rayner) (1992)
- *The King in the Forest* (1993)

- *The War of Jenkins' Ear* (1993)
- *Arthur, High King of Britain* (1994)
- *Snakes and Ladders* (1994)
- *The Dancing Bear* (1994)
- *Blodin the Beast* (1995)
- *Mum's the Word* (with Shoo Rayner) (1995)
- *Stories from Mudpuddle Farm* (with Shoo Rayner) (1995)
- *The Wreck of the Zanzibar* (1995)
- *Robin of Sherwood* (1996)
- *Sam's Duck* (1996)
- *The Butterfly Lion* (1996)
- *The Ghost of Grania O'Malley* (1996)
- *Farm Boy* (1997)
- *Cockadoodle-doo, Mr Sultana!* (1998)
- *Escape from Shangri-La* (1998)
- *Joan of Arc* (1998)
- *Red Eyes at Night* (1998)
- *Wartman* (1998)
- *Kensuke's Kingdom* (1999)
- *The Rainbow Bear* (1999)
- *Wombat Goes Walkabout* (1999)
- *Billy the Kid* (2000)
- *Black Queen* (2000)
- *Dear Olly* (2000)
- *From Hereabout Hill* (2000)
- *The Silver Swan* (2000)
- *Who's a Big Bully Then?* (2000)
- *More Muck and Magic* (2001)
- *Out of the Ashes* (2001)
- *Toro! Toro!* (2001)
- *Cool!* (2002)
- *Mr. Skip* (2002)
- *The Last Wolf* (2002)
- *The Sleeping Sword* (2002)
- *Gentle Giant* (2003)
- *Private Peaceful* (2003)
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (2004)
- *I Believe in Unicorns* (2005)
- *The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips* (2005)
- *Albatross* (2006)
- *It's a Dog's Life* (2006)
- *Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea* (2006)
- *Beowulf* (2006), illustrated by Michael Foreman
- *Born to Run* (2007)
- *The Mozart Question* (2007)
- *Hansel and Gretel* (2008)
- *This Morning I Met a Whale* (2008)
- *Kaspar: Prince of Cats* (2008)
- *The Voices of Children* (2008) (play)
- *The Birthday Book* (editor, with Quentin Blake) (2008)
- *Running Wild* (2009)
- *The Kites Are Flying!* (2009)
- *An Elephant in the Garden* (2010)
- *Not Bad for a Bad Lad* (2010)
- *Shadow* (2010)
- *New title TBC* (2011)

## 1, ii) Finding Private Peaceful by Michael Morpurgo

I was born in 1943, near London. I played in bombsites, listened to the stories told around the kitchen table, stories of war that saddened all the faces around me. My Uncle Pieter lived only in the photo on the mantelpiece. He had been killed in the RAF in 1941. But for me he lived on, ever young in the photograph, as I grew up, as I grew old.

So I have been drawn instinctively, I think, in many of my stories, to the subject of war, the enduring of it, the pity of it, and above all the suffering of survivors. Some twenty years ago, after meeting an old soldier from my village who had been to the First World War in the Devon Yeomanry in the Cavalry, I wrote *War Horse*, a vision of that dreadful war seen through the eyes of a horse. Then, just five years ago, on a visit to Ypres to talk about writing about war for young people at a conference, I visited the 'In Flanders Field' Museum.

Talking to Piet Chielens, its director, I was reminded that over 300 British soldiers had been executed during the First World War for cowardice or desertion, two of them for simply falling asleep at their posts. I read their stories, their trials (some lasted less than twenty minutes – twenty minutes for a man's life). They knew then about shell-shock – many officers were treated in psychiatric hospitals for it, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon amongst them. They knew even as they sentenced these men (they called them 'worthless' men), that most of them were traumatised by the terrors they had endured, by the prolonged and dreadful brutality of trench warfare. In all, over 3,000 were condemned to death, and 300 of them were chosen to be shot. I visited the execution sites, the cells in Poperinghe, I read the telegram sent home to a mother informing her that her son had been shot at dawn for cowardice. I knew recent governments had considered and rejected the granting of pardons for these men, had refused to acknowledge the appalling injustice visited upon them.

Standing in a war cemetery in the rain five miles outside Ypres, I came upon the gravestone of Private Peaceful. I had found my name, my unknown soldier. I had found my story, a story I knew I had to tell and that should be told. The question then was how it should be told. I decided to put myself at the centre of the story, to become the condemned man waiting only for dawn and death. A glance at my watch recently returned from the menders who had declared it was made in 1915, gave me the idea that the chapter breaks should happen only when the soldier glances down at his watch which he dreads to do, and tries not to do. My soldier would reflect on his life, live it again through the night so that the night would be long, as long as his life. He does not want to sleep his last night away, nor waste it in dreams. Above all he wants to feel alive.

Each chapter begins in the barn in Belgium, but his thoughts soon take him back to Devon, to the fields and streams and lanes of Iddesleigh, his home and his village. Memories of his childhood come back to him, of family. Of the first day at school, of the first stirrings of love, a father's death, a night's poaching, then of the first news of approaching war and the recruiting sergeant in the town square at Hatherleigh. So to the trenches and to the events that have led him to the last night of his life. And all the while the watch he does not want to look at is ticking

his life away. The New Zealand government has recently pardoned the five executed New Zealand soldiers. The French have now pardoned theirs. It is surely the mark of a civilised people to acknowledge shame and wrong-doing, to set the record straight. I hope the book of *Private Peaceful* and the play of *Private Peaceful* will help bring this about for our soldiers too, for the sake of the three hundred or so unfortunate men and their families, and for our honour too.

© Michael Morpurgo

After almost 90 years, in 2006 the British Government finally granted posthumous pardons to those shot at dawn for cowardice or desertion.

## 1, iii) **Adapting *Private Peaceful*: an Interview with Director, Simon Reade**

Interview relates to 2004 *Private Peaceful* Tour with Paul Chequer as Tommo. Please note that this is before the British Government granted posthumous pardons in 2006 to those shot at dawn for cowardice or desertion.

### **Q. How did the *Private Peaceful* journey begin for you?**

The Today programme was interviewing the Children's Laureate, Michael Morpurgo, about his forthcoming book, *Private Peaceful*. Michael talked about First World War soldiers, these young guys who signed up under age, often with the knowledge of the people [who] signed them up. They went to the front, then a lot of them got shell-shock and were shot at dawn for cowardice in the face of the enemy, or desertion or insubordination. Technically now, we realise that this is illegal, even according to army rules, but they've never been granted a pardon in Britain. France has granted a posthumous pardon, as has New Zealand. Our governments have always refused. Michael Morpurgo was talking about the book from this political perspective, but then he began to read from it, and as he read, I thought, "This is amazing! This is a dramatic monologue, all from the point of view of this young soldier". Unusually for literature, it's from the point of view of a Private rather than an Officer. We think of Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen - we even look at Sebastian Faulkes - and [their writing is] from the point of view of the Officer class, and this was from the point of view of a very simple person and not even an urban person but a rural one.

### **Q. What was your process in adapting the novel? Did all the material come from the novel or did you change things?**

When you take a novel and put it into the theatre, you have to make it work as a piece of theatre. So, of course, you are faithful to the original spirit of a work, but sometimes a great piece of literature isn't going to make a great piece of theatre. The first thing that you look for are all the dramatic arcs and journeys and when there are hurdles to jump. This is a rites of passage story with lots of dramatic vignettes along the way. It is about a young boy growing up; it's also about the little man fighting against, or fighting within, something that the state and the world order [is] imposing upon him.

