

# Assembly: What are war memorials?



**Outline:** This assembly is an introduction to war memorials, their purpose and importance. It can be followed on subsequent days by War Memorials Trust's other assemblies, or used alone if preferred. Pupils will learn what war memorials are and why they were created. While Remembrance Day might be a timely occasion for this assembly, it can be used at other times of year if it fits in with the curriculum or local events. This outline contains the information you will need; you may wish to adapt the format depending on the number of pupils.

**Suggested timing:** 20 to 30 minutes

**Suitable for:** Key Stages 3 and 4

**Resources:** Pictures of war memorials (examples are included on the PowerPoint but can be substituted – please see [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/gallery-of-war-memorials](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/gallery-of-war-memorials) to download pictures of a range of war memorials), 'Teachers' information about war memorials' secondary help sheet, accompanying PowerPoint.

## Suggested teaching:

### Introduction:

- Slides 2 and 3: Show pictures of war memorials (some well known, recognisable designs and more unusual memorials that pupils may be less familiar with) and ask pupils to identify what they are. Highlight the differences in them, for example slide 3 shows a large, elaborate monument and a much smaller, simpler shrine.

### Key question 1: what are war memorials?

- Slide 4: A war memorial is something that commemorates a war or conflict or those affected by it. This can include civilians as well as service personnel. As a result of this broad definition war memorial designs vary hugely from familiar village crosses to more unusual designs such as shelters or even vehicles. Some name individuals involved in conflict while others do not.
- Slide 5: There are an estimated 100,000 war memorials in the UK.
- War memorials often play a focal point in Remembrance commemorations (it is expected that pupils of this age will have a reasonable knowledge of Remembrance Day and its history but if not you may wish to extend the session or incorporate another assembly prior to this one to explain this. Guidance and suitable teaching materials can be found in War Memorials Trust's Key Stage 2 lesson plan, 'What is Remembrance?' available at [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary)).

### Key question 2: why did communities create war memorials?

- War memorials can be found just about everywhere in the UK. Their existence has almost become an intrinsic part of everyday life in the UK, to the point where you may not fully notice them.
- There is a long tradition of memorialisation of war and conflict in this country. Some memorials are monuments commemorating significant warriors and leaders to specific campaigns and

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victories. But the structures that we tend to think of when we think of war memorials today are largely the product of eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century conflicts.

- Ask pupils **why** this period was so central to the creation of the memorials we see today? What significant events took place that would have caused this?
- Slide 6: The aftermath of the First World War was when a large proportion of the war memorials we are familiar with were created. It was named 'The Great War' in recognition of the fact that it was, in scale and casualty rate, unlike any conflict this country had seen in the past.
- Slide 7: In most cases casualties were buried overseas, some in unmarked graves and others unidentified. This meant that bereaved families at home had no grave or place to remember their loved ones. This led to an unprecedented number of war memorials being created by local communities – in towns, villages, schools, Scout groups and workplaces all over the country. There has not been such a scale of mass commemoration before or since.
- Discussing or highlighting the inscription on Filleigh war memorial (slide 7) will help pupils to understand why communities were driven to create a memorial.
- Slide 8: Today, nearly 100 years after the outbreak of the First World War, these memorials still stand as a reminder of the sacrifices made during those years. They are often still focal points in communities; a place to pause and reflect on the lost lives that they help us remember.

## Conclusion

- Summarise the key points from the assembly. By the end of the assembly pupils should understand how common a feature in communities war memorials are and why they were created in the aftermath of conflict.
- Encourage pupils to look out for war memorials in their locality and reflect on their historical significance and ongoing relevance.
- Slides 9 to 11: You may wish to include a suitable poem, reading, prayer and/or hymn at this point. Some suggestions for suitable hymns can be found on War Memorials Trust's help sheet, 'Dedication and rededication ceremonies,' which can be downloaded from the Trust's main website at [www.warmemorials.org](http://www.warmemorials.org).
- Alternatively, you may want to ask pupils to observe a moment's silence to reflect on the content of the assembly.

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