

WORLD WAR I: THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE

Starting just 13 years after Australia became a nation, World War I was one of the first times we came together as 'Australians'.

Many people say our national character was shaped by this experience. After Gallipoli, ANZAC soldiers became known and respected for their courage, endurance and mateship – all attributes that we still prize.

But the war also changed society at home, from the role of women to the establishment of organisations to help returned service people.

Discover how the experience of World War I created the conditions that have helped make Australia what it is today.

Related content:

- www.rsleducation.com.au/Themes/Commemoration/years-7---10/World-War-I-the-Australian-experience
- www.redcross.org.au

FINDING OUT

In 1915, the population of Australia was just under 5 million. Eight per cent of the population (417,000 people) enlisted to serve in World War I. Of those who enlisted, 60,000 did not survive the war (14%) and 156,000 (37%) were wounded. Can you apply these percentages to your class? If your class represents the people who enlisted in World War I, how many students would not return? How many would be wounded?

The international community sought to outlaw the use of poisonous gas in The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. Did you know that wars had rules? Do you think wars need rules? Why/why not?

Find out more about the rules of war by researching international humanitarian laws. The Australian Red Cross website has helpful information www.redcross.org.au. Enter 'rules of war' in the search field.



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SORTING OUT

Slides 2 and 6 show men in trenches and Slide 3 shows soldiers preparing for a gas attack. Make lists of the advantages and disadvantages of using trenches as places to shelter from and launch attacks.

One of the earliest military uses of chlorine gas was by German forces in the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915. At first, Allied soldiers thought the gas was a smoke screen to cover an advance by the enemy. They mistakenly walked into the deadly gas. The British responded by using chlorine gas in the Battle of Loos in September 1915. Because gas proved to be an effective weapon for both sides, other forms such as phosgene and mustard gas were developed for use later in the war. Many soldiers who survived the war suffered the effects of gas for the rest of their lives.

The use of poison gas was described by Britain's Daily Mirror newspaper as 'devilry'. Sir John French, then commander of the British Expeditionary Force, described the use of gas as a '... cynical and barbarous disregard of the well-known usages of civilised war'. Yet it was only four months later that the British used the same weapon. Do you believe a nation is justified in breaking the rules of war if the enemy does so first? Why/Why not?

Some military historians claim soldiers were more terrified of gas attacks than any other threat. Why do you think gas was so feared?

Slide 8 describes the impact of trench foot on soldiers. A combination of cold, wet feet and poor blood circulation caused trench foot. In some cases, soldiers did not unlace or remove boots for days at a time. Eventually gangrene and tetanus set in. Even when soldiers were removed from the front it could take months for infected feet to recover.

Why might injuries caused by gas or trench foot slow an army's capacity to advance and win battles?

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TAKING ACTION

Search online for Wilfred Owen's poem *Dulce et Decorum Est*. The title is taken from an ode by the Ancient Roman poet Horace. The final phrase, 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori', means 'It is sweet and proper to die for the fatherland'.

Which of the following do you think best describes the perspective demonstrated in this poem. Explain your choice with reference to the poem and the images in the slide show.

- A victorious soldier who is proud that he has helped to save his country.
- A soldier who has survived battles but is devastated by what he has endured. He has seen friends gassed and bombed and argues that the saying 'Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori' is propaganda.

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TEACHERS' NOTES

The numeracy activity in Finding Out demonstrates the significance of the numbers of people who volunteered to enlist, given Australia's relatively small population in 1915. Relating the statistics regarding casualties and deaths to student numbers can make the impact of the data more personal and significant.

The activities on casualties are designed to demonstrate the early disorganisation of medical services during WW1 and to highlight the long-term impact that the fighting had on soldiers.

The poem by Wilfred Owen is an excellent opportunity to examine perspective.

As a culminating activity, students might be encouraged to participate in a debate on the following topic: The lessons of WWI indicate the strong need for clear rules of warfare. This activity addresses the Historical Skills listed to the right.

You might wish to invite members of your local RSL Queensland Sub Branch to contribute to discussions about the slideshow. To find your nearest Sub Branch, please visit www.rslqld.org/Contact-Us/Sub-Branches

This resource supports the following History and Mathematics Content Descriptions:

- ACDSEH095 The places where Australians fought and the nature of warfare during World War I, including the Gallipoli campaign
- ACHHS172 Identify and analyse the perspectives of people from the past
- ACHHS170 Process and synthesise information from a range of sources for use as evidence in an historical argument
- ACHHS173 Identify and analyse different historical interpretations (including their own)
- ACHHS174 Develop texts, particularly descriptions and discussions that use evidence from a range of sources that are referenced
- ACMNA158 Find percentages of quantities and express one quantity as a percentage of another, with and without digital technologies