The changes that you make in adapting are that you take out anything that doesn't serve the essential dramatic purpose. The most important aspect that people will notice has changed is the ending. What Michael Morpurgo does very cleverly in the novel is to pull off a great literary conceit. All the way through you think it's Tommo [who is] going to die, but of course it's Tommo's brother, Charlie, and it's only right at the end that there's this twist. In the theatre, my first instinct in adapting [the novel] was how terribly disappointing; it's a bit of a sleight of hand. We'll have lived with this person all the way through the evening and nothing's happened to him other than he's experienced things through his brother's eyes. So we decided to kill him. What was great about Michael is that he recognised that [this] would absolutely work in the theatre and wouldn't at all harm his novel because his novel is always there for people to read.

**Q. What made you choose to make it a one man show?**

The material demands it. Everything is seen from Tommo's perspective and you don't get other people's perspective. Tommo conjures all this up in these last hours of his life. I think that the most faithful way of adapting this for the stage is to do it as a one man show where he creates everything for his and the audiences' very eyes.

**Q. How does *Private Peaceful* relate to a young audience as a piece of theatre?**

First of all, it speaks directly to the experiences of somebody who's gone from pre-pubescence, to pubescence, through adolescence and into young adulthood. That obviously speaks to young people. Secondly, the reason that the First World War has always resonated with young people is [that] a lot of young people were the cannon fodder, dying for a cause that they really didn't understand. It touches all sorts of political and emotional buttons in young people. Connected with that of course, is that [this has happened] in the context of the latest war in Iraq, where young people, as young as teenagers, [died] for the political ends of America, Saddam Hussein, Britain and the rest of the European Allies. There's an immediate connection with young men, and now women, going off to war. You can take a classic war and superimpose it on the present, without being too crass about it. Thirdly, this is the kind of theatre that you can imagine somebody doing in their own bedroom. Chucking their bed over and saying, "now this is a trench", or sitting on a box and one moment they're at home and the next they're in the middle of a market square. It's non-literal theatre and children have the imagination to make that leap. And for adults watching it, it reawakens your childlike imagination; it has a young spirit about it.

**Q. What do you think that the theatre performance gives to the audience that they don't get by reading the book? Why adapt this for theatre not TV?**

There's a magical alchemy in theatre where you get excited by the artifice of it. You get transported on extraordinary journeys of the imagination with very few tricks, by the power of the word. There's something brilliant about the imagination and the transformation that happens in theatre where you're not spoon-fed. You have to actively engage with it.

**Q. What does a good piece of dramatic writing contain? What should young writers be aiming for?**

When you look for a good story, you look for a journey in which you have been transformed as an actor or as a member of the audience, or that the story has completely transformed all the characters in it. If you do something that is just a slice of life, it can get really dreary. The really good soaps, like Eastenders, at [their] best are fantastically operatic. We always ask, "Has it got drama?" But what does this mean? It just means that you have a protagonist and an antagonist and they've got a hurdle to jump over. One of them will win and one of them will lose, and then you'll get into another situation and that will synthesise and will form the next step of the drama.

**Q. Did you make lots of changes in rehearsal?**

Yes. Most of the changes that we made were cuts. I'm a great believer in cutting. When I was the dramaturg at the RSC I never talked about the text, I always talked about the script because scripts are great malleable things that exist to be chopped and changed and recreated time and time again by actors, directors, designers and the rest of the creative team. They're not sacrosanct blueprints, they're actually raw material. Shakespeare would turn up and say, "I really fancy the actress playing Juliet; I'm going to give her a good speech in Act 4." "Wow! The guy playing Mercutio is fantastic, let's rewrite something for him now". I think that that's the difference when you're approaching theatrical literature. It's rough and it's ready and you suit the particular nuances of the actor that you've got, of the time that you're living in.

**Q, How did you work in rehearsals?**

We did a lot of character work in rehearsal, looked at the detail. Obviously the main part is Tommo, but what we didn't want to do was to make all the other characters caricatures. You want them to seem rounded. Even though you may only meet people very briefly, we want the audience to feel like they know them. In the book, Michael sets things up that you think are quite innocuous at the beginning, for example, Jimmy Parsons has the fight with Charlie and gets kicked in the goolies - it's a snigger line of course: 'goolies', 'procreation', 'manhood'. And then it's Jimmy Parsons who actually is the most cowardly person. But he's the first person to volunteer as well. You learn about Jimmy Parsons even though you're hardly ever introduced to him at all.

**Q. Can theatre be a catalyst for change, political or otherwise?**

Yes, I think so, not necessarily alone (although there will be examples of that). It's a cumulative effect: you can become a more joyful, rounded person if you appreciate poetry and you see great theatre and enjoy films and watch good football matches. I think theatre is part and parcel of our rich culture. I think it would be naive to say any one particular play can have that effect. We've played to lots of adults. It's quite a rare thing that adults are very moved by [the play] in a way that they don't expect to be. When you think back to when we were twelve, we were idealistic. Good theatre can make you tap into the idealism we had before we all became pragmatic.

**Q. Why do you think that these soldiers haven't been granted a posthumous pardon?**

It's because of this particular country and its particular laws and its particular attitudes for setting precedent, not changing anything that's been done in the past. I think other countries are far less anal. There's also an appalling thing that happens to radical politicians and anyone you think would be a champion; you'd certainly think that a Labour government, of all governments, would want to reverse this sort of thing that happened ninety years ago. But you join the bloody establishment and somehow you think you can't change things so swiftly; you have to do things through evolution. I think they're being very irresponsible. This country is still too safe. We don't want to upset the apple cart.

## 1, iv) Questions on the Director's Interview

- 1.) What are the differences in duty between the rank of Officer and Private?
- 2.) What is a literary conceit?
- 3.) Simon Reade is very clear that the adaptation of the novel needed to be a dramatic monologue. Do you think an adaptation could have worked another way and included other actors? Explain your answer.
- 4.) What does Simon Reade mean by a dramatic vignette?
- 5.) Do you agree that audiences would have been disappointed if the end of the play had remained faithful to the novel? Explain your answer.
- 6.) If the novel is ever adapted for TV, how do you think it should be done?
- 7.) As a young person yourself, how did you relate to this piece of theatre? How did you feel as you watched the play?
- 8.) Boys of 16 were allowed to fight in WW1, with many of their superiors knowing they were underage. Was this right? Do you think a person of 16 is old enough to make up their own mind about what to do with his/her life? In England, a person of 16 can have sex and get married with consent at 16.
- 9.) What does protagonist mean?
- 10.) What does antagonist mean?
- 11.) Think of some soaps on TV. Can you give examples of storylines which 'have a protagonist and an antagonist' with 'a hurdle to jump over'? Who wins and who loses?
- 12.) Explain in detail the point Simon Reade is making about the character Jimmy Parsons.

### Writing and Drama Activities

- Write your own short dramatic monologues from the point of view of a soldier in WW1. Source material can be found in this pack (the recruitment experience, conditions in the trenches etc). The monologues need to include 5 different events set in five different places.
- Using one or two props only, bring your monologue to life and signal the change in time and place through imaginative use of your chosen props.

## 2, i) Why did WW1 Start?

At the turn of the Twentieth century, relations between countries in Europe were tumultuous and several different powers were competing for supremacy, each with their own separate agenda. For a while before 1914, Germany had been eager to push France to war in order to firm up its defeat of that country in 1871. France, still furious over its loss of Alsace and Lorraine to the Germans, was anxious to win these areas back and more. Similarly, Russia was worried about allowing Germany and Austria further dominance in Europe. Great Britain, while unhappy about rising German power, was convinced that diplomacy was the way to resolve matters. However, when a Serbian sponsored assassin killed Archduke Ferdinand, the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, on June 28 in Sarajevo, diplomacy was no longer an option and war was declared.

