

Animals in war



War Memorials Trust

Background: War memorials commemorate wars and those affected by them. This includes animals that have made vital contributions to wars and have been affected by conflict alongside humans. These contributions are increasingly recognised and there are various memorials commemorating the role animals have played during wartime. This lesson plan examines some of these memorials, the animals that are commemorated by them and what they did that is now remembered. This can be a useful and accessible way of approaching the subject of war with younger children, through a topic with which they are more familiar. There are various activities suggested here which we have suggested splitting across two lessons of roughly an hour, but there are also suggestions for cross curricular links to extend our suggested lessons further.

Suitable for: Key Stage 2 (could be adapted for Key Stage 1)

Learning objective: During these lessons pupils will learn:

- Some of the types of animals that were involved in the World Wars and what they did to help the war effort
- How and why these animals are now remembered on war memorials

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Understand the contributions of different animals to the war effort
- Know the purpose of war memorials and how animals have been commemorated
- Design a suitable memorial for a chosen type of animal

Resources: pictures of the Animals in War memorial (included on the accompanying information sheet), 'Animals in War' helpsheet for primary teachers.

Introduction:

- Show pupils pictures of the Animals in War memorial in London (these are available on the accompanying information sheet) and ask them what animals they can identify. At this stage do not explain what the memorial is.
- Ask pupils to suggest what the structure could be and what its purpose is. Explain that it is a memorial and what this means (that it helps people remember something or someone). Explain the objectives for the lesson and that they are going to learn why these animals are being remembered.

Suggested teaching points and activities:

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What are war memorials?

- To put this memorial into context, explain to pupils what war memorials are and what they are for. There are various activities that cover these issues in WMT's 'What is Remembrance?' and 'What are war memorials?' primary lesson plans.
- Having explained what war memorials are, explain that they do not only remember people who fought in wars, but also civilians (people who did not fight) and animals that have been affected by wars.

Why are animals remembered on war memorials?

- Use this section to teach pupils about the role of animals in wars. Animals played significant roles in World Wars I and II, as well as other conflicts.
- How you teach this will depend on the age of your class and the materials available to you but pupils should gain an understanding of the roles of horses, both as a means of transport and as part of the cavalry, as well as donkeys, mules, dogs and pigeons. Other species like cats and even glow worms are also represented by the Animals in War memorial and could be included here. They could learn about why animals were needed to carry out certain roles, what they did and the impact of this, how they helped fighting troops and the numbers of animals involved in the conflicts.
- Further information about how these different animals were involved in the World Wars is available in WMT's 'Animals in War' helpsheet for primary teachers.
- By the end of this lesson pupils should have an understanding of what animals did that was important during the World Wars. Following this, they should examine how these animals are remembered now. This is likely to need a separate lesson, but suggested activities are given below.

How is the role of animals in war remembered?

- Depending on when the previous activities were completed, you may need to briefly recap the points above before moving on.
- Ask children to discuss why it is important to remember what happened during the World Wars (this discussion could be general and then focus more specifically on why children feel it is important that animals are remembered too and on the importance of their specific contributions).
- Show photos again of the Animals in War memorial and explain that this was built more recently than many war memorials – in 2004.
- Through discussion analyse its design (photos are available on the Animals in War memorial information sheet). Encourage pupils in particular to suggest what feelings the designer sought to provoke and what they think of when looking at the memorial. There is information about the design that you can use during this discussion on the accompanying 'Animals in War memorial' information sheet.
- Pupils could then be involved in developing their own way of remembering the contribution of animals to wars. This could be a design for a memorial (which, if time and resources allow they could make; further suggestions for this activity can be found in WMT's 'Designing a memorial' primary lesson plan and our 'War memorial epitaphs' activity sheet), written work such as stories or poetry about animals in wartime (see 'Ideas for further work' below about potential cross curricular activities) or other work on what part different animals have played in conflicts, perhaps as part of wider research into those animals.

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Conclusion:

- Depending on which activities you have chosen to do during the lessons, conclude by summarising the key learning points from the lessons and, if relevant, displaying pupils' work.

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.

- While the topic of conflict is generally best suited to older children, this lesson could be adapted for pupils in Key Stage 1. Because animals are a familiar and often motivating subject for young children this lesson could provide an age appropriate way of approaching the subject of World War I and its centenary, which many schools are commemorating.
- Younger children might learn about what animals did during the war by, for example, matching descriptions of different 'jobs' with pictures of the different types of animal.
- Older children could approach this as a group research activity, building on skills learned in literacy and ICT lessons.

Ideas for further work:

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

- Literacy: there are various fiction books suitable for Key Stage 2 and older children that focus on the experiences of animals in World War I, such as *War Horse* and *Soldier Dog*. These can be used as texts for guided reading or as examples of historical stories. Researching different animals can also be the basis for writing reports and information texts, and pupils could use what they have learned to write recounts or letters 'in role' as their choice of animal. Poetry about the experiences of animals in war could be written as a form of memorial.
- ICT: pupils could use their ICT skills to research and present what they have learned.
- Art/Design Technology: Designing a memorial or way of remembering the role of animals in war could combine skills in these subjects.

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