

# Armistice Day



**Background:** This lesson provides a way of looking at the events surrounding 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918 which brought World War I to an end. It has been created to provide pupils with a greater understanding of what led to the end of World War I and why we still commemorate 11<sup>th</sup> November today. It can be used alone or in conjunction with other lessons from War Memorials Trust. Pupils will learn about the events which led to the end of World War I, the signing of the Armistice on 11<sup>th</sup> November and the reactions to this, the Paris Peace Conference which took place in 1919, the resulting Treaty of Versailles and the reaction to the peace treaty. While it is possible that some pupils may have prior knowledge of Armistice Day and related events this is not assumed and teachers may wish to adapt the lesson to include more challenging material for more able pupils.

**Suitable for:** Key Stage 3

**Learning objective:** Pupils will learn:

- What happened towards the end of World War I
- When and why the Armistice between Germany and the Allies was signed
- What happened after the Armistice to ensure peace continued

**Learning outcomes:** Pupils will be able to:

- Explain what happened leading up to and on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918
- Explain the reaction to the Armistice
- Explain what happened as a result of the Paris Peace Conference
- Give reasons why the Treaty of Versailles was not popular with everyone

**Resources:**

- 'Teachers' Armistice secondary helpsheet'
- 'Secondary pupil resource: events leading up to the end of World War I'
- Maps and relevant images

**Introduction:** To enable pupils to fully understand the events leading up to the Armistice and what happened subsequently they should have a basic understanding of World War I. Lead a discussion, the depth of which will depend on pupils' prior knowledge of World War I and whether they have previously studied it, about World War I. You may ask pupils to focus on causes, dates, significant battles and what made it different to previous wars. Ensure pupils understand the following:

- Britain declared war on Germany on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1914
- the Allies, including Britain, France, Russia and America, fought against the Central Powers including, Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria
- first truly global conflict
- changes in fighting compared to previous wars: introduction of trench warfare and tanks
- many people were killed or injured: over 900,000 in the British Army were killed

## **Suggested teaching points and activities:**

### **What happened in the months leading up to the end of World War I?**

- Lead a discussion around the key events in 1918 which led to the end of World War I
- Pupils should know that at the beginning of 1918 Germany and the Central Powers were considered to be in strong position and it was believed they would go on to win the war
  - The 'Armistice Day secondary resource' could be used with pupils so that they are aware of the key events. Pupils, in small groups, could be asked to determine how the events altered the course of the war and whether they put the Allies or Central Powers in a stronger position
- It should become evident through the discussion, or should be highlighted, that:
  - although Russia withdrew and enabled Germany to focus its efforts wholly on the Western Front the initial gains Germany made were not sustained
  - the arrival of American troops saw the Allies gain strength. This, and a number of victories, meant that the Allies found themselves in an increasingly stronger position
  - one by one the Central Powers began to discuss ceasefires with the Allies which resulted in their withdrawal from the conflict

### **When and where was the Armistice signed?**

- Share with pupils or lead a discussion about the events of 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918. You may wish to use maps and images to help with their understanding
- Pupils should understand:
  - discussions about the Armistice or ceasefire took place between the representatives of the Allies led by Marshal Foch and a German delegation
  - the two parties met in a railway carriage in the Forest of Compiègne, France
  - the Armistice was signed at 5.10am on 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918
  - the agreement to end the fighting came into effect 6 hours later at 11.00am
  - if any of the terms of the Armistice were broken by Germany, fighting would begin again with 48 hours' notice

### **What was the reaction to the Armistice?**

- The news of the Armistice spread very quickly and there was immediate reaction both at home and abroad
- Give pupils the opportunity to consider the reaction and feelings of different groups of people (e.g. leaders of Allied countries, leaders from the countries who made up the Central Powers, Allied troops, German troops, British population including families of soldiers, German population) to the announcement and the reasons for this
  - This could be done in the form of a 'walking wall'. Large sheets of paper with a group named on them are spread around the room on walls or tables. Organise pupils into small groups with each one starting at a different piece of paper. A minute or two is spent noting down ideas before moving on to the next piece of paper. This is repeated until the groups end up back at the original piece of paper
- It should be established that there was, in general, a very celebratory mood particularly in Britain and the other Allied countries. Images of the celebrations including the large crowds which gathered could be shared. However this joyous mood was tinged with sadness for those families whose loved ones would never return home. In addition, some of the soldiers found that weeks of boredom stretched ahead of them because they did not return home straight away from where they were fighting

## **What happened after the Armistice was signed?**

- The Armistice had ended the fighting but peace talks still needed to take place and a treaty drawn up to ensure it would last
- Delegates from 32 countries met in Paris in January 1919 for the Peace Conference. The conference was dominated by three leaders: the newly elected British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, the French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau and the American President Woodrow Wilson
- Each country had different hopes for the outcome of the peace treaty and as such discussions took time and were quite drawn out. The Treaty of Versailles was signed on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1919 at the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles
- Pupils could be given the opportunity to create their own peace treaty or have discussions around the different guidelines and sanctions they would put in place to ensure a lasting peace
- Share the key points of the Treaty of Versailles. Pupils could compare their guidelines and sanctions with what was actually put in place. Allow pupils to share and discuss their reaction to the Treaty of Versailles. How do they think countries on both sides would have reacted at the time?
- It should be established that Germany was shocked at how strict the treaty was and although people on both sides felt it was quite harsh it was considered necessary

## **Conclusion:**

- Recap the key points from the lesson
- Ask pupils to consider why the centenary of the Armistice is being commemorated and reflect on how the signing of the Armistice may have impacted their lives today

## **Suggestions for differentiation and further work**

The activities in this lesson plan are suggestions only and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of the needs of their class, and can extend it with further work if needed:

- Teachers should bear in mind that this lesson will address the themes of conflict and loss which some pupils may find distressing. You will need to decide what is appropriate to teach depending on individual circumstances
- This lesson lends itself to various opportunities for writing. In addition to, or instead of discussion in the lesson, pupils could, for example, produce their own set of newspaper reports about the events leading up to, on and after 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918
- War Memorials Trust's 'Changes to war memorials and Remembrance' secondary lesson plan examines some of the changes to Remembrance commemorations which have taken place since Armistice Day 1918 and could help pupils explore Remembrance traditions
- Having looked at how World War I ended pupils could look at the legacy of the war. This may include the public wave of remembrance which followed and led to two thirds of the 100,000 war memorials in the UK being created. Further guidance on how this may be taught is available in War Memorials Trust's secondary lesson plans including 'What are war memorials?' and 'Visiting a war memorial'.
- There may be the opportunity for pupils to participate in local events which mark the centenary of the Armistice

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