### Summary of events that led to WW1

- **Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia** on 28 July 1914.
- **Russia**, bound by treaty to Serbia, announced mobilisation of its vast army in her defence, a slow process that would take around six weeks to complete.
- **Germany**, allied to Austria-Hungary by treaty, viewed the Russian mobilisation as an act of war against Austria-Hungary, and after scant warning **declared war on Russia** on 1 August.
- **France**, bound by treaty to Russia, found itself at war against Germany and, by extension, on Austria-Hungary following a German declaration on 3 August. Germany was swift in **invading neutral Belgium** so as to reach Paris by the shortest possible route.
- **Britain** allied to France by a more loosely worded treaty which placed a "moral obligation" upon her to defend France, declared war against Germany on 4 August. Her reason for entering the conflict lay in another direction: she was obligated to defend neutral Belgium by the terms of a **75-year old treaty**. With Germany's invasion of Belgium on 4 August, and the Belgian King's appeal to Britain for assistance, **Britain committed herself to Belgium's defence** later that day. Like France, she was by extension also at war with Austria-Hungary.
- With Britain's entry into the war, her colonies and dominions abroad variously offered military and financial assistance and included **Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand** and the **Union of South Africa**.
- **United States President, Woodrow Wilson declared a U.S. policy of absolute neutrality**, an official stance that would last until 1917 when Germany's policy of unrestricted submarine warfare - which seriously threatened America's commercial shipping (which was in any event almost

entirely directed towards the Allies led by Britain and France) - forced the **U.S. to finally enter the war** on 6 April 1917.

- **Japan**, honouring a military agreement with Britain, **declared war on Germany** on 23 August 1914. Two days later Austria-Hungary responded by declaring war on Japan.
- **Italy**, although allied to both Germany and Austria-Hungary, was able to **avoid entering the fray** by citing a clause enabling it to evade its obligations to both. In short, Italy was committed to defend Germany and Austria-Hungary only in the event of a 'defensive' war; arguing that their actions were 'offensive', she declared instead a policy of neutrality. The following year, in May 1915, she finally **joined the conflict** by siding with the Allies against her two former allies.

## 2, iii) Daily Mirror Headlines: The Declaration of War

The Daily Mirror published news on 4 August 1914 that Britain had declared war on Germany, along with reports of overwhelming support for the King. See below extract:

### **Great Britain Declares War on Germany**

Declaration last night after 'unsatisfactory reply' to British ultimatum that Belgium must be kept neutral.

Great Britain is in a state of war with Germany. It was officially stated at the Foreign Office last night that Great Britain declared war against Germany at 7pm. The British Ambassador in Berlin has been handed his passport.

War was Germany's reply to our request that she should respect the neutrality of Belgium, whose territories we were bound in honour and by treaty obligations to maintain inviolate.

Speaking in a crowded and hushed House, the Premier yesterday afternoon made the following statement: 'We have made a request to the German Government that we shall have a satisfactory assurance as to the Belgian neutrality before midnight tonight.'

The German reply to our request, officially stated last night, was unsatisfactory.

### **The King and His Navy**

The King has addressed the following message to Admiral Sir John Jellicoe: 'At this grave moment in our national history I send to you and, through you, to the officers and men of the fleets, of which you have assumed command, the assurance of my confidence that under your direction they will revive and renew the old glories of the Royal Navy, and prove once again the sure shield of Britain and of her Empire in the hour of trial.'

The above message has been communicated to the senior naval officers on all stations outside of home waters.

It was reported yesterday evening that Germany had taken the first hostile step by destroying a British mine-layer.

At the present time Germany is in a state of war with: Great Britain, Russia, France and Belgium.

It would seem as if Germany, in her ambition to control the destiny of the whole of Europe, were ready to embark on any grandiose scheme of adventure, however precarious her chances.

So far as Great Britain is concerned, her attitude has always been plain, straightforward and perfectly intelligible. She was prepared to stand aside from the conflict that has now involved practically the whole of Europe.

But she insisted and had to insist on two things: these were that Belgium's neutrality should be respected; and that the German fleet should not bombard defenceless French towns.

Germany tried to bribe us with peace to desert our friends and duty. But Great Britain has preferred the path of honour.

### **Chief of the Fleets**

Sir John R Jellicoe has assumed the supreme command of the Home Fleets, with the acting rank of Admiral. Rear Admiral Charles E Madden has been appointed to be his chief of staff. Field Marshal Sir John French, the famous cavalry leader, has been appointed Inspector General to the Forces.

Mr Lloyd George subsequently announced in the House that the Government was engaged in preparing a scheme for the distribution of food, and hoped that it would be completed in the course of one or two days. The House unanimously passed in five minutes all outstanding votes, amounting to over £100,000,000.

An Order in Council has been issued declaring it expedient that Government should have control over the railroads of Great Britain.

### Writing and Drama Activities

- Write a newspaper article of your own with the title, 'Great Britain Declares War on Germany'.
- Imagine you are the British Monarch as War is declared. What would you say to your people in an official speech? Plan and write your speech. Think about your use of language.
- Present your speech to the class in character. Remember the solemnity of the occasion and your status – how does this affect your body language? Think about eye contact, posture, gesture, movement, as well as the tone, volume and pace of your voice.

## 2, iii) Recruitment and 'Heroic Ideals'

In 1914, young men were actively encouraged to join the army. They were promised adventure and glory in battle, as well as being led to believe that the war would be over by Christmas that year. Hundreds of men rushed to enlist because they did not want to miss out. In some cases, all the men from a single town or village joined up at the same time. This meant that new regiments had to be formed or old ones reorganised. These regiments were known as 'Pals' battalions because all the men in them came from the same town. However, this was disastrous for some communities and was stopped after the Battle of the Somme, where many Pals Battalions were practically wiped out and whole towns lost an entire generation of men. Pals battalions were then disbanded and their men posted elsewhere.



### Drama Activity

Discuss how the men in the picture might be feeling. What is the general mood? Get into groups. Imagine one of you is a soldier who has just signed up. Improvise the moment the soldier tells his family that he is going off to war to fight. You might want to re-read pages 93-104 from the novel *Private Peaceful* as a stimulus for your work.

### Writing Activity

- Imagine you are a recruiting officer in the army. What would you say to a gathered crowd containing some potential volunteers? Plan and write your speech.

### Drama Activity

- Present your speech to the class in the character of the recruiting officer. How can you make your body language and your voice commanding and persuasive?

### Discussion Point

- Look at the collection of recruitment posters on the next few pages of the Resource Pack. Compare and contrast the posters and discuss the messages these posters communicate. You might want to think about the use of images, colours, fonts as well as use of language.

