

**Background:** This lesson uses some of Kent's war memorials to explore the historical importance of war memorials and their emotional significance to communities, both when they were created and now, and the resulting impact of vandalism and other damage to war memorials. The memorials that form the focus for the lesson are a drinking fountain in Cliftonville, Margate, which has in the past suffered several times from graffiti, and the Destiny memorial in Ramsgate which has also been vandalised and has suffered the effects of weathering.

**Suitable for:** Upper Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3

**Learning objectives:** Pupils will learn:

- Why war memorials were important to communities in the past
- Why memorials continue to be important to communities today
- Some of the problems facing war memorials in Kent today and what can be done about these

**Resources:** case study sheets on the Cliftonville and Destiny memorials, including photographs, teachers' helpsheets from [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org) for background information.

## Introduction

### What are war memorials?

- Before focusing on specific war memorials it is important that pupils have an overall understanding of what war memorials are, why we have them and when most of them were created. This will provide context for considering their ongoing importance.
- There is guidance on teaching this in other lesson plans from War Memorials Trust, especially the 'What are war memorials?' primary and secondary lessons, and in War Memorials Trust's helpsheets for primary and secondary teachers.
- Younger pupils will probably have some knowledge of the First and Second World Wars and it is sufficient to explain that most of our war memorials were created after the First World War.
- While it is true that around two-thirds of the UK's war memorials commemorate the First World War, you may want to point out to older pupils that many were also created earlier, in response to the Boer War and other conflicts, but that the First World War was a turning point that led to many more memorials than there were previously. The aftermath of the First World War also remains the biggest wave of commemoration ever seen in the UK.

## Suggested teaching points and activities

### Why were war memorials important when they were first created?

- Having established that many of the UK's war memorials were created after the First World War, discuss **why** this was and why community based memorials were so important to many people at that time. The main points to ensure pupils understand are:
  - ◇ The scale and impact of the First World War and the way it affected the wider population compared to previous wars.
  - ◇ The number of casualties of the First World War, which was unprecedented and led to a strong call in most communities across the UK for war memorials to act as a permanent reminder and mark of respect for those who had been lost. Highlight the fact that many have inscriptions calling for future generations – like your pupils – to continue to remember.
  - ◇ The fact that the government did not allow bodies to be repatriated and that many casualties were missing and never found, and that therefore for most families who lost relatives there was no funeral and no grave to act as a focal point for their grief. War memorials therefore provided this focal point and, often, the only place where their relative's name was recorded.
- You may wish to incorporate work that really helps pupils understand these ideas. For example,

you could use photographs of battlefield cemeteries to illustrate the numbers of casualties or, if you know the proportion of the local population that went to war, illustrate this by counting out the equivalent number of pupils in the class. A local example you could use is Knowlton (further information and photographs at [www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/node/161152](http://www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/node/161152)) —out of a population of 39, 12 men volunteered and the village was subsequently named the UK's 'Bravest Village.' Drama techniques may also help pupils explore community feeling at the time.

### **Why are war memorials important today?**

- Having established why war memorials were created in such large numbers after the First World War, remind pupils that the war began 100 years ago. For younger pupils you may want to use a timeline or other strategy to help pupils understand how much time this is.
- Ask them whether, with the passing of this amount of time, they think the importance of war memorials has diminished.
- After discussing pupils' opinions on this, explain that many people believe that war memorials are still as important as ever even though their function has changed over time (we don't directly remember the things and people commemorated but they help us learn about them, show respect for those that were involved and are a link to important events in the past). Some people may still have relatives named on war memorials and so for some there is still a very personal importance.
- Furthermore, war memorials are often the only record of the names of those who served in the wars from a particular community, and if they are lost that information can be difficult to recover.

