

## GRWW1 6 Christmas Truce

<b>Activity title:</b>	The Christmas Truce
<b>Curriculum subject or area:</b>	PSHE, Art & DT, English, Religious Studies.
<b>NC objectives:</b>	That during WW1 British & German troops on the Western Front took part in an unofficial truce over the Christmas period.
<b>Main learning objective:</b>	How a Christmas truce was held between the opposing forces in the trenches on Christmas 1914

Timing	Lesson plan ideas, activities and resource sheets needed
INTRODUCTION minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the children what Christmas means to them. List the things that spring to mind. 'Peace', 'Goodwill to all mankind' will probably be in the list.</li> <li>• Ask how they would feel if they had to spend Christmas away from their families. Ask how they might feel if they were in the Armed Forces? Remind them that for many soldiers today and in the past, this is what happens. In WW1, this was often the first time that these mostly young men had been away from home and their families. Many were also quite young.</li> <li>• One thing you may want to consider is the religions of the opposing sides. Although the main combatants were Christian (British troops were Church of England, Catholic and non-conformist - such as Methodist, Baptist, etc, while the German forces were mostly Catholic), the British forces utilised many soldiers from the Commonwealth especially India and among these were Sikh, Hindu and Muslim troops. When Turkey joined the war, this put some strain on the British Muslim troops as they were fighting fellow Muslims.</li> <li>• Explain that, in wartime, the Army considered Christmas to be just another fighting day. Unlike today, when armed forces usually get a Christmas dinner, in WW1 the food for the day was standard Army rations (see:</li> </ul>

	<p><a href="http://www.stjohn.sceschools.com/_files/curriculum/HISTORY/Homework%20-%20Y9/research_the_food_that_british_soldiers_ate_during_wwi.pdf">http://www.stjohn.sceschools.com/_files/curriculum/HISTORY/Homework%20-%20Y9/research_the_food_that_british_soldiers_ate_during_wwi.pdf</a>) and the usual daily routine was followed (<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25626530">http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1/25626530</a>).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• However in the run-up to Christmas, soldiers did send Christmas cards and often received parcels from home, which would contain all sorts of things - warm clothing, tobacco, and food. In 1914, every soldier and sailor wearing the King's uniform and serving overseas on Christmas Day also received a 'Princess Mary Tin' (see: <a href="http://www.kinnethmont.co.uk/1914-1918_files/xmas-box-1914.htm">http://www.kinnethmont.co.uk/1914-1918_files/xmas-box-1914.htm</a>).</li> <li>• However on that first wartime Christmas, something special happened in the front lines, in that over the Christmas period, many of the opposing soldiers stopped fighting - see GRWW1 6a The Christmas Truce'.</li> <li>• In lots of places in Flanders (Belgium), the British and German troops in the front-line climbed out of their trenches, walked out into No-Man's Land and here, they met each other, and spent hours talking, exchanging souvenirs (such as military buttons, badges, helmets and food), autographs and even playing games of football.</li> </ul>
<p>MAIN ACTIVITY minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the children to read 'GRWW1 6a The Christmas Truce 1914' and 'GRWW1 6b Christmas Truce Letter Home' and look at 'GRWW1 6c Christmas cards from the Front'.</li> </ul> <p>This subject is suitable for many different learning tasks, depending on time and resources available:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask the children to research this incident using IT and then imagine that they are War Correspondents. Their task is to write an account of the Christmas Day Truce as it would appear in the media today. The material should be created for television, radio or newspapers. This could be done as a classroom topic, with the results being presented to the class (or school assembly) as in a modern day news report (so you have potential for having studio presenters and outside reporting). Why not film or record the children's work and presentations for your school's website or social media feeds?</li> <li>2. Ask the children to design and/or make their own 'Princess Mary' tin for a soldier or sailor (either a WW1 soldier/sailor or a modern one). What would they put in it and why?</li> <li>3. Ask the children to design/make their own WW1 Christmas card - would it be different to a Christmas card</li> </ol>

	<p>today? Try to create it in a similar style to WW1 (see: <a href="http://www.artinthepicture.com/styles/">http://www.artinthepicture.com/styles/</a> for a useful guide to art history which includes famous images of the art period).</p>
<p>PLENARY minutes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is thought over 100,000 British and German troops took part in these unofficial ceasefires (some of which lasted until New Year's Day) and the following year, a few units again arranged similar ones with their opponents.</li> <li>• Thanks to the methods of communications of the time, news of the truces didn't reach Britain until a week later.</li> <li>• The Army high commands were caught unawares by the truces when they first happened, although when they found out, both sides subsequently issued orders forbidding them. If caught, any offenders were subject to full military law and if found guilty could be punishable by death.</li> <li>• In 1915 truces were not as widespread as in 1914 partly because orders from the high commands of both sides prohibited them.</li> <li>• In 1916, after the bloody battles of the Somme and the widespread use of poison gas, soldiers on both sides increasingly viewed the other side as inhuman and no more Christmas truces were sought. As a result, the Christmas Truce of 1914 remains a symbolic moment of peace and humanity amidst one of the most violent periods of human history.</li> </ul>

**Suggested extension activities or cross curricular links:**

- Make the 'shoebox' trench and then decorate it for Christmas.



The Tower of London, after centuries of death had been opened out.

### The Christmas-Day Truce.

GLoucester Corporal's DESCRIPTION.

Mr. and Mrs. W. Philpott, of Clifton-road, Gloucester, have received a letter from their son, Corporal James Philpott, 1st Royal Warwick Regiment, in which he describes the Christmas-Day truce on a portion of the fighting line.

"Writing on Christmas Day, he says:— 'We came back into the trenches last night after a four days' rest, and the Germans were in a good mood. They were singing and shouting and they wanted to come over and talk to us. Then during the night they massed a few instruments and gave us some Gas tunes. They gave us, first of all, 'Home Sweet Home,' and that made us think a bit. I was thinking of three words and I could picture home. 'But, cheer up all, I shall be home soon.' They played us some cards, and then they did us the great honour to play our 'God save the King' first, which we sang to and they cheered us, and then they played their own, which they sang to and we cheered to the echo. Then the music was wonderful thing of today. Although there is no armistice, we have by mutual consent stopped all firing, and are going half-way to their trenches, and they half-way to meet us, unarmed, and we are changing tags and cigars and plum stuff and buttons for souvenirs. We are shaking hands and chatting, and some of them close here are waiters and theatre band-players from England, and talk good English. They told the Somersets they could fetch their dead in from a charge the other day, but I will not talk of those things until I come home. I have seen it all and am still fit to fight. The Germans have the news that Russia is absolutely beaten and the French no good, but they admit we are the best fighters and the best men. They can trust us, and for a change we are trusting them, and walking about on top of the trenches in broad daylight.'

Continuing his letter later, Corporal Philpott adds:— 'Here is Monday after Christmas, and we are still at truce. We have not fired a shot this four days. I have had some cigars, and I have two Germans' autographs for souvenirs. They say they are Saxons and near relations to us, and therefore will not fire again until we do. We are doing everything in broad daylight which we usually have to do in the dark, and then chance our lives at that. I mean fetching food, water, vegetables and such things. I am hoping this letter will get through to you complete, because it is interesting to see the history of Waterloo and the Crimea repeating itself with the truce. Mind, it is only our lot and the Somersets at present. If the English papers only knew, as I expect they will, it would seem to be a lie, but when I come home I can show the German autographs to prove it.'

