Westminster Abbey
Learning

Remembrance lesson for secondary – teachers' notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool in your classroom.

As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this five-question survey.

Warning: Slide 9 shows a photograph of the body of a solder wrapped in hessian. It is not identifiable as a body from the photograph.

SLIDE 3:

- Poppies have become an instantly recognisable symbol of Remembrance but one hundred years ago, no one was sure how to remember the First World War.
- The memorial had to comfort those many thousands who mourned loved ones and often did not even know where their bodies lay.
- It also had to make some kind of meaning for the whole nation out of a victory that had cost the lives of 800,000 men.
- This is the Grave of the Unknown Warrior. He really is unknown. He was buried in Westminster Abbey as the result of a very simple idea.

This image shows the Grave of the Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey after the Remembrance Sunday service in 2014, 100 years after the outbreak of the First World War.

SLIDE 4:

Learning objectives:

- To understand what we remember at Remembrance time
- To be able to explain how the Unknown Warrior buried in Westminster Abbey helps us remember
- To discuss why we continue to remember
- To think about who we might remember by the Grave of the Unknown Warrior today

Talk through learning objectives.

The image shows the single vigil candle at the 2014 service to mark the outbreak of the First World War. At the end of the service the light was extinguished.

SLIDE 5: Click to play the video as an introduction to the Grave of the Unknown Warrior.

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SLIDE 6:

- The First World War lasted from 1914 to 1918 and was fought across the world. Much of the fighting was in France and Belgium.
- The fighting men were supported by many who did not take up arms, such as doctors and nurses who looked after the wounded, and chaplains – churchmen who cared for the men, whatever their faith or beliefs.
- Captain David Railton was a chaplain who received many letters from families of soldiers lost in battle longing for news.

This image shows a wooden cross marking an anonymous grave at Thiepval, France. The cross reads 'R.I.P. In Memory of an Unknown British Soldier Found & Buried 25.11.15'.

SLIDE 7:

- By the end of the war in 1918, the fighting had become so widespread and so devastating that about half of the 800,000 fallen soldiers had no known grave.
- In London, families celebrated the end of hostilities on Armistice Day but over the next year returning soldiers faced delays and, sometimes, rejection and unemployment. With deaths from Spanish flu rising and over two million workers on strike, the country needed healing.

This image shows the crowd cheering outside Buckingham Palace on Armistice Day, 11 November 1918.

SLIDE 8:

- The Cenotaph, or 'empty tomb', was made permanent in response to public demand.
- On November 11th 1919 the first Two Minute Silence was solemnly observed across the whole country.
- Visits to carefully organised graveyards in France and Belgium were beginning for those who could afford them but parents of those missing in action had no grave to visit.
- In the summer of 1920 Railton wrote to the Dean of Westminster asking for the body of 'one comrade' to be buried in the Abbey.

The Cenotaph was designed by Edward Lutyens and he chose a design that deliberately did not include Christian symbols because he wanted not to exclude all those soldiers from other faiths who had fought across the world for Britain.

SLIDE 9:

- At midnight on November 7th 1920 in France, Brigadier-General Wyatt reached out and touched one of the four coffins in front of him.
- That body was placed in a special coffin and brought to London with full military honours.
- Nobody knew the name of the soldier whose body lay inside. He had been identified only by his uniform buttons and boots.

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- The Indian, Canadian and Australian armies fought for Britain in France and Belgium and West Indian soldiers undertook essential support roles within range of enemy guns. The Unknown Warrior could be from anywhere in Britain and Ireland or from the countries of the old Empire.

This image shows one of the four bodies exhumed in 1920 for the selection of the Unknown Warrior.

SLIDE 10:

- On Armistice Day 1920 the Warrior was taken to Westminster Abbey past the Cenotaph where King George V joined the procession. Thousands lined the London streets, many of them carrying white flowers.
- In the Abbey, as well as military men, were very many women who had helped in the war effort. Women who had lost loved ones had especially been given tickets.
- The Warrior's coffin was covered by the flag that Reverend David Railton had used often on the front line as an altar cloth or to cover the body of a comrade at his funeral.

Pair discussion: discuss what each of the people might be thinking as they watch the funeral:

- King George V facing the Grave and holding his service booklet
- The Dean of Westminster in his long-embroidered cope
- The military men
- The women who have lost loved ones

This image shows the Burial of Unknown Warrior by Matania.

SLIDE 11: How does the Grave of the Unknown Warrior help us remember today?

- The Grave lies in the middle of the Nave, near the Great West Door, the Royal Entry to the Abbey. All visitors see the Grave and no one, not even royals, walks over it. What is being said by the location of the Grave?
- What is being said by the surrounding poppies?
- The Warrior who fought for Britain is buried in French soil, brought from the battlefields in 1920, and covered with Belgian black marble. What is being said by the way he is buried?

