

Script for Remembrance Powerpoint, slide by slide

Questions to ask the children are bold and underlined. After each question, let them talk in pairs for a bit, then hear a few responses. To go swiftly from lots of noise as they talk to silence, I recommend drilling a short sharp “shh” at the start of the assembly. You go “shh”, along with an expansive arm gesture, and when they hear the “shh”, they go “shh” and then they... shush. It’s less intrusive than a clapped rhythm and works well with large groups.

1. At the start of the war, thousands of men rushed to volunteer to join the army. **Why do you think that was?**

2. At the start of the war, many people thought it would be like wars had always been. They practiced cavalry charges, which soldiers who had fought hundreds of years ago would have recognized.

3. But new weapons, like the Maxim gun in this picture, soon made the cavalry as old-fashioned as the bow and arrow. These machine guns could fire hundreds of bullets, mowing down men and horses.

4. The war went on and on. The warring armies dug great networks of trenches, stretching for miles. There were long periods when little happened, and then great attacks when lots of soldiers were killed, but often not much changed.

5. Lots of wounded soldiers returned too, bringing tales of the miseries of life in the trenches. But these two are smiling. **Why might that be?**

6. Fewer people were joining the army as volunteers. In September 1914, 462,901 volunteered to join. In December 1915, only 55,152. So in January 1916, the British Army started using conscription. Letters were sent to men of fighting age. Whether you wanted to fight or not, you had to join the army. **Would you have wanted to fight? Why? Why not?**

7. There were some people who didn’t want to fight, but for other reasons besides not getting killed or injured. They thought war was wrong, and they refused to become soldiers who would have to kill the enemy. Some said their religion told them they must not kill. Some thought the war was wrong for political reasons and disagreed with the government: they thought the war was something the rich and powerful wanted, but that ordinary people would be killed because of it. Some had personal beliefs, that they could not kill someone, whatever was happening. These people were called conscientious objectors, because their consciences told them they could not kill.

8. Lots of people hated the conscientious objectors. But some people admired them. Imagine you were alive in 1917. **What might you have said to a conscientious objector?**

9. Conscientious objectors had to go in front of a tribunal of local people, including an army officer, to explain why their beliefs would not allow them to join the army. If the people on

the tribunal thought they were just pretending to have strong beliefs about war being wrong, and were just being cowards, they could force them to join the army.

10. If they were forced to join the army, but refused to obey orders, they could be sent to prison. 6,000 conscientious objectors were sent to prison during the Great War. These are working at the quarry at Dartmoor, doing hard labour.

[Note – these are the questions at the heart of the discussion. It's important to bring out each side of the argument before they make up their own minds]

What reasons would someone have had for saying it was wrong to send people to prison if they refused to fight?

What reasons would someone have had for saying the government was right to send people to prison if they refused to fight?

What do you think? Can it ever be right for a government to force people to fight, or not?

11. [Note - this is a coda to the discussion, encouraging reflection on the scale of the war. The image of the factory is one I find very poignant, because it captures the magnitude in a single image more than anything else I have seen] This picture is from a factory in France making shells for the artillery guns in the Great War. But it's only part of the picture.

12. At an estimate, there are 10,000 shells just in the section of the factory in the middle of the picture. If each of those shells represented 1000 graves of soldiers...

13. ...that would be roughly how many soldiers died on all sides in the Great War. As many more civilians, people who were not soldiers, died as well.

14. We are lucky that we don't live in such terrible times. As you remember the soldiers that died in the Great War, and in other wars, you might decide that the conscientious objectors should be remembered too. Were they brave in their own way, or was true bravery just for those who went to fight? [Note – rather than getting them to talk about this question, you might just leave it hanging in the air as something to think about]

A final note: because you have been asking the children to talk, it's possible that on their way out they may be wanting to share their thoughts rather than leaving in silence as they usually do. Do try to negotiate that in a kind way, perhaps by acknowledging the urge to talk before you start to dismiss them.

The silent exit from assemblies is a kind of mutual performance of the control that we have over children, and while of course silence can sometimes be important for learning, it can be mistaken for an end in itself. The thoughtfulness children show when they are contributing to an assembly gets forgotten if they are barked at on the way out.