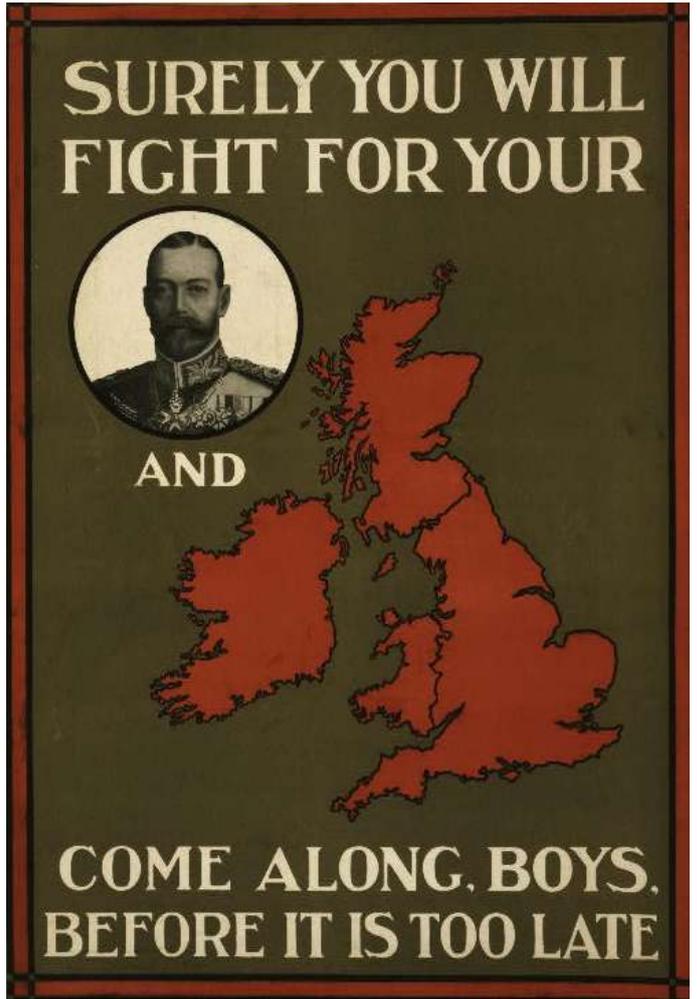
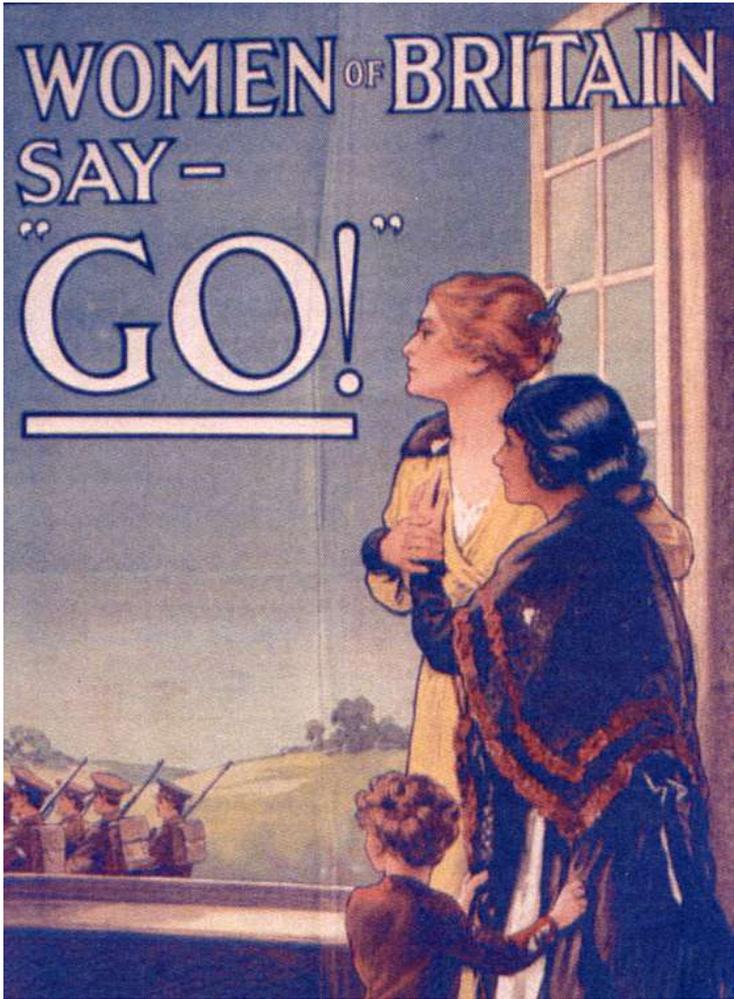
## RECRUITMENT POSTERS





### Research and Discussion Points

- Find out some information about Lord Kitchener. Who was he?
- Look at some more recruitment posters on the internet. Which do you think would have been the most effective at the time and why?
- Find some more recruitment photos on the internet as well as some photos of men fighting in the trenches. Compare and contrast these pictures and discuss the 'heroic ideals of war' alongside the 'reality of war'.





*Here's YOUR chance*  
**IT'S MEN WE WANT**

No. 1. United States Government, No. 2 Military Division, Toronto

*Stone Co.*

## Discussion Point

- Read by 'The Volunteer' by Herbert Asquith and 'Who's for the Game' by Jessie Pope. How is war presented in these two poems? Read the accompanying notes *after* discussing the above question.

### **The Volunteer**

Here lies a clerk who half his life had spent  
Toiling at ledgers in a city grey,  
Thinking that so his days would drift away  
With no lance broken in life's tournament  
Yet ever 'twixt the books and his bright eyes

The gleaming eagles of the legions came,  
And horsemen, charging under phantom skies,  
Went thundering past beneath the oriflamme.

And now those waiting dreams are satisfied  
From twilight to the halls of dawn he went;  
His lance is broken; but he lies content  
With that high hour, in which he lived and died.  
And falling thus, he wants no recompense,  
Who found his battle in the last resort  
Nor needs he any hearse to bear him hence,  
Who goes to join the men of Agincourt.

### **Who's for the Game?**

Who's for the game, the biggest that's played,  
The red crashing game of a fight?  
Who'll grip and tackle the job unafraid?  
And who thinks he'd rather sit tight?

Who'll toe the line for the signal to 'Go!'  
Who'll give his country a hand?  
Who wants a turn to himself in the show?  
And who wants a seat in the stand?

Who knows it won't be a picnic – not much –  
Yet eagerly shoulders a gun?  
Who would much rather come back with a crutch  
Than lie low and be out of the fun?

Come along, lads – but you'll come on all right –  
For there's only one course to pursue,  
Your country is up to her neck in a fight,  
And she's looking and calling for you.

## Notes on **The Volunteer**

This poem tells the story of an office worker who has died in battle on the front. Once he was a frustrated clerk living a boring life, living out his heroic fantasies through books. In dying for his country he finds true satisfaction, having lived out his heroic dreams. Asquith wrote this as a recruitment poem to try and convince men to join up and fight in the First World War.

Structure: the poem is written in a rather rigid iambic pentameter, attempting a high-flown, elevated style to reflect the perceived nobility of the volunteer's choice. It is comprised of two octet stanzas of the same rhyme scheme, ABBACDCD.

As a mixture of patriotism, social snobbery and old-fashioned Romantic fantasy, it is a fascinating snapshot of the attitudes of some to joining up at the beginning of the war. The poem also references the great patriotic work of Shakespeare, *Henry V*: which retells the story of the victories of Henry V in France, which includes the Battle of Agincourt.

Herbert Asquith was the son of the British Prime Minister of the same name who led Britain from 1910-16.

### Research

- Find out some information about the poet Jessie Pope.

### Discussion Point

- Discuss the content, style, rhythm, structure and rhyme scheme of 'Who's for the Game'.

### Writing and Drama Activity

- Write your own recruitment poem. Prepare to read it to your class; think about the rhythm, tone, volume and pace of your voice to recreate the right mood for the presentation of the poem.

## Discussion Point

- Look at the below extracts from the novel. Discuss the themes of courage and duty.

### **Extract 1:**

Tommo is on an errand and comes across the sergeant major and stops to listen to his recruitment speech. He thinks:

‘Until that very moment it had honestly never occurred to me that he was saying anything to do with me. I had been an onlooker. No longer.

“Your king needs you. Your country needs you. And all the brave lads in France need you too.” [the sergeant major’s] face broke into a smile as he fingered his immaculate moustache. “And remember one thing lads – and I can vouch for this – all the girls love a soldier.”

