

Why was the First World War also known as The Great War?

Introduction

This lesson uses articles from *Science+Nature* and *The Week Junior* to help pupils answer this question. Teachers and pupils are taken on a topical historical enquiry (in light of forthcoming First World War commemorations), which not only targets aspects of the Key Stage 2 programme of study, including a **study of an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066** and a **local history study**, but also promotes the development of key skills, such as **critical thinking, decision making, analysis** and **evaluation**. There is an opportunity to extend learning beyond the classroom, as well as link to other areas of the curriculum, including English/literacy, maths (using real-life data), geography, science, design and technology (D&T), music and spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development.

Subjects covered

- History
- English
- Maths
- Geography
- Science
- D&T
- Music
- SMSC

Learning objectives

Pupils will:

- know key facts about the First World War
- understand why it was also known as The Great War
- have an opportunity to think critically, summarise factual information, put forward ideas, justify decisions made, as well as work independently and with others.

Key vocabulary

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| • The Great War | • Western Front |
| • artillery | • chemical weapons |
| • stalemate | • Little Willie |
| • ammonia | • Big Willie |
| • fertilisers | • gunfire |
| • war criminal | • gas mask/box respirator |
| • trenches | • tanks |
| • front line | • trench fever |
| • invention | • explosives |
| • blood transfusion | • tea bombs |
| • blood bank | • peace sausages |
| • ally/allies | • radiological car |
| • revolutionary | • radiation poisoning |
| • amputation | • air raid |
| • battlefield/battleground | • armistice |
| • Marie Curie | • veteran |
| • Fritz Haber | • conflict |
| • Gerhard Stalling | • alliance(s) |
| • John Haldane | • Michael offensive |
| • Leonard Joyce | • centenary |
| • Oswald Hope Robertson | • Battle of the Somme |

Resources needed

The Week Junior:

- Resource 1: Image (Anti-aircraft machine gun)
- Resource 2: Question grid
- Resource 3: Article: *Great inventions of the Great War*
- Resource 4: Article: *All about the First World War*
- Resource 5: Timeline
- Resource 6: A typical day in the trenches
- Resource 7: Mind map
- Resource 8: Inventions resulting from the First World War PPT and A4 handout
- Resource 9: Word cloud

Classroom:

- Laptop/PC, projector and white-board (WB)/screen
- Pens/pencils

Teaching and learning activities

Starter

- 1 Ask pupils to work in pairs. Display **Resource 1** on the WB and explain what the image is, and when and where the image was taken (Anti-aircraft machine gun of 101st Field Artillery firing on a German observation plane at Plateau Chemin des Dames, France on 5th March 1918). Distribute **Resource 2**, a blank question grid, to each pair. Ask pupils to imagine that they have the opportunity to quiz the soldiers in the image. Ask them to use the question stems to write a suitable question in each box of the grid. Invite pairs to share some of the questions that they have generated with the rest of the class. Next, launch the lesson's historical enquiry (Why was the First World War also known as The Great War?) and explain that they will, hopefully, discover the answers to many of their questions during the various activities that they will subsequently do.

Main

- 1 Read **Resource 3**, the article from *The Week Junior Science+Nature* entitled *Great inventions of the Great War*. Ask the children if they are any the wiser as to why the First World War was also called The Great War. (If necessary, explain that it was so-named, not because it was so good, but because it was the most devastating war the world had ever seen.) Explain to pupils that they will now explore some aspects of the First World War in more depth.
- 2 Distribute **Resource 5**, a blank timeline, and ask pupils to refer to **Resources 3 and 4**, *Great inventions of the Great War* and *All about the First World War*, to help them complete the blank boxes on the timeline. Encourage pupils to include as much factual detail as possible. Afterwards, ask them to share what they now know about the First World War. Does this help them understand why the First World War was also known as The Great War?
- 3 Show the BBC animation, *Life in the trenches*, and play the BBC journal reading, *Life in the trenches*, to the children. ▶ In small groups, ask pupils to use information gained from these, **Resources 3 and 4**, *Great inventions of the Great War* and *All about the First World War*, and **Resource 6**, *A typical day in the trenches*, to help them complete **Resource 7**, a mind map about life in the trenches. After five minutes or so, stop the children and encourage them to share any information gathered with others within their group. Any new information that they glean should be added to their own mind map. (Printing the mind map sheet on A3 will provide more space for notes to be written.)

▶ *Life in the trenches* animation: bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/28589440
 ▶ *Life in the trenches*: bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25626530
- 4 Next, suggest pupils use their mind map to write a detailed description of a typical day in the life of a soldier in the trenches. (This could be presented as a diary extract on tea-stained paper for a more authentic result.) Afterwards, invite a couple of pupils to share their piece of writing with the rest of the class.

Support:

- Mind map: Lower attainers could be given basic facts to sort into appropriate categories.
- Written description of a typical day in the life of a soldier in the trenches: Lower attainers could be given a copy of **Resource 9**, the word cloud, or a series of sentence starters to complete.

Stretch and challenge:

- Mind map: More able pupils could be asked to consider how a soldier (similar to one in the image) might be feeling/what he might be thinking.
- Ask more able pupils to make a list of key vocabulary that they have encountered throughout the lesson and create their own word cloud using a free, online word cloud generator. ▶
- Pose the key questions on page 4 to your more able pupils and others for contemplation.

