

Assembly: Threats to war memorials



Outline: Having learned what war memorials are and why they were and still are important to communities, this assembly brings the issue right into the present day by showing pupils some of the threats they face. This can be used to introduce pupils to issues such as community and responsibility for war memorials and how they might play a part in this, which can then be followed up in further lessons by pupils carrying out condition surveys of their local war memorials. This outline contains the information you will need; you may wish to adapt the format depending on the number of pupils.

Suggested timing: 20 to 30 minutes

Suitable for: Key Stages 3 and 4

Resources: 'Teachers' information about war memorials' secondary help sheet, 'Current issues involving war memorials' secondary help sheet, accompanying PowerPoint.

Suggested teaching:

Introduction:

Slide 2: Review what war memorials are and why they were created. Most pupils should understand this, especially if you have previously used War Memorials Trust's assembly, 'What are war memorials?' If you want to explain in more depth, key points can be found in our help sheet, 'Teachers' information about war memorials.' You may need to allow extra time for this.

Key question 1: What do war memorials represent?

- Slide 3: Show pictures of war memorials and inscriptions and ask pupils what they think the memorials represent – e.g. bravery, sacrifice, grief, respect. This is a good opportunity to get pupils' opinions on war memorials and their significance, which may help make some later points clearer.
- War memorials were created because many families did not have a grave for their loved ones and so it was a way of remembering the dead and provided a physical place/object they could visit to remember the person they had lost. The war memorial was therefore extremely emotionally important to the community as well as being a reminder of past events and history.
- Slide 4: As the World Wars are move beyond living memory war memorials also serve as a reminder of these conflicts and a link with the past, allowing subsequent and future generations to 'remember' despite not being directly affected by events. Their importance, therefore, has altered but not diminished over time.
- Many war memorials are also sources of information, both about the people they commemorate and our artistic and architectural past. Many are listed for this reason. A war memorial can sometimes be the only record of casualty names and as such it is important to preserve it to keep this record.

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Key question 2: Why are war memorials sometimes a target for theft or vandalism?

- Slide 5: Show a war memorial that has had elements stolen and repeat the question about what the memorial represents – how does the theft change the memorial and its meaning?
- Show a video of a news report about this or other incidences of vandalism – examples can be found on War Memorials Trust's YouTube channel.
- War memorials have increasingly become targets for metal thieves due to the rising prices of scrap metal. Many war memorials contain metal, such as plaques bearing names and inscriptions or sculptures, which are often a crucial part, or the entirety, of the memorial and their loss can be devastating for the community. A memorial can be the only existing record of names and that if these are lost that record of sacrifice is lost forever.
- Slide 6: War memorials can also be damaged through inappropriate use, even when this is unintentional. Common examples are memorials that have been damaged by people cycling or skateboarding on or around it.

Key question 3: What other problems face war memorials?

- Slide 7: Some memorials are also affected by non-malicious damage. Many war memorials were erected in the aftermath of World War I and as such are around 90 years old. The time passed since then has caused some memorials to age and weather, and changes to the local community and area around some memorials, as well as difficulties in identifying who is responsible for memorials, can mean they become neglected. This can mean they need works done to repair them.

Key question 4: What can we do to help protect war memorials?

- Slide 8: Encourage pupils to be vigilant and report any anti-social behaviour that they may notice and treat a memorial and the area around it appropriately. A war memorial that is obviously cared for and a focal point in a community is less likely to be targeted by thieves or vandals.
- Young people can promote local awareness of the memorial by finding out about it and the people it remembers. (This could become an extended project, with pupils researching names or the memorial's history and presenting it to members of the wider community. Further ideas are included in War Memorials Trust's lesson plans and work can be uploaded to the Project Showcase on our learning website.)
- In Memoriam 2014 is a campaign to protect memorials at risk of theft or damage by marking them with a forensic liquid called SmartWater. Pupils can get involved by writing to the custodians of their local memorial and alerting them to the campaign. If your school is involved with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme or Cadets they can also get involved.
- There is more information about the In Memoriam project and involving young people at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/projects.
- Slide 9: War Memorials Online (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk) is a website which allows anyone to add information about war memorials. This includes details of the type and location of the memorial, information about its condition and photographs of it. War Memorials Trust encourages young people to take part in this important project, and teaching resources helping them to do this are available on our website at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/projects.
- The information added to War Memorials Online helps War Memorials Trust identify those memorials that require help and support the custodians in carrying out the necessary works, so it is crucial that we have reliable information, and young people can be a great help in this.

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Conclusion

- Summarise the key points of the assembly. By the end of it pupils should have an understanding of the significance of war memorials, some of the reasons they are at risk, and what they and others can do about this.

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