### **Damage to Kent's war memorials**

- Explain that, despite war memorials still being important, they are sometimes targets for theft, particularly metal theft, and vandalism, and suffer problems caused by their age and lack of maintenance. Show the pictures of the Cliftonville memorial included in the case study resources, explain (or let them read) the information about the memorial in the case study sheet, and draw their attention to the graffiti around the base and pedestal of the fountain.
- Pupils should explore their reactions to this and discuss what they think of the fact that this has happened to the memorial – their opinions may vary and raise interesting points.
- You could also explore **why** pupils think war memorials are vandalised in this way especially with the centenary of the First World War taking place.
- Show pictures of the Destiny memorial included with the case study sheet for that memorial and explain that it was vandalised soon after it was unveiled (in contrast to the Cliftonville memorial which was damaged recently, in 2014). Details of this are given in the case study sheet. Explore pupils' reactions to the fact that vandalism has been a problem for war memorials for some time.
- Get pupils to consider the impact such vandalism has (or had in the past) on different groups within the community, such as those related to the people commemorated by the memorial (the Cliftonville memorial was commissioned by the family of the individual it remembers so would have a great personal significance to them), veterans of the wars commemorated and other residents of the community, both at the time they were unveiled and now. Drama or writing tasks 'in character' can be a useful way of approaching this.
- The Destiny memorial is also an example of a memorial that has suffered from lack of maintenance and exposure to weathering, as outlined in the case study sheet. This is worth highlighting to pupils as a different sort of damage affecting memorials because of their age and location rather than vandalism, so that they understand that not all problems to do with war memorials are caused by deliberate damage.

### **Other war memorials**

- At this stage explain some of the wider context of these issues. Theft has also historically been a problem for war memorials, with metal theft being a particular issue in recent years. Cases of this peaked in 2011 with 40 cases of theft from war memorials, but have dropped to just four cases in 2014. Vandalism has also decreased, from 18 cases in 2013 to 10 in 2014.
- Explain how these issues are being dealt with and what pupils can do to help. For older pupils in particular this could be a way of getting them involved in a community project. For example, projects such as War Memorials Online and In Memoriam 2014 aim to record information about and provide protection for war memorials and so help us ensure that they are kept in good condition for future generations. There is further information about these projects and other activities that pupils can do to help care for local war memorials at

[www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/projects](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/youth-groups/projects), and you could extend this lesson to incorporate some work around these projects if suitable.

## Conclusion

- Sum up the key points of discussion about why war memorials like the Cliftonville fountain and Destiny memorial were and are important and the impact problems like vandalism can have.
- If you are teaching this lesson during the centenary of the First World War highlight this anniversary to pupils and explain that the passing of this war from living memory means it is even more important that war memorials are cared for and the people they commemorate remembered. War memorials can be the only record of the names of people from a community who were involved in the war and so damage to or loss of these can lead to this important information being lost. Encourage pupils to consider the historical and emotional significance of war memorials and to make an effort to look after them.

## Support/Extension:

The activities in this plan are suggestions only, and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of the needs of their class.

- It may be appropriate to have adult support for some pupils when they are exploring the reasons for memorials being important to a community, to focus their discussions and help them understand the feelings involved. Cards with 'emotions' words and pictures may help with the selection of appropriate responses.
- More able pupils could have the opportunity to prepare a more formal presentation of the reasons for people wanting a memorial, or research the background to the creation of a particular memorial in the local area. They could be given the task of presenting to the class, in role as someone raising support for a war memorial, the reasons why one is wanted by the community.

## Ideas for further work:

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

- Literacy: The issues covered in the lesson provide a context for persuasive writing. Pupils could demonstrate their knowledge by writing an article for a local paper or letters to the community, explaining why war memorials continue to be important and why we should look after them.
- Citizenship: It would be possible for older pupils to use the news reports of thefts and vandalism to examine how the media presents information, and to analyse statistics related to war memorial theft and vandalism. War Memorials Trust's main website, [www.warmemorials.org/news](http://www.warmemorials.org/news), contains various news releases some of which relate to vandalism and theft from war memorials.
- RE: the idea of the importance of war memorials to a community can be linked to their role in the ritual of Remembrance, which is explored further for younger in War Memorials Trust's general primary lesson, 'What is Remembrance?' and older pupils in our secondary lesson, 'Changes to war memorials and Remembrance' and the idea that, for many bereaved families, the war memorial replaced a gravestone and a funeral service. War memorials can therefore be used when researching the meaning of these rites of passage.

For further information and resources please contact the Learning Officer at:  
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