

Primary activities: Local war memorial committee



Background: The news of the Armistice which brought World War I to an end on 11th November 1918 spread quickly to those at home in the UK and in other countries. People were jubilant and the news was celebrated. Huge crowds gathered in places like Trafalgar Square and the Mall in London and church bells, which had remained silent for most of the war, rang out in celebration. However, alongside this joy, there was a huge amount of sadness for those who had lost loved ones during the war. Over 900,000 in the British Army were killed and many more were injured meaning nearly every community was affected in some way.

Those who lost their lives during World War I were either buried near where they fell or had no known grave. For families at home this meant they were unable to have a funeral to say goodbye to their loved one and did not have a grave nearby which they could visit. The British government did not allow the fallen to be repatriated (brought home) even once the war was over. This left many communities with the desire to commemorate those they had lost so that they had a place nearby where they could mourn and remember. Many would have been unable to afford to travel to the cemetery abroad where their loved one was buried. Furthermore, there was a desire to ensure that the sacrifice made by so many and the events of World War I were not forgotten. Local war memorial committees were set up to make decisions about, and raise funds for, war memorials which would serve as this permanent reminder.

The activities set out below allow pupils to explore the types of decisions which a war memorial committee may have made in 1919 and subsequent years by taking on the role of someone who was part of the committee. Pupils will be given the opportunity to consider what form their local memorial should take, where it should be located, who it should commemorate and how it could be funded.

The amount of time spent on each activity depends on how in depth you wish to go and also to what extent your pupils engage. The activities can split and carried out over a number of sessions to fit with the timetable of your class. They should be adapted to suit the needs of your class as appropriate. Pupils can come in and out of the activities and their role as a member of the war memorial committee so that the knowledge and skills that they need to complete the task can be taught to them directly.

Following the centenary of the end of World War I in 2018, thoughts turn to the 100th anniversary of many local war memorials. These activities could form part of a local history topic which focuses on the school's local memorial and highlights the importance of the memorial 100 years on from when it was unveiled. These activities could also be taught in the lead up to Remembrance Day to help pupils understand the importance of war memorials and commemoration.

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Suitable for: Key stage 2

Inquiry questions: Pupils will learn:

- How do we remember people from the past and is it important?
- Why were war memorials created?
- Who is commemorated on war memorials?
- Who decided what war memorials looked like and where they are located?
- How were war memorials funded?

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Give reasons why war memorials were created
- Explain the types of decisions which were made by war memorial committees
- Empathise with people whose relatives died during World War I and their desire to create a war memorial to remember them

Resources:

- [‘Teachers’ Armistice primary helpsheet’](#)
- Images showing contrasting emotions following the Armistice in 1918
- Primary resource sheet [‘Why were war memorials created?’](#)
- Roll or large sheet of paper and drawing materials
- Images of war memorials from www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/gallery
- War memorial design brief (created by pupils) as a poster or newspaper notice
- Materials for designing a war memorial (paper, pencils, other art materials)
- Junk modelling materials, building blocks, lego or clay (activity 9)

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Suggested activities:

Activity 1: The end of World War I

Understanding the emotions following the news that World War I had come to an end.

If pupils are not familiar with the events of World War I some work on this may be required to develop their understanding either before or after this activity. War Memorials Trust's '[1. Armistice Day 1918 Primary lesson plan](#)' may be useful.

- Show pupils an image of jubilant scenes following the news of the Armistice e.g. people celebrating on board a bus. Pupils expand the scene using a few minutes of spontaneous improvisation.
 - What other celebrations do they think will be taking place in the street where the photograph was taken?
 - What will they do to show the joy and jubilation they are feeling?
- Bring the improvisation to an end and ask pupils to freeze. You may wish to take a few photographs of the pupils in their final positions which could be used to expand the original image
- Show pupils a photograph of a large Commonwealth War Graves Commission cemetery or similar. Establish that the joy and jubilation felt by many was tinged with sadness because of the personal losses that people had experienced
- Pupils to create a frozen pose which reflects the contrasting emotions relatives may have felt. Go round with a 'microphone' or 'spotlight' pausing at individual pupils who can bring their pose to life or say a word or phrase to shed more light on their frozen pose
- Conscience alley: pupils to be split into two sides which form an alley or corridor. One side will focus on the joy and jubilation, the other on the sadness. Pupils should come up with a short phrase as if they are someone's conscious. This could be linked to the war being over, those who lost their lives or that they will never see their father, husband, uncle, cousin again. Select someone to walk down the alley. Pupils to whisper their phrase as they pass. You may choose to repeat this with different people walking through the alley

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Activity 2: Our local area after World War I

Understanding the layout of the village or town where the war memorial will be erected.

