

4. Why are war memorials important?



War Memorials Trust

Background: This lesson introduces pupils to the ongoing importance of war memorials, and encourages them to consider the role that they could have in their care. During the lesson pupils review the conflicts which led to the creation of so many war memorials and consider the feelings of communities at that time, so gaining an understanding of their personal significance to so many in the past. They will then have the opportunity to examine the controversial issue of threats to memorials from age, neglect, theft and vandalism and the impact this has. This lesson may be used in isolation if pupils have some prior knowledge of the topic, or in conjunction with other plans from War Memorials Trust.

Suitable for: Upper Key Stage 2

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 today

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Explain why we have memorials and why they are important
- Understand some of the problems facing war memorials today.
- Give clear opinions about the importance of war memorials today and listen to the opinions of others.

Resources: Pictures of war memorials, pictures or video of scenes from wars, 'Teachers' information about war memorials,' primary helpsheet, 'Current issues affecting war memorials' primary helpsheet, 'Information on war memorial theft' pupil activity, 'numbers of war memorials in the UK' and timeline cards.

Introduction

What are war memorials?

- Slide 4: Review what war memorials are, and what they are for. Ensure pupils know when many of them were created (see our 'Teachers' information about war memorials' primary helpsheet for information). If this is being used with earlier War Memorials Trust lessons a brief review of these will be sufficient.
- Slide 5: Draw attention to unusual facts to capture interest, for example numbers of memorials in the UK or thankful villages (see our 'Teachers' information about war

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memorials' primary helpsheet for further information). War Memorials Trust's timeline cards and 'numbers of war memorials in the UK' cards could also be printed and used to establish how many there are and when many were created. The timeline can be added to so it shows additional dates that will be meaningful to your pupils.

Suggested teaching points and activities

Why were war memorials important when they were first created?

- Discuss **why** memorials were so important to communities at that time. The main points to include in the discussion are:
 - The scale of the losses during the First World War in particular, which were unprecedented and led to a strong call for war memorials to act as a reminder of 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 therefore for most families who lost relatives there was no funeral and no grave to act as a focal point for their grief.
- 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. Drama can be used to explore community feeling at the time. Other ideas are given in 'Ideas for further work,' below.

Why are war memorials important today?

- Remind pupils that the First World War, when many war memorials were created, began 100 years ago – refer to any centenary events that are going on to put this into context – and discuss whether, with the passing 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 now help us learn about them and remind us of the past). Some people may still have relatives named on war memorials and so for some there is still a personal importance.
- Furthermore, war memorials are often the only record of the names of those who served in the wars and if they are lost that information can be difficult to recover.

Problems facing war memorials

- Slide 6: Show pictures of war memorials that have been vandalised or stolen and explain they show the same memorial before and after theft. Give out the 'Information on war memorial theft' pupil activity.
- Give pupils time to read the information on the sheet, looking for clues that the memorial is important to the community. Discuss any points they do not understand and their opinions about the questions on the back of the sheet.

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- Help pupils to explore the feelings of people affected by these events through drama or discussion in role. Use pictures that represent different types of people connected to the war memorial who may have been affected (e.g. veterans, immediate relatives and descendants of those named) and imagining their 'story' and their thoughts on seeing the war memorial vandalised.
- Pupils should understand the impact of losing a war memorial on the community and know that this could mean we have no record of the names anymore. They should also be aware of the potential issues around replacing materials with others.
- Slide 7: Pupils could debate in groups the different opinions on the topics in the questions from the sheet to practise speaking and listening skills, or plan and write their answers to the questions on the pupil activity (some guidance for planning written answers is provided on this). This could then be incorporated into writing lessons for various genres (see 'Ideas for further work,' below).

Conclusion

- Slide 8: Recap what pupils have learned about memorials and their importance. Use pictures or video footage from wars and discuss why we should still make an effort to remember these conflicts and why war memorials are still important today.
- Highlight the centenary of the start of the First World War and remind pupils that war memorials continue to be important and that they can help to care for them and record them so people know about them. Introduce the In Memoriam 2014 project as an initiative to protect war memorials and briefly recap why this is important (see 'Current issues affecting war memorials' primary helpsheet and the 'In Memoriam 2014' project sheet in the Youth Groups section of www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org). You could also encourage pupils to get involved in adding records of memorials to War Memorials Online (www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk; see the 'War Memorials Online' project sheet in the Youth Groups section of www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org).

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. However, some possibilities for supporting or extending learning are given here.

- 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 children 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.

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Ideas for further work:

This lesson gives pupils an insight into the current issues facing memorials, bringing the topic of these important historic structures into the present day. There are also many further 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, for example, demonstrate their knowledge by writing an article for a local paper or letters to the local community, explaining why war memorials continue to be important and why the community 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.
- **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 in War Memorials Trust's primary lesson, 'What is 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.

Subsequent lessons based on war memorials can also look at how they can be used as a source of information, both on the people they commemorate and the locality in which they are situated. War Memorials Trust's primary lesson 'What can we learn from war memorials?' and subsequent lessons give further suggestions.

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