The ladies in the crowd all laughed and giggled at that.

Then the sergeant major returned the stick to under his arm.

“So, who’ll be the first brave lad to come up and take the king’s shilling?”

[Tommo watches a number of young men stepping forward]

‘Suddenly someone prodded me hard in the small of my back. It was a toothless old lady pointing at me with her crooked finger. “Go on, son,” she croaked. “You go and fight. It’s every man’s duty to fight when his country calls, that’s what I say. Go on. You ain’t a coward are you?” (p.95-96)

### **Extract 2:**

The Germans begin to attack:

‘I can see their wild eyes as they reach our wire. It is the wire that stops them. Somehow enough of it has survived the bombardment. Only a few of them find the gaps, and they are shot down before they ever reach our trenches. Those that are left, and there are not many now, have turned and are stumbling back. I feel a surge of triumph welling inside me, not because we have won, but because I have stood with the others. I have not run.

*Y’ain’t a coward, are you?*

No, old woman, I am not, I am not.’ (p.140)

## 2, iv) Life in the Trenches and the 'Reality of War'

In September of 1914, German commander General Erich von Falkenhayn ordered the construction of defensive trenches to ensure that the Allied forces couldn't overrun his own men. The Allies responded in kind, and two long trenches were dug from the coast of France to Switzerland, which was soon dubbed the Western Front. The trenches mostly ran alongside each other and varied from a distance of over a kilometre to as little as 15 metres apart, such as at Hooge, near Ypres.

Soldiers who thought that joining up for the good of their country was all guns and glamour were to be proved horribly, horribly wrong. Instead of dashing about on horses, or fighting in the beautiful fields of Europe (and meeting lots of nice French girls), the soldiers found themselves facing their enemies from inside a big hole in the ground. The trenches soon became extremely inhospitable and terrible places and aside from the fact that men a few yards away from each other were trying to kill their enemy in a variety of ingenious ways, there were many other things to contend with.

### Parasites and Rodents

In the cramped conditions many parasites thrived. Lice, notoriously hard to get rid of, were a never-ceasing problem; they bred in the seams of uniforms and caused the occupants to itch. All the soldiers could do was to burn them out with a match. Some men shaved their entire heads to avoid a dreaded nit infestation. Lice could also cause Trench Fever, a blood-borne infection caused by a bacterium known as *Bartonella Quintana*. The symptoms are similar to influenza, with increased pain and a high fever and only rest, usually away from the front-line, could assure that the condition could be treated. Full recovery usually took up to twelve weeks, but because the lice were not actually identified as the culprits of Trench Fever until 1918, some men it was assumed, had just a high fever associated with another illness. As such, many succumbed to the disease whilst recuperating away from the trench due to inadequate medical treatment.

Frogs also made their way into trenches. Normally found in shell holes filled with water, they thrived in the base of trenches and could cause a man to slip and fall. This could be fatal due to the dangerous weapons and equipment in the trenches. Furthermore, pests such as slugs and horned beetles invaded the sides of the trenches, as well as rodents. Millions of brown and black rats gorged themselves on human remains, both in and out of the trenches, and there were reports of rats as big as domestic cats. Corpses, it seemed, were not all the rats ate, as they would often eat fresh rations, or even nibble on a living toe or ear while a soldier slept!

### Food

While at the outset of the war most soldiers were supplied with hot meals from Field Kitchens during the winters, there was a decline in food available, so soldiers soon had to rely on their rations and were often hungry. However, there was a daily allowance of rum to those on the front-line, and the Red Cross sent food parcels too, which was lucky as rations were not all that appetising.

Field rations consisted of hard, dry biscuits as opposed to fresh bread. The soldiers had tins of corned beef, which was named bully beef, after the French word for boiled - 'boiler' (pronounced *boo-lay-err*). They also had rations of jam and tea. Mostly the food came from tins or packets or was salted for preservation, as there was no way to keep fresh food properly.

Fresh water was also often a problem. It had to be brought up to the trenches and often was kept in big tanks which was not very hygienic. To make matters a little better, there were cigarette and tobacco rations regularly. Although a cigarette didn't offer any nutritious value, smoking helped take the soldiers' minds off their hunger.

### Hygiene

Other examples of the lack of hygiene were that the men could not wash while they were in the trenches as there was limited access to running water. A lavatory (or latrine) often consisted of a large bucket in a side trench. However, this was a very vulnerable position to be in as the enemy could sneak up behind the unwitting soldier while he was 'occupied'. Soldiers who were aware of this danger in the trenches would sometimes opt instead for the 'in the hat' method. Due to the cramped conditions and the constant upheaval of land from shelling, dysentery was a common ailment too.

### Weather Conditions

Another factor that depressed the troops was the abysmal weather. The bitter cold could claim digits to frostbite, and the heavy rain flooded the trenches and turned the soil into thick, slimy mud. The trenches sometimes filled with water up to the waists of the soldiers. This submersion of the feet for long periods of time led to a terrible condition called 'Trench Foot' - a fungal infection that could turn septic, resulting in amputation. Thus a clean dry pair of socks and a decent pair of boots was something akin to heaven on Earth.

*Our trenches are ankle deep in mud. In some places trenches are waist deep in water.*

- Private Livesay, from a letter to his parents, 1915

### Health

Dead bodies littered the surrounding land, a constant reminder to the soldiers of their own mortality. Continuous artillery fire was heard from both sides of the trenches. This indecent noise was enough to drive anybody mad. Often called 'shell-shock', and now recognised as post-traumatic stress disorder, the constant firing and banging of the artillery shells caused some men to succumb to shattered nerves and resulted in them being unable to go 'over the top' of the trenches.

*Bombardment, barrage, curtain-fire, mines, gas, tanks, machine-guns, hand-grenades -- words, words, words, but they hold the horror of the world.*

- from *All Quiet on the Western Front*

Reduced to shivering wrecks, these soldiers were not tolerated at the time. Many high-ranking Army officials (and doctors) didn't recognise shell-shock as a medical problem during World War One and treated those suffering from it as cowards. Punishment was often harsh and known to include things like taking the bolts from the rifles, and in some extreme cases, tying the poor men to the wheels of artillery guns. Soldiers who refused to fight were often court-martialled and in some cases sentenced to death.

## Gas

*How horrible, fantastic, incredible, it is that we should be digging trenches and trying on gas masks here because of a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing.*

- Neville Chamberlain

One of the major fears was of poison gas. While tear gas was first employed by the French, it wasn't until the 22 April, 1915 when the German Army used this new type of chemical warfare (chlorine gas in this instance) at the battle of Ypres in an offensive capacity. The main types were:

- Chlorine - a terribly smelly and irritating gas, it would burn at the throat and lungs, make the eyes water and could even lead to suffocation.
- Phosgene - not unlike chlorine gas, its chemical make-up meant that there was less coughing, so more of the poison gas could be inhaled.
- Mustard (Yperite)- first used by the Germans in 1917, this colourless and odourless gas caused symptoms similar to eating mustard, except much, much worse. That is, watering eyes, burning of the throat and lungs and blistering of the skin (both externally and internally). Worse still, it was highly undetectable and soldiers were only aware of it when it was too late.

