7. War memorials and the local area

Background: This plan is intended to be a guide to using a war memorial as the basis for a study of the local area and how it has changed over time, and can be used to help you plan a session that is relevant to your locality and can help address the local history requirements of the National Curriculum. Using local records, census returns, maps and archives, pupils have the opportunity to find information about the family life of people named on a local war memorial as well as others in the community at that time. They can research the background to the memorial's creation. They can also find out about the geography of the local area at the time of the memorial's creation and compare this to the present day. The scope of this lesson will depend on the extent of local sources of information.

Suitable for: Upper Key Stage 2, but can be adapted for other primary ages.

Suggested timing: this will vary depending on the activities you choose.

Learning objectives: Pupils will be taught:

- To use primary sources to find out about local people, events and places in the past
- To make comparisons between the past and the present and suggest reasons for change

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Use their previous research and own knowledge to focus their search for information
- Select relevant sources to use to build up a profile of the life of a soldier named on a war memorial
- Use local sources of information to research the war memorial's area and community in the past, and make comparisons to the present

Resources: The resources you need depend on the activities you choose. Suggestions are given below.

Introduction

- Explain that, as well as being a source of information about an individual, a war memorial can reveal information about other aspects of the past – discuss what these might be.
- Establish that war memorials can tell us something about the local area at the time when it was built and that other sources of local information can be used alongside the memorial to tell us about the people in the local community in the past.

Main teaching points and activities

Note: The activities you do will vary according to the extent of local resources in your area. You can use these suggestions as part of a study of the wider changes to the local area. The following are examples of activities you could do, but you can vary the order they are done in, how much emphasis is put on each, and what you want the outcome for pupils to be. Further information about sources of information for a project like this can be found in our 'Researching a war memorial,' and 'Researching the names on a war memorial,' primary helpsheets.

Studying the local area:

- Ask pupils to sketch a map of the local area (you could combine this with a walk in the area to note features that should be included, and teaching pupils how to use appropriate map symbols). Include important landmarks and buildings.
- Use maps or photographs of the area from the time the war memorial was created and compare the locality then and now. Explore the reasons for some of the changes; for example national events, changes to the population and its requirements, technological progress. You could focus the study on the changes to one building, such as the school, since the war that the memorial commemorates.
- Create a timeline or a large map showing the changes that have taken place in the area from the time of the war memorial's creation to the present day. This could be a useful item for display and be added to over time as the local study is extended.

Studying the creation of the war memorial:

- If evidence about the creation of the war memorial (e.g. newspaper reports from the unveiling) is available, pupils can use this to find out about it. Local websites may also hold this information. This could be a good way of involving the local community in the pupils' work, especially if there are residents who know about the memorial's history and are willing to come in and speak to pupils.
- Pupils might think about why a particular design was chosen (does the design or any symbol on the memorial have a particular relevance to that community?), or why it was decided to locate the memorial where it is (again, sometimes the location was relevant, for example because it was where those who fought in the war used to socialise or was where they departed for the war from). This links the research to the pupils' study of the geography and history of the local area and may also provide links to RE or subsequent lessons on war memorial design.
- Investigating some of the decisions taken by the group who created the memorial can also support Citizenship lessons about community feeling and decision making. Role play may be a useful technique for helping pupils consider the thought processes behind the memorial's creation. Local archives may even have records of meetings that took place held locally, which can be a valuable source of information.

Further research into people named on memorial:

- If needed, briefly recap why the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database is a useful source for researching individual names of those killed in war.
- Another useful source of information that pupils may find it useful to explore is the local parish register of births, marriages and deaths. You may wish to gather appropriate information from these prior to teaching, depending on the accessibility of them and the needs of your class. Using the records for the people named on your local war memorial can help to expand on information found on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission database and give details of the casualty's family and life before the war.

- If they are available, archived records from a school or local business may give extra details about the people who worked there. If these people are also named on the war memorial then such records can provide further details about them. It may be worth asking local residents for help in sourcing this information.
- See our 'Researching names on war memorials,' primary helpsheet for further advice and sources of information.

Conclusion

At this stage, and especially if the suggestions here have been carried out over a number of lessons, it will be necessary to review what your pupils have found out about the people and places connected to the war memorial and bring together the work that they have produced over the course of the lessons you have carried out. Consider how this work might be presented to the rest of the school or members of the local community, e.g. through an assembly, presentation, making a film or a display that could be put somewhere accessible to the community like a library. Any work produced can be shared with other schools by uploading it to the Primary Project Showcase on www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org.

Support/extension:

The ideas in this lesson plan are suggestions only, and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of the needs of their class. Much of the content here is written with Upper Key Stage 2 in mind, but elements of the local study project could be adapted for younger pupils in Key Stage 1 and Lower Key Stage 2.

Ideas for further work:

This plan is intended to be a guide to activities that could be done if a war memorial is being used as part of a wider local study, and the potential for further work will depend on the nature of the area you are in and the resources available. However, some ideas are given here:

- Literacy: If pupils have found information about the people named on the local war memorial and the families of those people, this can lend itself to biographical writing. Use of newspaper reports from the time the war memorial was created can also lead into pupils writing their own reports or recounts written in role as someone who was there. There are many additional writing opportunities in the activities suggested.
- ICT: War Memorials Online is a project which allows the public to upload photographs and condition information about their local memorial to a website, www.warmemorialsonline.org. The website also has space for other comments and information about the memorial which the public can complete. Pupils can help with this by ensuring that their local war memorial is registered with the project and that information and photographs about it is up to date. Further information is available on the War Memorials Online website.