What can we learn from Sussex war memorials?

War Memorials Trust

Background: The focus of this session is to look at what war memorials themselves tell us about the people from the local area in the past and the events which are commemorated on them. This is a template which can be used to examine any war memorial in Sussex. If you do not have access to a local memorial then War Memorials Trust's war memorial case studies can be used. This lesson can be used to help teach the **local history element of the National Curriculum.** Pupils are encouraged to consider war memorials as sources of historical information which can be used to help pose and answer historical questions about the local area, its people and what happened to them. If you plan to visit your local memorial as part of this you will need to consider the time involved with this. This lesson is particularly helpful as an introduction to activities like researching names on war memorials. There are suggestions in the Ideas for further work section for how to continue the lesson.

Suitable for: Key Stage 2

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:
- That war memorials can be used to find out about the past
- What information may be given on a war memorial, and that this varies

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:
- Explain what we can find out from war memorials
- Ask and begin to answer questions about a war memorial and the people names on it

Resources:
- 'Teachers' information about war memorials' helpsheet
- 'Planning a visit to a war memorial' primary helpsheet
- Case studies of Sussex war memorials available from www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org
- Photographs of your local memorial if using this as a focus

Introduction:

What are war memorials?
- Review what war memorials are and their continuing importance to communities especially if teaching this during the centenary of World War I or other anniversaries. A brief recap of the relevant points from the 'What are war memorials?' general lesson plan from War Memorials Trust should be sufficient, if this has been used. Alternatively, discussing the main points on our 'Teachers' information on war memorials' primary helpsheet should ensure that pupils have a good overview of key information about war memorials
- Ask pupils to write down questions about the wars that the memorials you are looking at commemorate (likely to be World War I and II) and the people who were involved in those wars

Information that can be seen on war memorials
- Give groups different photographs of your local war memorial or photographs of one of the Sussex war memorials for which War Memorials Trust provides a case study. Allow pupils 5 minutes to look at the pictures and write down what they can see and the information that they can gain from the war memorial itself. Encourage pupils to look at the actual written information on the war memorial such as who it commemorates, who erected the memorial, some of the places fought in and the community's attitude towards those who died as well as the design and what this tells us. The case studies provide more interesting details which could be helpful to refer to
- Other Sussex war memorials that have interesting information and could be included here are:
  - Buxted (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/106665), a war memorial with a rather unusual lantern design which has two civilians recorded on the memorial in addition to those who served
  - Amberley and Houghton (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/229415), which has an inscription which details who erected the memorial and the community's attitude towards those who died and World War I
  - Battle of Boar's Head (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/251174), a war memorial in Worthing which was unveiled on 30ᵗʰ June 2016 on the 100 year anniversary of the battle. The memorial includes a map of the battle site
  - Hastings and St Leonards (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/120486), a Victory sculpture which has the theatres of war engraved in the base and bronze relief panels representing service in the air, on land and at sea
  - Rye Harbour (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/176042), a memorial lychgate at the entrance to the graveyard and grounds of the Church of the Holy Spirit which lists those who served in addition to the fallen
  - East Wittering (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/170051), a war memorial in St Anne's Church which highlights that East Wittering was one of thankful villages of World War I as all of those who went to war returned home safely
  - Midhurst (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk/memorial/107039), a war memorial with a traditional design which records the regiment for each person commemorated
- Throughout this activity, pupils should write down any information they identify which answers their original questions

Suggested teaching points and activities:

What does the war memorial tell us?
- Discuss the information that can be found on the memorials with each group giving information about the war memorial they were looking at. This will vary according to the war memorials being used
- Discuss other questions which they have been able to answer and those they could not answer
- Through doing this activity, pupils should come to understand that all war memorials are different and have different information on them. Depending on their prior knowledge, you may wish to expand on this – war memorials have historically been community creations and as such reflect the individual wishes of the community and how they wanted to commemorate their fallen. Each war memorial is unique as there have never been any rules about what they should look like

- Highlight that, for example, some memorials give only the names of those commemorated whereas others give information such as their rank, age or the year they died. Many memorials give the dates of the conflict being commemorated but this may not always match what we think today e.g. 1914-18 and 1914-19. Some may also give more detailed information about the events in addition to the dates
- Pupils should also come to the conclusion that war memorial designs and inscriptions can often reveal important information but that in order to fully understand wars and know about the people affected, as well as answer all their questions, we need to look at other sources of information alongside the war memorial

Conclusion:
- Discuss with pupils what other sources of information may be required to answer the questions which remain unanswered. Suggestions may include local records, census records, military information and more recent internet sources. Discuss why it is important to find out about war memorials and the people and events they commemorate. Highlight that World War I and II are, or soon will be, beyond living memorial. Objects like war memorials link us to the people and events from the past

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.

- More able pupils could be challenged to look at war memorials where the information they contain is less 'obvious' e.g. where they have to look at the design and interpret what symbols or certain design elements represent.
- Consider if you have any young people with personal connections to active service personnel

Ideas for further work:
There are many opportunities to extend this lesson and link it with other areas of the curriculum:

- As mentioned above, the activities in this lesson provide a useful introduction to activities such as researching the names on one of the memorials used or your local one. This is covered in War Memorials Trust's general lesson plans, which can be applied to war memorials in any area. Researching names on a war memorial or looking at the history of the local area with the war memorial as a starting point incorporates various curriculum areas including history, geography and computing, www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary/pri-lessons/war-memorials-local-area