

Assembly: First World War Centenary



War Memorials Trust

Outline: This assembly focuses on helping pupils understand the significance of the centenary of the First World War and some of the events that are taking place to commemorate it. It has been written to coincide with the first year of the centenary, 2014, but could be adapted for use in subsequent centenary years too, or used as a template for assemblies about other significant anniversaries. The assembly reviews when the First World War happened and why it is still being remembered one hundred years later. It also outlines some ways in which young people can get involved in the commemorations and find out more; something which could be followed up in lessons using lesson plans or project ideas from War Memorials Trust. This assembly plan tells you what information should be included in your assembly. You may wish to adapt the format depending on the number and age of the pupils involved.

Suggested timing: 20 to 30 minutes

Suitable for: Key Stages 1 and 2

Resources: Timeline cards showing when the First World War happened (available from www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org)

Suggested teaching:

Introduction:

- Ask pupils what year it currently is (2014) and what year it would have been 100 years ago.
- Ask them what key event happened in 1914 – you could refer to any local commemorative events that pupils are likely to have heard of to encourage their answers. Establish that 1914 was the year the First World War started (4th August was the exact date of Britain's entry into the conflict) and that this year is the centenary of the outbreak of the war. Explain that centenary means one hundredth anniversary – you may wish to compare the words 'centenary' or 'century' to others like 'centimetre' to highlight the relationship.
- You could use War Memorials Trust's timeline cards (and suitable additions of your choice if necessary) to create a timeline showing the key events being discussed and dates with which your pupils will be familiar (e.g. the period they and their parents were born, the year their school opened) to put the war and amount of time that has passed since it happened into context.

Key question 1: What happened during the First World War?

- Use this part of the assembly to explain to pupils some background information about the First World War. The idea of this is to help children understand why the First World War was a significant event and therefore why it is still remembered. You should use your judgement to decide how much detail is appropriate for this section depending on the age of your pupils, but as a minimum they should understand that:

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- The First World War went on for four years and involved more people than previous wars had done, so its impact was greater than previous wars had been.
- Many people were either killed or injured during the conflict (over 900,000 in the British Army were killed). Nearly every community was affected in some way and afterwards remembered the people who had died by creating war memorials (you may have a local one to refer to as an example). You may wish to illustrate the scale of losses locally by asking a number of pupils that is the same as the number of people killed locally (or the same proportion of the school) to stand up or mark them out in some other way.
- You may choose to add more detail to this for older pupils, for example by explaining some detail of key battles; explaining some recruitment practices such as Pals' Battalions, the number of civilians who volunteered for the army in the early days of the war or conscription (and therefore why this war affected more ordinary families than previous wars had done); or explaining that some of the technological advances since previous wars meant this war was much larger in scale, if you feel this would be appropriate. If the war had any particular impact on your local area you could refer to that as well.
- Many of the organisations whose websites are listed at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links offer a range of information about and images of the First World War which may be useful here.

Key question 2: Why is the First World War centenary being commemorated?

- Explain that the First World War had such an impact on so many people's lives at the time that immediately after it had ended there was a drive to commemorate it and ensure that the sacrifices of those who fought were widely remembered. This is when Remembrance Day started to be marked and why we have so many war memorials from this time (around two-thirds of the UK's 100,000 war memorials are associated with the First World War; there is further information on them in other assemblies and lesson plans from War Memorials Trust which could be incorporated here).
- Move this forward to the present day and ask pupils if they think it is still important to continue to remember the First World War, and if so why.
- Using pupils' answers help them understand why the First World War is still remembered and commemorated now, even though it was a long time ago. Reasons you give pupils could include:
 - The First World War is now almost beyond living memory – there are few people alive today who lived through it. The centenary is therefore a chance for new generations to learn about what was a major event in history, and in doing so ensure the knowledge that we do have is not forgotten with the passing of time.
 - The First World War involved so many people and impacted on their lives in a way that was unprecedented. It is seen by many as a turning point in history that resulted in major changes, the results of which that can still be seen today. Therefore even though it was a long time ago people still think it is important to remember and learn about it.
 - The numbers of people killed or otherwise injured and affected by the war mean that many want to commemorate that sacrifice and reflect on what those people experienced, with the hope that we can prevent it happening again.

Key question 3: How is the First World War centenary being commemorated?

- This section of the assembly should outline to pupils what is being done to mark the centenary and in particular any ways they could get involved in the commemorations.

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- You may be able to explain about local events, depending on what is happening in your area, or outline some of the key ways the centenary is being marked nationally.
- You may also choose to explain to your pupils what they can do personally. War Memorials Trust has a range of resources giving suggestions for war memorial related projects young people can do and you may be able to get your school involved in these, for example researching the local people involved in the conflict or ensuring that the condition of your local war memorial is recorded on War Memorials Online (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk). In this way they will be doing something to ensure war memorial heritage is cared for and the people commemorated are still learned about and 'remembered.'
- You may simply wish to encourage your pupils to reflect on what the centenary means and remind them that it is important that they, and future generations, continue to learn about past events so that they are not forgotten.

Conclusion

- Draw together the key points of the assembly and conclude it in a way appropriate to your school.

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