This image shows the Grave of the Unknown Warrior in the nave at Westminster Abbey.

SLIDE 12:

- The lettering on the Grave is made from ammunition shells – what message does this re-purposing give?
- The word 'Warrior' shows that he could be a soldier, a sailor or an airman
- Four texts from the Bible edge the Grave:

(top) THE LORD KNOWETH THEM THAT ARE HIS 2 Timothy 2:19

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(sides) GREATER LOVE HATH NO MAN THAN THIS John 15:13
UNKNOWN AND YET WELL KNOWN, DYING AND BEHOLD WE LIVE 2 Corinthians 6:9
(base) IN CHRIST SHALL ALL BE MADE ALIVE 1 Corinthians 15:20

Pair Activity: On the worksheet called "Remembrance-lesson-transcript-activity", circle what for you are the key words on the Grave. Share your findings with your group.

SLIDE 13: When it was suggested to the Dean of Westminster in 1920 that there should be a memorial to the war in the Abbey, he said the only thing would be to have a burial.

- Look at the images of King Henry III's tomb in the Abbey on the left. There are 30 monarchs buried in the Abbey.
- Look at the monument to General Wolfe on the right remembering an 18th century British military victory. The dying Wolfe is handed a victory wreath. There are many such statues in the Abbey marking past wars.

Pair discussion: What is symbolic about having a grave in Westminster Abbey to remember the First World War?

Think about:
- What it says on the Grave inscription
- What a statue like that of Wolfe suggests about war
- What a grave suggests about war
- Whether a grave or a statue is more relatable

SLIDE 14: This is a Remembrance Sunday Service in the Abbey. The same symbolic actions happen as in churches across the land:

- people wear poppies and some lay wreaths
- they fall silent at 11 o'clock
- they hear the Last Post being played by a bugler
- they join to sing the National Anthem.

Notice that the focus is the Grave of the Unknown Warrior, not the altar with its cross, as is usual. On the Grave are written Jesus' words at the Last Supper about sacrificial love:
Greater love hath no man than this [that a man lay down his life for his friends] John 15:13

Pair discussion: How does the Grave of the Unknown Warrior express the Christian idea of sacrifice? This image shows the Remembrance Sunday service in 2015.

SLIDE 15: This can be organised as a class discussion in groups or a debate.

Students should refer to the following Bible passages (all NRSV) when discussing this question:
'They shall beat their swords into plowshares' Isaiah 2:4
'For the same reason you also pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants' Romans 13:6

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'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' Matthew 5:44
'But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also' Matthew 5:39
'Blessed are the peacemakers' Matthew 5:9
'You shall not murder' Exodus 20:13

If time, prompt students to consider what these Bible verses tell us about how Christians view death.

SLIDE 16: Why continue remembering those who have died in war?

At special services marking war prayers are said from the faith traditions of those on both sides of the conflict.

Here soldiers from Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Turkey form a guard of honour at the Grave of the Unknown Warrior.

Services commemorating war focus on:

- Remembrance of all those involved in conflict
- Thanksgiving for their sacrifice
- Penitence for the destructive effects of war
- Commitment to the cause of peace with justice

Possible extension:
You can listen to the Archbishop of Canterbury talking about peace and reconciliation at the Abbey on the 75th Anniversary of VE Day. The 5 minute audio file is at the bottom of this web page:
https://www.westminster-abbey.org/about-the-abbey/history/ve-day-75#i29970

SLIDE 17:

- Today no one who served in the First World War survives but many British servicemen have fought and died since. The Unknown Warrior has come to represent British servicemen from any conflict.
- This is the Field of Remembrance, opened with prayer every November just outside Westminster Abbey. All the crosses have been placed by families remembering loved ones. Look carefully and among the crosses you can see a Star of David; crescent moons are placed by Muslim families.

SLIDE 18: Around the Grave are written words from the Bible 'unknown and yet well known' (2 Corinthians 6:9) expressing the Christian belief that however things might seem, each person is known and loved by God.

Group reflection:
'The silence of the grave' is a common expression. What do people mean by it?
This Grave is particularly silent because it has no name.
There is a body but there is also an absence because he has lost his identity.
How might the silence and absence of this Grave help visitors to Westminster Abbey today?

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SLIDE 19: Use the document “Remembrance-lesson-KS3-activities” to select one or more of the five suggested activities. The document also includes further materials for teachers.

SLIDE 20: Use the document “Remembrance-lesson-KS4-activities” to give students a series of challenge questions to help them consolidate their understanding. The document also includes further materials for teachers.

SLIDE 21: Review learning objectives.

This image shows a wreath which has been laid at the Grave of the Unknown warrior and children have written their own poems to soldiers who died in the First World War.

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