If this forms part of a local history topic you may wish to look at historic local maps to see how the area around the school has changed since World War I up to the present day.

- Landscaping activity: on a roll or large sheet of paper pupils create the village or town where the war memorial is to be erected. Ideally this should be based on the area around the school but discussions may be needed about the sort of buildings and other areas which are relevant to a place in 1919. Pupils may include roads, shops, houses, streets, school, church, bus stops, train station, fields and other open spaces, river or pond as appropriate. They may wish to mark houses where someone went to war and did not return
 - Pupils can draw directly onto the roll of paper or draw onto smaller pieces of paper which are then added to the larger piece. The latter enables pupils to move parts of the landscape around as the map develops
 - The map which is created can be referred back to during later activities particularly when the war memorial committee decide upon a site to erect the war memorial

It is important that before pupils embarking on activity 3 pupils understand that the bodies of the fallen were not repatriated following World War I. Therefore relatives did not have a grave to visit locally. As a result communities wanted something or somewhere they could visit to remember those who had not returned. War Memorials Trust's Primary resource sheet '[Why were war memorials created?](#)' which accompanies '[What are war memorials? Primary lesson plan](#)' could be used. War memorial committees were set up to make decisions about the creation of a local war memorial. It would also be helpful for pupils to have some understanding of the different types of war memorials. Images in the Gallery section of www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups highlight the variety. Alternatively this is also covered in War Memorial Trust's '[What are war memorials? Primary lesson plan](#)'.

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Activity 3: First war memorial committee meeting

Improvised discussions which help pupils build their understanding of what may have been talked about at the initial meeting of a war memorial committee.

- Pupils take on the roles of people who may have sat on a local war memorial committee. This could include the local mayor, councillors, vicar, relatives of the fallen and local business owners. Some discussion around the thoughts and feelings of the different members of the committee could occur before embarking on the improvisation activity
 - You may consider altering the layout of the classroom to reflect a committee meeting
- Teacher should open the meeting in role as the war memorial committee chairperson. Words similar to “I am pleased to welcome you to this inaugural meeting of [name of village or town] war memorial committee. Thank you for making time in your busy schedule to attend. The purpose of this evening is to start to consider what would be a suitable war memorial to remember those from [name of village or town] who lost their lives during the Great War and where it should be located. I invite you all to share your thoughts” should suffice
 - An agenda for the meeting could be displayed and a pupil(s) could be asked to take notes or minutes during the meeting
- Allow the improvised discussion to take place and develop with minimal intervention enabling pupils to share the viewpoint of the person they are in role as. If someone shares a suggestion which others do not agree with it is fine for pupils to disagree and respond with a counter point. Discussions should centre around the type of war memorial which would be suitable and where it would be located. The map created in activity 2 could be referred to
- Bring the meeting to a close with a brief summary of the ideas discussed. If there was a general consensus over what should be done this should be noted. Possible actions or discussion points for future meetings, such as commissioning an architect to design the memorial, how to raise funds and the criteria for the names which will be included, should also be mentioned

Following this activity it may be possible for pupils to view minutes from local war memorial committee meetings which took place after World War I. This will depend on the availability of parish or local records. Occasionally these can be viewed online or you may need to visit local archives or museums.

Activity 4: Design poster for public subscription

Identifying ways in which the local community could contribute to the war memorial fund.

Pupils should understand that war memorials were paid for by the local community through public subscription. Often this could be through door-to-door collections or requests for donations. In some instances local events were held to raise money. It was also possible for wealthier residents to make large donations or donate an area of land where the war memorial was then located. The inscriptions on some war memorials acknowledge the raising of funds through public subscription.

