

LESSON SIX: CONSEQUENCES

Context

This scene shows some of the consequences of war as we see how Harry, our main protagonist, tries to cope with family life eight years after the end of the war. Often it was very difficult for those who had fought to readjust to civilian life. Many had witnessed terrible events in the trenches and the death of close friends was always difficult to cope with. Health, both physical and mental, could be affected for the rest of their lives. For women it meant giving up their jobs and independence when the men returned home, which also caused bad feeling.

Exercise One: Status

Whilst the men were fighting, women took on very different roles, often taking on jobs of considerable responsibility in support of the war effort. For those returning from war it was difficult to readjust not only to being back at home but also seeing the change in their wives or girlfriends. A sense of responsibility and pride in achievement could affect the way that some women and men regarded their status and how they were regarded by others. This exercise is a useful way to explain the feeling of status.

Pair the group up into As and Bs, asking the As to form a seated audience somewhere in the room, telling them they can talk amongst themselves for a while. You should then take team B to one side of the room whispering 1–15 (presuming the class is an average size of 30) to each in turn. Once done, inform Bs that you have allocated a number between 1–15 to each of them and that for the purposes of this exercise the higher the number the more important their status. You should then ask them to begin walking around the space in any direction they like in a way that reflects their status; eg the lower numbers should walk around timidly, averting eye contact whilst the higher numbers will be confident and have a purposeful stride.

Exercise Two: Inner Thoughts

Select five of the more confident students from the group and tell them that they are now a family living in 1926. Key characters should be a father, mother, brothers and sisters, who are posing for a family portrait and should pose accordingly. Think of appropriate roles that each member of the family might have undertaken during the war. Once posed take suggestions from the group as to how each character might be feeling. Once suggestions have been made pick another five students and allocate them each one of the characters to stand behind.

Exercise Three: Pulse

Split the group up into smaller groups of five or six allocating each of them a character listed below. Using a large piece of paper get each individual group to brainstorm as many words as possible about how their character might feel about war. From here you should ask your group to decide on how their group has been affected by the First World War.

Once decided they should begin creating a short scene using only a few of the key words they have come up with. After sufficient time ask each of the groups to stand up on their own ready to perform their scene. The rest of the group should surround those performing, at first giving them as much space as possible. How they feel about each individual performance will determine how big the circle remains.

Look at the additional historical information sections **On the Home Front**, **Munitions** and **The End of the War**.

Play DVD: *Scene Six – Consequences*

The following drama exercises are intended to stimulate discussion and debate about the consequences of war.



Once Bs are up and walking about tell As what is going on and that it is their job to put the group in order beginning with the least important and moving up to the most important. You should then swap teams and repeat the exercise.

The new students are now going to ‘voice’ the internal thoughts of their allotted character. The rest of the group can now ask the ‘internal thoughts’ students direct questions as to how they are feeling which the original characters must physically dramatise as they answer. As seen in the DVD extract often feelings of regret and blame never went away putting enormous strain on the family unit.

If they are affected in a sympathetic way they should step into the circle or negatively step out. This exercise is a simple way of getting young people to open up and form an opinion that is entirely their own. It is a good way of beginning a discussion about the consequences of war either this war or contemporary wars going on today.

Characters:

- German Soldier
- French or Belgian civilian
- Nurse in France
- British Soldier
- Wife at home in Britain

THE END OF THE WAR

Hostilities on the Western Front ceased at 11am on 11 November 1918 when an armistice between Germany and the Allies came into effect. A final settlement, determined by a peace conference, was embodied in the Treaty of Versailles, which was signed by the Germans, under protest, on 28 June 1919. Germany lost territory and its armed forces were greatly reduced. It had to pay massive compensation for war damage and admit its guilt for causing the war.

At the end of the war there were 20 million men in Europe who needed to be demobilised, 3 million of them British. When the war finished many men who had volunteered or were conscripted and had fought in the army found it difficult to readjust to civilian life. War experiences physically and psychologically could mark you for the rest of your life.