The use of gas took the Allies by surprise and caused widespread panic: but often, when the wind changed direction, the gas was redirected from whence it came. Soon both the Allies and the Germans were using gas as a weapon, and gas masks were a common sight. William Pressey recalls being gassed at the Messines Ridge on 7 June, 1917:

*I was put into an ambulance and taken to the base, where we were placed on the stretchers side by side on the floor of a marquee. I suppose I resembled a kind of fish with my mouth open gasping for air. It seemed as if my lungs were gradually shutting up and my heart pounded away in my ears like the beat of a drum. On looking at the chap next to me I felt sick, for green stuff was oozing from the side of his mouth.*

## Boredom

Boredom was another thing that irritated the troops. There were many menial tasks to keep them occupied though. These included filling sandbags, mending barbed wire, repairing the duckboards on the floor of the trench and the draining of trenches. Trenches had to be rebuilt after heavy rainfall or an explosion. Soldiers also had to take it in turns to be on sentry duty, meaning they had to stand on the fire step of the

trench and wait for the enemy to make a move. Due to the constant bombardments and the sheer effort of trying to stay alive, sleep deprivation was common. This was dangerous because if a soldier fell asleep he could be caught and severely reprimanded by his commanding officer or be caught unaware by the enemy.

*In the last four days in the trenches I don't think I'd eight hours' sleep altogether.*

- JB Priestley, in a letter to his father in 1915

*My arms have mutinied against me — brutes!  
My fingers fidget like ten idle brats,  
My back's been stiff for hours, damned hours.  
Death never gives his squad a 'stand-at-ease'.*

- Wilfred Owen, 'Lest We Forget'



## Discussion Points

- Read the below extracts; they are soldiers' memories of their experiences of WW1. They have been taken from the Soldiers' Stories Audio Gallery on the World Wars in-depth section of the BBC website: [www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)
- Compare and contrast the accounts of recruitment and the reality of trench warfare and gas attack.

## Summer 1914 - Volunteers in their Thousands Queue to Enlist.

**Extract 1:** 'I felt restless, excited, eager to do something desperate for the cause of England. And then the impulse came, sending the blood tingling all over my body: why not join the Army now? A great and glorious suggestion. It might not be too late.'

Girls smiled at me, men looked at me with respect, the bus drivers wished me luck and refused to take money for my fare, and everybody made way for me, as being on the King's business.'

**Extract 2:** 'That afternoon I decided to join the Liverpool Scottish. What sights I saw on my way up to Frazer Street; a queue of men over two miles long in the Haymarket; the recruiting office took over a week to pass in all those thousands. At the Liverpool Scottish HQ things seemed hopeless; in fact I was giving up hopes of ever getting in, when I saw Rennison, an officer of the battalion, and he invited me into the mess, getting me in front of hundreds of others. I counted myself in luck to secure the last kilt, which although very old and dirty, I carried away to tog myself in.'

**Extract 3:** 'Before we got uniforms we learnt to become soldiers in civilian attire with arm-bands. On a route march one day it commenced to rain and a new recruit put up the umbrella he had brought with him. Our then CO even addressed us as 'Gentlemen!'

## Trench Life

**Extract 4:** 'If you're nearly frozen, they keep quiet: as soon as you warm up those blasted lice start to bite like the devil. It's horrible. I often think it is one of the worst things we have to endure out here.'

**Extract 5:** 'Getting along a trench is not as easy as you think. For one thing it is not straight for more than four yards (it is 'traversed' to prevent crossfire and shell fire having much effect). Then there are all sorts of odd off-turns, to officers' dugouts, or other lines of trenches: at other places there are steps down and other unknown steps up where a piece of parapet has been blown in, or some walls of a traverse have collapsed. In these mazes where we have fought each other so often and each side has held the ground in turn, you can never be quite sure whether a trench won't lead you straight to the German lines. In more than one place in our present line we actually do have communication trenches connecting our and their lines.'

**Extract 6:** 'I'm a great believer in my star. If I were going to be killed I'd have been killed long ago. Walking about the trenches all day long hand-in-hand with death, you can't help become a fatalist.'

## Gas Attack

**Extract 7:** 'Propped up against a wall was a dozen men - all gassed - their colours were black, green and blue, tongues hanging out and eyes staring - one or two were dead and others beyond human aid, some were coughing up green froth from their lungs - as we advanced we passed many more men lying in the ditches and gutterways - shells were bursting all around.'

My respirator fell to pieces with the continual removal and readjustment - the gas closed my eyes and filled them with matter and I could not see. I was left lying in the trench with one other gassed man and various wounded beings and corpses and forced to lie and spit, cough and gasp the whole of the day in that trench.'

**Extract 8:** Although our road was only slightly sunken it lay at the foot of a gentle slope and thus acted as a gas trap. Our Colonel and our Medical Officer had both been affected by the stuff and during the morning they were carried away on stretchers. The rest of us stayed out there all day, coughing and retching and gradually going blind...

Next day, with a label hung on each of us, and equipped with nothing but our tin hats and gas masks, ha ha, we groped our way outside with the Quarter-Master-Sergeant leading and each of us hanging on to the tail of the jacket of the man in front of him...'

**Extract 9:** 'Our eyes now began to feel irritated. All and sundry commenced to vomit. I heard several men complain about the pain in their eyes, some even complained of going blind; one by one these fellows made their way to the First Aid Dressing Station. The stream of men increased, those who could see led the way while the others formed a queue behind, each one placing his hands on the shoulders of his predecessor for guidance...

The symptoms were as follows: blindness, deafness, loss of voice, inability to swallow, weakness, high fever, burns on exposed and delicate parts of the anatomy, choking cough, difficult breathing.'

**Extract 10:** '[By the afternoon]...the faces of our lads who lay in the open changed colour and presented a gruesome spectacle. Their faces and hands gradually assumed a blue and green colour and their buttons and metal fittings on their uniform were all discoloured. Many lay there with their legs drawn up and clutching their throats.'

## Writing Activity

- Compare and contrast these first-hand accounts of recruitment and trench-life with Tommo's descriptions in the play or novel.

## Research

- Find the book *Forgotten Voices of The Great War*, compiled by Max Arthur, in the Library and choose an account that demonstrates a soldier's feelings of excitement and adventure and another that details the horrors of war.

## Reading and Discussion Points:

Read the below poem: 'Dulce Et Decorum Est Pro Patria Mori', by Wilfred Owen.  
Discuss how the poem conveys the horrors of war to readers.

### **Dulce Et Decorum Est**

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,  
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,  
Till on the haunting flares<sup>2</sup> we turned our backs  
And towards our distant rest<sup>3</sup> began to trudge.  
Men marched asleep. Many had lost their boots  
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; all blind;  
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots<sup>4</sup>  
Of tired, outstripped<sup>5</sup> Five-Nines<sup>6</sup> that dropped behind.

Gas!<sup>7</sup> Gas! Quick, boys! – An ecstasy of fumbling,  
Fitting the clumsy helmets<sup>8</sup> just in time;  
But someone still was yelling out and stumbling,  
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime<sup>9</sup> . . .  
Dim, through the misty panes<sup>10</sup> and thick green light,  
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.  
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,  
He plunges at me, guttering,<sup>11</sup> choking, drowning.

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud<sup>12</sup>  
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest<sup>13</sup>  
To children ardent<sup>14</sup> for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie; Dulce et Decorum est  
Pro patria mori.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes on **Dulce Et Decorum Est**

1.) The Roman poet Horace famously wrote:

*"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori:  
mors et fugacem persequitur virum  
nec parcit inbellis iuventae  
poplitibus timidove tergo."*

*"How sweet and fitting it is to die for one's country:  
Death pursues the man who flees,  
spares not the hamstrings or cowardly backs  
Of battle-shy youths."*

The first line of this poem was taken up by the war poet Wilfred Owen as the title of his poem, written in 1917 and published after his death in the trenches in 1921. Wilfred Owen was killed in action a week before the war ended.

2.) Rockets which were sent up to burn with a brilliant glare to light up men and other targets in the area between the front lines.