- ‘Have you heard the news’ game:
 - pupils think about how communities in 1919 and subsequent years may have gone about raising money to pay for a local war memorial
 - pupils, in role as local residents, move around the room stopping occasionally as they pass to say “have you heard the news that a war memorial is going to be built”. They should indicate that they understand that they (the local residents) will be asked to raise funds to help with the costs. If they have an idea about how to raise the money or a reaction to the news that a war memorial is being created they should share it
 - try to allow pupils to talk to several of their peers before bringing the game to an end
- Set pupils the task of a designing a poster which encourages local residents at the time to contribute to the fund for a war memorial. They may choose to create a poster which advertises an event such as a tea dance, summer fete, whist drive or cake sale from which the proceeds will go to the war memorial fund. Or it may be a poster persuading and encouraging residents to contribute directly to the war memorial fund. When creating their poster pupils should consider:
 - why the creation of a war memorial is important
 - what phrases can be included to grab peoples’ attention
 - what persuasive language should be used
 - what images to include
 - how to make a poster eye-catching and impactful

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Activity 5: Devise a commission for an architect

Creating a brief for architects wishing to submit a war memorial design.

- As a whole class, reflect on some of the discussions which took place during the initial war memorial committee meeting (activity 3). What were the thoughts of the community about the type of war memorial which would be suitable and where it should be located?
 - You may wish to refer to the minutes if a pupil(s) was tasked with taking these
 - At this point it is okay for the ideas to be quite broad e.g. a large stone monument, something which incorporates the statue of a soldier, enough space for the names of the fallen, something practical e.g. hall or library
- Draw up a list of bullet points which an architect, sculptor or other artist should follow when creating a design for the local war memorial. The brief may include the location, the material it is to be made from e.g. local stone, the shape of the war memorial, the inscription, specific elements to include such as a cross, soldier, wreath
 - It may be helpful to have some images of war memorials on display during this activity. These can be found at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/gallery

The brief which pupils create will be used in activity 6 when they are asked to design a war memorial.

Activity 6: War memorial designs

Creating a war memorial design which follows the given brief.

- The brief which was drawn up by pupils in activity 5 should be presented to them as a poster or in the form of a notice in a local newspaper. The poster or notice should invite local architects, sculptors and artists to submit a design for a war memorial in [name of village or town] which follows the given brief by a set date e.g. 5th April 1920
- In role as architects, sculptors or artists, pupils to create a war memorial design. These will be used as part of a 'public exhibition' in activity 7

Additional resources linked to designing war memorials created by War Memorials Trust such as '[War memorial designs primary lesson plan](#)' and the primary lesson plans which form the '[Art unit: Great artists and war memorials](#)' could be used alongside this activity.

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Activity 7: Public exhibition of war memorial designs

Browsing the exhibition to select the war memorial design.

- The designs which pupils created in activity 6 should be displayed as if in an exhibition. It may be useful to give each design a number so that the 'local residents' can vote on them
- Pupils take on the role of local residents, this could be the role that they had during the initial war memorial committee meeting
- Pupils to enter the public exhibition. If this is in the classroom you may choose to take the class out of the room and then re-enter so that there is a clear point where they take on the role of local resident
 - It may be necessary to remind pupils that they are viewing designs by 'architects and sculptors' who answered the call for war memorial designs not ones which were created by their friends
- Pupils to view the designs and comment on them in role. Pupils could be paired up so that they explore the exhibition together
 - Which do they like and why?
 - Which fit the brief that was put together?
 - Which would be the most suitable design for the location?
- As they exit the exhibition pupils can vote for their preferred design
 - If numbered, pupils can write this on a small piece of paper and drop it in a voting box or basket

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Activity 8: War memorial committee meeting

Improvised discussions confirming the decisions about the design, location and cost of the war memorial and consideration of who should be commemorated.

Pupils should understand that there was no central list of casualties for each area. Therefore this information had to be collected. This could be done by door-to-door post, word of mouth, through announcements in the local press or local noticeboards and church announcements.

- Teacher to open the war memorial committee meeting in a similar way to last time (activity 3) explaining what will be discussed (final design, location, costs, criteria for names being added). Like the last meeting, you may choose to display an agenda and have a pupil(s) take notes or minutes
- If the war memorial designs were voted on, the results of the vote could be revealed so that the committee know which design has been selected
- Using the agenda and your role as chairperson, guide the improvised discussion of the pupils, in role as members of the war memorial committee, through the various points and decisions which need to be made:
 - confirm the location of the war memorial. You may wish to refer to the landscape/map which was created in activity 2
 - encourage discussions around the cost of the memorial (these do not have to be exact). It is possible for pupils to refer to the amount that has been collected and whether this is more or less than is needed. If it is more discussions around what could be done with the extra money could take place. If there is a shortfall discussions around whether the design needs to be altered to reduce costs or if further fundraising activities can take place should be discussed
 - devise criteria to help decide who should be named on the war memorial. This is most likely to be a geographical boundary but pupils may also consider whether those who served and returned home should be named in addition to those who died. Ideas about how to collect the names may also be considered at this point
- Bring the meeting to a close with a brief summary of the ideas discussed

After the meeting when the decision on design and location is confirmed pupils could add a simple image of the war memorial to the landscape created in activity 2.

