

# Planning a visit to a war memorial



War Memorials Trust

This helpsheet is intended to guide school staff who are planning to visit a local war memorial with pupils as part of their studies. The secondary school lesson plans that form part of War Memorials Trust's Learning Programme contain several opportunities for such a visit, and it is beneficial for young people to see a memorial and apply the learning they have undertaken back in the classroom. This guidance aims to give general advice about arranging a visit and ensuring all pupils get the most out of it.

## Arrangements before your visit

As with all educational visits, the lead adult must plan all aspects of the trip carefully and conduct a full risk assessment of the journey and activities to be undertaken beforehand. If possible, carry out a preliminary visit to the war memorial before taking pupils there, to identify any potential hazards around the site, possible teaching points that you can incorporate into your planning and issues that may arise during the visit. Ensure that you have adequate staffing to supervise pupils and ensure their safety and good behaviour on the journey to and from school and at all times during the visit.

## Behaviour

The vast majority of young people who take part in visits to war memorials behave very well and gain a great deal from participating in the visit, and War Memorials Trust is always delighted to hear of such successes. However, concerns are sometimes raised by the public about the perceived lack of respect some young people have for war memorials and what they represent, so while we do not wish to discourage young people from engaging with their local war memorial, it is worth setting out clear expectations for behaviour and establishing a code of conduct before setting out on a visit so that such concerns do not apply to your pupils. In particular, please encourage all visitors to the war memorial to remember the following:

- Many war memorials were erected after the First World War, with names often being added after the Second World War. As such many are over 90 years old and are significant historic structures. The actual fabric of the memorial may have suffered from age and weathering and care should be taken not to damage it in any way.
- War memorials were, and in some cases continue to be, the only focal point for the grief of those who were bereaved during wartime, and visitors should remember the emotional as well as the historic significance of the memorial. Therefore, please do not allow pupils to disrespect the memorial by making inappropriate comments, sitting, standing on, or otherwise using the structure itself, running around near the memorial or damaging it in any way. Encourage them to reflect on what the war memorial means to many people and the conflict and deaths that led to its creation in the first place.

## What to do during your visit

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Ideally, a visit to a war memorial should take place after pupils have learned something about their general history and different forms, so that they can apply what they have learned and identify particular features of 'their' memorial (please see War Memorials Trust's 'Teachers' information about war memorials' secondary helpsheet for more information). During a visit, get them to identify what type of memorial it is (cross, plaque, cenotaph etc) and notice its appearance (for example what materials it is made from, what images, statues, decorative features it has). It may be useful for future lessons for pupils to sketch or photograph all or part of the memorial, provided the memorial's location makes it safe and practical for them to do so. Look at the inscriptions on the war memorial and consider what they tell us about the people who fought and the locality in which they lived. Further suggestions relating to specific learning objectives can be found in War Memorials Trust's secondary lesson plans.

### **What to do after your visit**

Various suggestions for further work relating to your local memorial can be found in War Memorials Trust's secondary lesson plans. In particular, researching the names on the war memorial can be an effective way of helping pupils to understand its significance and give them a deeper understanding of the personal meaning of the war memorial to many people. By researching the names, pupils get to know the individual stories of the fallen, which can make them seem more 'real' to pupils than a name engraved on a memorial.

War memorials can also be a useful tool for studying the local area, its geography and how it has changed over time since the memorial was created. Further details are given in the secondary lesson plans from War Memorials Trust.

Two projects in which War Memorials Trust is involved can provide opportunities for further work. War Memorials Online ([www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk)) is a way for the public, including young people, to get involved with recording information about their local war memorial. The website allows users to upload photographs, check and add condition and location information. Pupils can take photos of a war memorial during a visit and then help to check to see if the memorial is already recorded by War Memorials Online. If it is not, they can add a record of it to the website. This will help War Memorials Trust identify the UK's war memorials and their condition, allowing us to allocate our resources efficiently. More information about how young people can get involved in the project can be found in the Youth Groups section of our learning website ([www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org)).

The other project is In Memoriam 2014. This aims to protect war memorials that are at risk of theft or vandalism by marking them with a forensic liquid called SmartWater. Further information about this is available at [www.inmemoriam2014.org](http://www.inmemoriam2014.org), and information about how young people can get involved in this important work can be found in the Youth Groups section of our learning website ([www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org)).