3.) A camp away from the front-line where exhausted soldiers might rest for a few days, or longer.

4.) The noise made by the shells rushing through the air.

5.) Outpaced, the soldiers have struggled beyond the reach of these shells, which are now falling behind them as they struggle away from the scene of battle.

6.) Five-Nines - 5.9 calibre explosive shells.

7.) Poison gas. From the symptoms it would appear to be chlorine or phosgene gas. The filling of the lungs with fluid had the same effects as when a person drowned.

8.) The early name for gas masks.

9.) A white chalky substance which can burn live tissue.

10.) The glass in the eyepieces of the gas masks.

11.) Owen probably meant flickering out like a candle or gurgling like water draining down a gutter, referring to the sounds in the throat of the choking man, or it might be a sound partly like stuttering and partly like gurgling.

12.) Normally the regurgitated grass that cows chew; here a similar looking material was issuing from the soldier's mouth.

13.) High zest - idealistic enthusiasm, keenly believing in the rightness of the idea

14.) Keen

15.) See note 1

Discussion Point

- Is it sweet and fitting to die for one's country?

## 2, v) Shell-Shock and the True Life Case of Harry Farr

It wasn't until the years after the war that there was a greater understanding of shell-shock, and it was brought into focus by the true life case of Harry Farr. He joined the elite British Expeditionary Force at the beginning of the Great War and fought in the trenches. In May 1915, he collapsed with strong convulsions and was unable to stop shaking. Despite his health, he was sent back to the front and fought at the Somme. After several months, he requested medical help for his worsening condition, but he was refused. Farr refused to return to the front and was sent to Court Martial. His death warrant was signed by General Sir Douglas Haig, and he was shot at dawn on October 16th 1916.

After Farr's death, it became evident that he was suffering from acoustic shock which occurs when the inner ear is damaged by sound causing it to lose its ability to soften and filter sound, making loud noises physically unbearable. Farr's family always argued that Harry Farr was suffering from shell-shock and in 1992 the family discovered that some of the execution papers were being released. When they assessed the papers, they discovered that their relative had been dragged kicking and screaming back to the front, when he actually needed urgent medical treatment.

306 soldiers were executed during the First World War for military offences and despite a sustained campaign, John Major's government refused to grant a pardon. However, 14 years later on 15 August 2006, Harry Farr's family announced that Farr was to be granted a pardon and that the then Defence Secretary, Des Browne, would be seeking a statutory group pardon, one that is achieved through an Act of Parliament for all those executed regardless of the merits of individual cases. It wasn't until 7th November 2006 that all those soldiers shot for desertion were given a posthumous pardon.

This could be interpreted either as a move to avoid the numerous court cases and save the potential embarrassment that would have arisen if the case of Harry Farr had completed its course through to the High Court, or a righting of atrocities that were carried out by the British Government on her own citizens.

Early symptoms of shell-shock included tiredness, irritability, giddiness, lack of concentration and headaches. Eventually the men suffered mental breakdowns making it impossible for them to remain in the front-line. Records show that other symptoms included: hysteria, paralysis, blindness, deafness, contracture (shortening) of limbs, mutism (inability to speak), limping, nightmares, insomnia, heart palpitations, dizziness, depression and disorientation.

Between 1914 and 1918, the British Army identified 80,000 men (2% of those who saw active service) as suffering from shell-shock. A much larger number of soldiers with these symptoms were classified as 'malingerers' and sent back to the front-line. In some cases men committed suicide. Others broke down under the pressure and refused to obey the orders of their officers. Some responded to the pressures of shell-shock by deserting. Sometimes soldiers who disobeyed orders got shot on the spot. In some cases, they were court-martialled.

## 2, vi) WW1 Poets

The experience of World War One has remained vivid to thousands of people across the decades because of the work of a number of young poets, who joined up and went to fight in the trenches. Sadly, many of them did not come back again. However, these men were the leading poets of their generation and many had already had poems and collections of poems published back in England. Rupert Brooke and Wilfred Owen offer two contrasting but equally fascinating perspectives on The Great War. Brooke died in the first year of the war and his poetry retains the patriotic fervour of the new recruit. Owen, who joined up with the same sense of patriotism and duty at the start of the war, served throughout, with his poetry reflecting the gradual disaffection and disillusionment that most soldiers felt as they were exposed to the horrors of the fighting.

### Rupert Brooke

Rupert Brooke was born on 3 August 1887. His father was a housemaster at Rugby School. After leaving Cambridge University, where he became friends with many of those in the 'Bloomsbury Group', Brooke studied in Germany and travelled in Italy. In 1909 he moved to the village of Grantchester, near Cambridge, which he celebrated in his poem, 'The Old Vicarage, Grantchester' (1912). His first collection of poems was published in 1911. In 1913, Brooke became a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, his old college.

In the same year, he left England to travel in North America, New Zealand and the Pacific islands. He returned home shortly before the outbreak of World War One. He was commissioned into the Royal Naval Division and took part in the disastrous Antwerp expedition in October 1914. In February 1915, he set sail for the Dardanelles. On board ship, he developed septicaemia from a mosquito bite. He died on 23 April 1915 on a hospital ship off the Greek island of Skyros and was buried in an olive grove on the island.

Rupert Brooke caught the optimism of the opening months of the war with his wartime poems, published after his death, which expressed an idealism about war that contrasts strongly with poetry published later in the conflict.

### Wilfred Owen

Wilfred Edward Salter Owen was born 18 March 1893 in Oswestry, Shropshire. After school, he became a teaching assistant and in 1913 went to France for two years to work as a language tutor. He began writing poetry as a teenager.

In 1915, he returned to England to enlist in the army and was commissioned into the Manchester Regiment. After spending the remainder of the year training in England, he left for the western front early in January 1917. After experiencing heavy fighting, he was diagnosed with shellshock. He was evacuated to England and arrived at Craiglockhart War Hospital near Edinburgh in June. There he met the poet Siegfried Sassoon, who already had a reputation as a poet and shared Owen's views.

Sassoon agreed to look over Owen's poems, gave him encouragement and introduced him to literary figures such as Robert Graves.

Reading Sassoon's poems and discussing his work with Sassoon revolutionised Owen's style and his conception of poetry. He returned to France in August 1918 and in October was awarded the Military Cross for bravery. On 4 November 1918, he was killed while attempting to lead his men across the Sambre canal at Ors. The news of his death reached his parents on 11 November, Armistice Day.

Edited by Sassoon and published in 1920, Owen's single volume of poems contains some of the most poignant English poetry of World War One, including 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.

### **Siegfried Sassoon**

Siegfried Sassoon was born on 8 September 1886 in Kent. His father was part of a Jewish merchant family, originally from Iran and India, and his mother part of the artistic Thorneycroft family. Sassoon studied at Cambridge University but left without a degree. He then lived the life of a country gentleman, hunting and playing cricket while also publishing small volumes of poetry.

In May 1915, Sassoon was commissioned into the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and went to France. He impressed many with his bravery in the front line and was given the nickname 'Mad Jack' for his near-suicidal exploits. He was decorated twice. His brother Hamo was killed in November 1915 at Gallipoli.

In the summer of 1916, Sassoon was sent to England to recover from fever. He went back to the front, but was wounded in April 1917 and returned home. Meetings with several prominent pacifists, including Bertrand Russell, had reinforced his growing disillusionment with the war and in June 1917, he wrote a letter that was published in the Times in which he said that the war was being deliberately and unnecessarily prolonged by the government. As a decorated war hero and published poet, this caused public outrage. It was only his friend and fellow poet, Robert Graves, who prevented him from being court-martialled by convincing the authorities that Sassoon had shell-shock. He was sent to Craiglockhart War Hospital in Edinburgh for treatment. Here he met, and greatly influenced, Wilfred Owen. Both men returned to the front where Owen was killed in 1918. Sassoon was posted to Palestine and then returned to France, where he was again wounded, spending the remainder of the war in England. Many of his war poems were published in 'The Old Huntsman' (1917) and 'Counter-Attack' (1918).

