

How war memorials can be used by schools



War Memorials Trust

The study of war memorials, their fascinating history and the variety of memorial designs that exist can be used as the basis of many lessons across the primary curriculum. The ideas outlined here are suggested in further detail in our primary lesson plans, which consist of a medium term 'topic' plan, as well as detailed lesson plans for each suggested lesson, which could be taught in isolation if you choose not to follow the whole topic. The suggestions below show how you might effectively integrate the topic of war memorials into your teaching to provide Key Stage 2 pupils with an interesting and purposeful curriculum, and are expanded on in our lesson plans. If you have any questions about the content of our lesson ideas please contact learning@warmemorials.org.

- **Art and Design**

War memorials can take many different forms. They may be functional buildings or objects, living things, plaques, books or a monument. Some memorials have a fairly plain and simple appearance, while others might be more elaborately decorated or include patterns or sculpture. Local war memorials can provide useful starting points for pupils learning to make and record observations, and can be an important source of information on artistic trends and designers in the past. The design of a new memorial, whether to commemorate a war or for another reason, can provide pupils with a real purpose for their art work and the opportunity to investigate a range of materials and processes. This task can also provide interesting cross curricular links with History, as pupils find out about those who are commemorated, and PSHE, as pupils consider community feeling both in the past when the memorial was created and in the present towards a new memorial. Younger pupils may also be involved in designing and making an appropriate commemorative object, such as a wreath, to be used during Acts of Remembrance.

- **Citizenship and PSHE**

The issues surrounding war memorials means that the subject can be emotive and therefore requires pupils to demonstrate sensitivity to people's feelings. Learning about the history and importance of war memorials, both in the past and the present day, gives pupils the opportunity to discuss their opinions, listen respectfully to others and develop speaking and listening skills. Studying the background and events that led to the creation of a memorial not only provides interesting links with other areas of the curriculum, including history, but also gives pupils a unique insight into how a local community lived and worked in the past, how the community and population was affected by war, the community feeling towards a war memorial and how that might differ today, and how local media presented the issue.

War memorial theft and vandalism has, sadly, often been reported in local and national media and there has been a recent increase in this as memorials have become a target for scrap metal thieves. Such stories, while distressing, provide an interesting opportunity to

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examine media coverage. It is important to use events such as this to educate young people about the issues surrounding these thefts and encourage them, as the next generation of war memorial custodians, to work to prevent it happening in the future. Looking at such news stories also helps pupils see war memorials very much as a current issue of which they should be aware, and allows them to develop empathy for those that are affected by the thefts.

- **English**

There are many ways that the topic of war memorials can be used within the primary literacy curriculum. For example, the two World Wars produced a number of contemporary poems that can be studied and used as the basis for pupils writing their own, as can dedications and epitaphs. Various conflicts and the remembrance of them have also been the inspiration for modern fiction writers whose stories can be used in the classroom. War memorials can raise many issues in the community. For example, there were and continue to be strong feelings over such questions as where a memorial should be placed, and who should be commemorated. These are issues which can be used to help pupils develop skills in speaking, listening, debating and presenting. Finally, researching the history of or the names on a war memorial is a way of helping pupils practise their research and note taking skills, and can lead into planning and writing reports or biographies. Many activities in our primary lesson plans involve speaking, listening, reading and writing, and provide great opportunities to develop these skills in further work by linking the lesson to your class's literacy curriculum.

- **Geography**

The study of a war memorial can form part of a more general study of the local area and the wider impact a significant event like a war had on that area, its people and their way of life. The local area at the time of the conflict can be compared to what it is like now and pupils can examine what drove some of the changes. Investigating the locality at the time of the conflict, and the war memorial's background, creation and who it commemorates can make this local study an historical as well as a geographical one. Pupils could learn about decision making skills and processes when considering suitable locations for a new memorial, and communicate with locals about their thoughts.

War memorials exist in many countries and a study of them could be incorporated into a study of the wider world, and comparisons drawn between how countries reacted to the losses suffered during wartime.

- **History**

History perhaps has the clearest links to the topic of war memorials. War memorials are a fascinating and unique source of information about events, people and places in the past, and give us valuable insights into aspects of local, social and military history. Pupils can use memorials to learn about the wars that led to their creation, and how the local population at the time was affected by the conflict. This can be used to meet the criteria that pupils are taught about significant turning points in history. Studying war memorials can also be used to conclude a study of these wars and examine their legacy and how they are remembered. Because many memorials commemorate only those from the community in which they are

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located they are also a valuable source of information about that community at that point in history, so provide an interesting angle for the study of local history. Pupils can find out about the community that created the war memorial and learn about the lives of the people it commemorates.

War memorials are also a useful way of teaching pupils key historical skills, such as how to use and compare historical sources, and to practise and apply research skills. If names are recorded on the memorial then the stories of those people's lives can be investigated through interviews with residents who may remember or be related to them. If this is not possible, pupils can learn how to use other sources, like local parish records, census returns, birth, marriage and death records, and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database. Where names are not recorded on a memorial, they could research the population at the time to find out who fought in the war. Military records can also be used in conjunction with personal records, and the actions of a soldier's regiment traced. This type of research provides an excellent opportunity for pupils to practise skills in ICT, including using and creating databases.

War memorials are likely to increasingly become focal points for commemoration during the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. This anniversary is an excellent opportunity to approach the subject of the two World Wars and how they are remembered, and War Memorials Trust is keen to assist schools with their plans to mark this event.

- **Mathematics and ICT**

A study of war memorials can provide opportunities for teaching and applying mathematical skills, especially those involved in handling data. Research into the names commemorated on a memorial could provide details about the individuals and these details can often be represented in charts and graphs (for example, ages of soldiers who joined the army from the locality) and primary pupils can learn how to record data from a memorial in a systematic way such as a table. Pupils could create a database of the people researched using the memorial. Some data may also provide ways of teaching simple statistics.

- **Religious Education**

It is difficult to provide detailed guidance for how war memorials can be incorporated into your RE curriculum because the requirements for RE teaching vary between schools. However, it is possible to provide some general suggestions that you may choose to adapt to work for your school's syllabus. Many war memorials are located in churches or churchyards and could therefore be incorporated into a study of these buildings. Some war memorials may include religious inscriptions or symbols which could be used to help children learn about that faith. Many of the subject ideas described elsewhere in this help sheet can also be used when studying church based war memorials, particularly those for art and design and history.

- **Science**

War memorials can provide a meaningful context for primary aged pupils to learn about materials, their characteristics and their suitability for different purposes. When thinking

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about the design of a memorial, pupils might consider the advantages and disadvantages of using different materials and think about the effects that the location of a memorial, its potential life span and its design might have on the choice of material. They can investigate the properties of different materials to work out which would be the most appropriate.

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