The discussions around the cost the war memorial could feed in to pupils' maths work. The cost of different materials (e.g. enough stone for a war memorial which stands at 0.5m high), labour costs could be provided. Pupils could then work out the cost of a memorial of a given height.

Following this activity you may decide that pupils should research those who are named on the local war memorial. War Memorials Trust's '[Researching names on war memorials](#)' Primary lesson plan provides guidance on this. While researching, pupils could keep in mind the criteria that may have been applied when selecting which names would be included.

Activity 9: Create the war memorial

Building or sculpting the chosen war memorial design.

- Provide pupils with a copy of the war memorial design chosen by the 'local residents' and approved by the war memorial committee. Explain that they will now be creating a model of the memorial. The model could be created using junk model materials, building blocks/bricks, Lego or could even be sculpted out of clay
 - More able pupils could be asked to create a scale model. They should note the actual height of the war memorial and the scale they have used

The completed models could be photographed in front of a background showing the chosen location in the local area. This might be used as part of the newspaper article pupils will write following activity 11.

Activity 10: Plan the unveiling of the war memorial

Improvised discussions planning the unveiling of the war memorial.

- Teacher to open the war memorial committee meeting explaining that during this meeting the ceremony or service during which the war memorial is unveiled will be discussed and planned. As with previous meetings, you may choose to display an agenda and have a pupil(s) take notes or minutes
- Using the agenda and your role as chairperson, guide the improvised discussion of the pupils, in role as members of the war memorial committee, through the various points and decisions which need to be made. Elements of the service which need to be considered include:
 - who to invite. This might include local dignitaries, relatives of the fallen, local clergy, people from the services including those who returned from the Great War
 - what will occur during the service? Suggestions may include:
 - laying wreathes – who will do this
 - prayers and hymns (if appropriate)
 - readings (poems)
 - 2 minutes silence with the Last Post and Reveille
 - reading out of names (could be taken from existing war memorial)
 - When it will take place. Is there a significant date or time which could be used
 - It is important to note that many war memorials were unveiled a few years after the end of World War I as it took time to raise funds, make decisions and for someone to create the memorial as their work was in high demand. You may wish to look at when the local war memorial was unveiled to gauge when would be an appropriate date but it may be 11th November, the date of a Battle at which a lot of those on the war memorial died or just a date when the Bishop was available
- Bring the meeting to a close with a brief summary of the ideas discussed

Following this activity pupils could produce an order of service or create a poem or reading suitable for the unveiling ceremony.

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Activity 11: Unveiling ceremony

Carrying out and reporting on the war memorial unveiling ceremony.

- In small groups pupils to dramatise the unveiling ceremony which was planned in activity 10
 - You might like to make the list of names, the Last Post and the Reveille available to pupils should they wish to incorporate these in their dramatisation
 - If pupils are expected to include quotes from those who attended the unveiling in their newspaper report, you may choose to collect these following the dramatisation and display them somewhere
- The dramatisation should lead to pupils writing a newspaper article which reports the unveiling. It may be necessary for you to directly teach how to write a newspaper report and what it should include if this has not already been covered
 - You may be able to access the actual newspaper report of the school's local war memorial being unveiled through online sources (British Newspaper Archive, IWM's War Memorials Register, Historic England's List), local archives or parish records

Support/extension:

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.

Primary lesson plans available at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org can be used throughout these activities to ensure pupils have the required knowledge to act in an 'expert' capacity as a member of a war memorial committee

Ideas for further work:

There are many opportunities to extend this lesson and link it with other areas of the curriculum.

- Local history: if these activities are being taught in the lead up to the centenary of the unveiling of the school's local war memorial, pupils work may be used to commemorate this. As part of this commemoration pupils could:
 - visit the local war memorial and carry out an act of Remembrance and read pieces of creative writing linked to remembering the fallen
 - create an exhibition about the local war memorial and those it remembers. This could be an exhibition for parents or even the local community
 - if pupils have researched the names of the fallen and been able to identify where someone named on the memorial lived with a large degree of certainty, you may like to ask pupils to write to residents who now live in the same house to tell them this

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