▶ Free online word cloud:
wordclouds.com

Plenary

- 1 Ask pupils to recall some of the inventions that have resulted from the First World War. Record them as a list on the WB or reveal the list on the PPT **Resource 8**. Ask pupils to rank the inventions in order of their importance using the handout **Resource 8** (1 being the most important invention; 5 being the least important invention). Remind pupils that they should be able to justify why they have placed each item in that position. Invite them to share their ranked order with the rest of class. Did they agree or disagree with each other?
- 2 Encourage pairs to revisit their question grid completed during the starter activity. How many questions do they now know the answer to? Are there any questions that remain unanswered? The latter could become foci for a subsequent lesson or homework task.
- 3 Refer to the lesson's historical enquiry question (Why was First World War also known as The Great War?) and ask the children if they are able to answer it more fully now that they have attempted a number of different activities.

Extending the lesson

- 1 **History/geography:** Visit a local war memorial. Use an online mapping tool, such as Google Maps/Bing Maps/Digimap, or a local OS map, to locate the nearest war memorial. The following web-links provide ideas for lines of enquiry, as well as accompanying resources. ➡

➡ War Memorials Trust: learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary/
Gloucestershire County Council WW1 resources: gloucestershire.gov.uk/archives/learning-for-all/key-stage-2/ww1-resources-for-key-stage-2/ (Lesson 7)
Historic England – condition surveys: historicengland.org.uk/services-skills/education/teaching-activities/doing-a-condition-survey-with-your-class-guidance-for-teachers

- 2 **Science:** Marie Curie won two Nobel prizes for her research into radiation before, in fact, dying of radiation poisoning in 1934. Conduct research to help answer the following questions.
 - When did she win these awards?
 - What did she discover?
 - Do her findings have an impact on our lives today?
- 3 **D&T:** Search for images of First World War trenches to discover what they were like, internally and externally. Create a 3-D model of a trench using suitable materials and adding labels to exemplify its key features, dimensions, etc. You can find suggestions and help online. ➡

➡ BBC Trench model: bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25581110

- 4 **Music:** Learn a First World War song(s) or play *The Last Post*. Give pupils a blank sheet of paper and ask them to draw what springs to mind when they hear this being played. Create an exhibition of their artwork. You could incorporate an element of peer assessment. (Which one do they feel is the best interpretation of this piece of music, and why?) Ask pupils to consider if the images that they drew are very similar or different.

🔗 The Guardian: The 10 best: first world war music: [theguardian.com/culture/2014/nov/07/the-10-best-first-world-war-music](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2014/nov/07/the-10-best-first-world-war-music)

- 5 **SMSC:** Read the new book from Michael Morpurgo, *Poppy Field*, with the class. This new book from Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman (in association with the Royal British Legion) tells an original story explaining the meaning behind the poppy. Follow this up by inviting a representative from the Royal British Legion into school to talk about the charity, the centenary Thank You movement, and all their other work. Then challenge children to get involved in the Thank You movement.

🔗 The Royal British Legion: britishlegion.org.uk

🔗 Thank you movement: britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/ww1-centenary/thank-you/how-to-get-involved/schools/

- 6 **Maths:** Ask pupils to display statistical data relating to the First World War in a variety of different forms, e.g. pie chart; bar graph; table; pictogram; line graph.

Key questions

- 1 How else might we increase crop yields without using fertilisers that contain ammonia?
- 2 When else might you have heard the term 'stalemate' used?
- 3 Did the First World War/The Great War have more negative than positive effects?
- 4 Why do some historians refer to Fritz Haber as a war criminal?

🔗 Although all website links have been checked prior to going to press, website content can change. When you access an external website, please keep in mind that *The Week Junior* has no control over its content. Please make sure that you check before you share!

About the author

Lesson plan and accompanying resources created by Emma Espley, an experienced teacher and now freelance author and consultant based in Gloucestershire.

Suggested related wider reading

- *The Story of World War One* by Richard Brassey
- *A Soldier's Friend* by Megan Rix
- *Archie's War* by Marcia Williams
- *Only Remembered* edited by Michael Morpurgo
- *Where The Poppies Now Grow* by Hilary Robinson and Martin Impey
- *Line of Fire: Diary of an Unknown Soldier* by Barroux, introduced by Michael Morpurgo
- *The Foreshadowing* by Marcus Sedgwick
- *Stories of WW1* edited by Tony Bradman
- *The Amazing Tale of Ali Pasha* by Michael Foreman
- *Stay Where You Are and Then Leave* by John Boyne
- *See Inside The First World War* by Rob Lloyd Jones
- *Dear Jelly: Family Letters from the First World War* by Sarah Ridley
- *A Song for Will and the Lost Gardeners of Heligan* by Hilary Robinson and Martin Impey
- *Remembrance* by Theresa Breslin
- *The Christmas Truce* by Hilary Robinson and Martin Impey
- *Flo of the Somme* by Hilary Robinson and Martin Impey
- *Private Peaceful* by Michael Morpurgo
- *Captain Rosalie* by Timothée de Fombelle
- *Our Jacko* by Michael Morpurgo
- *Poppy Field* by Michael Morpurgo
- *The Button War: A Tale of the Great War* by Avi