In particular it was difficult for the young men who had joined up under-age. Many had missed out on apprenticeships and therefore found it difficult to find work. There were no attempts to rehabilitate the majority of these men and many became disillusioned. Many were now disabled and their health was severely affected. Compensation and pension rights were complicated and many missed out. The Prime Minister, Lloyd George, had promised 'Homes fit for Heroes', and many became disillusioned that this was not going to happen.

One positive development was that on December 1918 women over 30 were able to vote for the first time. It has been argued that the example set by women working in their various roles in the First World War brought about their emancipation more quickly than it might have done otherwise.

Key Points

① It took around 2 years for all the British troops to be demobilised.

② The British government wanted to improve industry and avoid mass unemployment but it was very difficult to find employment for all these men returning to civilian life who had been out of the work environment for so long.

③ Only 25% of those who served received a government disability pension.

④ Over 240,000 British soldiers received total or partial amputation of a limb. Many had severe facial injuries and many others experienced psychological trauma for the rest of their lives.

⑤ 8–12 million men in the military services had died, the exact numbers are unknown. Germany and Russia lost the greatest numbers. Britain and her Empire lost 921,000 (47,746 from India and 3,649 from Africa and the West Indies). In the British forces 1 in 8 soldiers were killed.

⑥ 340,000 children lost one or more parent with an even greater number losing a brother or close relative.

⑦ Around 14,000 young men aged 18 or under are listed by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Taking into account those who lied about their age, this could be at least 28,000 killed.

⑧ The dead were commemorated in cemeteries at the battlefields where they fell. It was considered too complicated to bring the bodies home to Britain. The national memorial, the Cenotaph, in Whitehall, was unveiled on 11 November 1920 on the same day as the Unknown Warrior was buried in Westminster Abbey. These were to become the focal points along with local memorials for the nation's grief. Those who could afford it would try to make a visit to the relevant cemetery, or to the memorials such as the Menin Gate or Thiepval, if their loved one had no known grave, which were mainly abroad in France and Belgium.

Below are listed some of the inscriptions on gravestones in official cemeteries on the Western Front of under-age soldiers who died during the Somme offensive. Families could choose a few words which they felt were appropriate.

A BOY IN YEARS A MAN IN DEEDS

18/596 Private Willie Whitaker
18th West Yorkshire Regiment
Killed in Action
1st July 1916,
aged 18

DO GOOD & BE GOOD

11117 Private George Edwards
11th Essex Regiment
Killed in Action
24th September 1916,
aged 15

HE GAVE HIS YOUNG LIFE FOR ENGLAND

28407 Private John Harris
1st Cheshire Regiment
Killed in Action
25th July 1916,
aged 17

WORTHY OF EVER LASTING LOVE

25793 Private James Walters
9th Sherwood Foresters
Killed in Action
9th August 1916,
aged 16

A YOUNG LIFE CHEERFULLY GIVEN GOD MAKE US WORTHY OF SUCH SACRIFICE

16201 Lance Corporal Albert Taylor
12th Royal Sussex Regiment
Killed in Action
13th November 1916,
aged 17

O SO YOUNG & YET SO BRAVE

24444 Private James Rathband
9th Royal Dublin Fusiliers
Killed in Action
9th September 1916,
aged 16

A MOTHER'S HOPE, A FATHER'S JOY GOD HAS CALLED OUR ONLY BOY

79210 Private Harold Carter
9th London Regiment (Royal Fusiliers)
Killed in Action (Epéhy)
18th September 1918,
aged 18

ONLY A BOY BUT A HERO

4214 Private Frank Gardiner
16th Battalion Australian Infantry
Killed in Action
30th August 1916,
aged 17

MOTHER'S BABY SON SORELY MISSED

22243 Private Bernard Whittingham
98th Battalion, Machine Gun Corps
Killed in Action
23rd July 1916,
aged 17