After the war Sassoon spent a brief period as literary editor of the Daily Herald before going to the United States, travelling the length and breadth of the country on a speaking tour. He then started writing the near-autobiographical novel 'Memoirs of a Fox-hunting Man' (1928). It was an immediate success, and was followed by others including 'Memoirs of an Infantry Officer' (1930) and 'Sherston's Progress' (1936). Sassoon had a number of homosexual affairs but in 1933 surprised many of his friends by marrying Hester Gatty. They had a son, George, but the marriage broke down after World War Two.

He continued to write both prose and poetry. In 1957, he was received into the Catholic Church. He died on 1 September 1967.

Note: Look at Section 2, iii) and v) for examples of war poems.

### **3 Quick Drama Ideas**

The below activities may be useful for teachers and workshop leaders because they relate to the themes of war and conflict. Some will be more suitable as warm-up activities because they are short and lighter in feel; others will be good stimuli for more serious, exploratory pieces of work. I have included a few activities on 'status' because it relates to the theme of power. Private Peaceful's fate is determined by a rejection of authority, but his powerlessness to battle the decision made by his superiors, reinforces his position of insubordination. Private Peaceful is low in status in terms of his employment, but does his personal status change when he challenges his superior? This might be an interesting area of investigation.

Finally, a few activities have been included to nurture the group dynamic and their ability to work as a team. This could be related to the sensitivity soldiers, in any battle situation, need to develop towards one another to keep themselves alive.

#### **Bomb and Shield: warm-up**

Without letting anybody else know, each person must choose two other people in the room. The workshop leader tells them that the first person they chose is a bomb and the second person is a shield. On a signal, everybody starts moving around the room with the aim of staying as far away from the bomb as possible and keeping the shield between him or her and the bomb! The leader then gives a signal to freeze at any moment to check whether they are doing it correctly.

#### **Make Friends / Argue: warm-up**

In pairs, students walk around the room, making friends. When the leader tells them, they need to find something to argue about - then make friends again. The leader keeps swapping between making friends and having an argument. The aim is to try to continue the conversation, whatever happens.

#### **'Yes' and 'No' Game: warm-up or main activity**

Students get into pairs. They have to make up a scene using the words 'yes' and 'no' only. Person A is 'yes' and person B is 'no'. To bring the scene to life, students must rely on their voices (volume, tone, pace). Once they have worked with their voices, they can add a gesture or movement to accompany each 'yes' and 'no' spoken. This activity can be further developed with students adding more words to their dialogue and moulding it into a scene. The scene can be set in a particular time and place to relate to the area of class study.

### **Rainstorm: warm-up or main activity**

The trenches were often filled with water due to bad weather. The idea for this game is for the whole group to create the sound of a rainstorm. They are asked to carefully follow the movements of the leader. He/she starts by tapping one finger on the palm of his/her hand. It sounds just like raindrops. Slowly the effect is built up by using two, three, four and then five fingers so that everyone is clapping their hands really loudly. After the storm reaches a crescendo, the volume is slowly reduced with four, three, two then just one finger again tapping on the palm.

To extend the activity, after everybody is clapping their hands, the leader might want to progress onto slapping thighs, followed by stamping feet. To further extend the soundscape, sounds of war could be added. This piece of work could also be used as the beginning to an improvised scene set in the trenches.

### **Moulding a Character: catalyst for an improvisation**

Students are split into groups of 4. One student plays the part of an actor and stands in a neutral position in front of the others. The rest of the group "mould" the person into a recruiting officer or a soldier from the trenches or maybe a woman working the land. No talking or discussion is allowed. The aim is to sculpt the character together until a consensus is reached. The sculptors carefully move the person's body into place. If a particular facial expression is required, it may be made by one of the sculptors and shown to the statue, who then copies it. This can be really helpful in character development and may help an actor discover new ways to physicalize a character.

### **Improvisations from Photos: main activity**

Photos of people at war from this pack or from magazines, books or the internet are used as a stimulus for this piece of drama work. The pictures are discussed with the class and individual groups are asked to work with one photo each. In their groups, students decide who the people in the photos are. They then can give each person a name and create backgrounds for them. Questions to ask:

- Where was I born?
- How old am I?
- What did I do for a living before I joined up?
- Who is in my family
- Am I married?
- Do I have children?
- How long have I been at war?
- What am I doing?
- What time of day is it?
- How am I feeling about my current situation?

Now the students can make a still picture of the photo and then on the count of 3, bring the picture to life. Students can spontaneously improvise action and dialogue between the characters or even explore internal thoughts by thought-tracking what is on the mind of each character.

Extension: students could write down their improvisations to create and develop a script.

## **Status**

High Status = 1

Low Status = 5

Students walk around the room. When they make eye contact with another person, they need to greet them. The leader then calls out a number relating to the status they need to play, and the students adjust their body language accordingly. To extend the activity, different numbers can be written on pieces of paper and given to the students. Interaction is very interesting when they play different status levels.

## **Status Pictures: catalyst for main activity**

In pairs, students create a still image, where one has a higher status than the other. They show their images to the rest of the class and let them guess who is "high" and who is "low". They then can discuss why there may be areas of disagreement. Students can then make another image showing high and low status in a different way. They could even try to make an image where both students have equal status.

Note: to create differences in status, students need to think about eye contact, posture and gesture and voice.

## **Pecking Order: warm-up game or main activity**

In groups of three, students decide on a situation and three characters, e.g. a hospital, with a doctor, nurse and patient. One person leaves the room and the others decide on their own pecking order or status - 1, 2 or 3. They also decide what status the other person is (without telling them). The person re-enters and the improvisation begins. After a while, the improvisation is stopped and the third person has to guess their own status and that of the other two.

The game can be made more challenging by having two people with the same status. It is interesting if students steer away from the obvious pecking order, e.g. the patient can be 1, the nurse 2 and the doctor 3. This activity has a lot of potential for humour, so the right tone needs to be set, according to what needs to be achieved. It is a good activity to introduce students to the idea of status, so they may be permitted to run with the humour; however, if a more serious and sensitive piece of work is required then a framework of expectation needs to be set.

### **Walk together: warm-up to encourage group sensitivity**

Everybody finds a space in the room. On a given signal, everyone starts walking, using all the space in the room. On a second signal, everybody stops. This time, without talking, everybody must decide to start walking at the same time - and then to stop as a group at the same time. With sensitivity, it can be done and therefore is worth spending time on.

As a further challenge - the group spreads out into the space. One person must walk, and then stop. Now - without talking - two people walk, and then stop at the same time. Now three, then four, then five. If a group can get as far as five, they can continue the game with four, three, two then one person walking alone again. If the game goes wrong at any time, it starts again with one person walking. What usually happens is that the wrong number of people start to walk, or they don't set off or stop at the same time. Again, it is challenging, but with sensitivity, and a mutual language of complicity, it can be done.

### **Count to 20: warm-up to encourage sensitivity**

Sit or stand in a circle. The idea is for the group to count to twenty, one person saying one number at a time. Somebody is chosen to start the count. Anybody can say the next number - but if two or more people speak at the same time, counting must start again from the beginning. It is possible to get to twenty if everybody really concentrates. Students can try doing it with and without eye contact. Other variations include members of the group facing outwards and closing their eyes or counting back from twenty to one.



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