# The Unknown Soldier: English



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## Learning objectives

Young people will:

* Have increased understanding of the humanitarian impact of armed conflict
* Explore feelings and emotions of people involved in, and affected by, armed conflict
* Have greater respect for human life and dignity

Age range: 14–19-year-olds

## Introduction

This resource is based on the short film [*The Unknown Soldier*](https://vimeo.com/144877010) and has been designed to support humanitarian learning through the teaching of English.

We recommend you read the [introductory sheet](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/49D044650D154F3D8591220B17D6357A.ashx) before using this resource.

This resource has been designed for delivery over approximately three sessions but the structure can be adapted to suite your own teaching needs.

The sessions guide young people through English-relevant activities to explore the humanitarian impact of armed conflict.

*The Unknown Soldier* short film provides the initial stimulus for learning that will enable young people to:

* respond to the film
* identify and empathise with the characters in the film
* critically analyse and evaluate historical and contemporary texts portraying WWI
* use dialogue and writing to express reactions to and interpretations of stimuli
* engage with complex themes such as the humanitarian impact of armed conflict and human dignity
* reflect on the power and significance of language (written and spoken) in relation to purpose and audience.

Additional [supporting activities](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/D678FD21EB2A441AAA779EF14D29ABAB.ashx) also accompany this session plan.

## Curriculum links

This learning supports specific skills and content for the subject of English drawn from respective national curriculum documents and subject specifications.

These elements can be expanded and adapted to suit the curriculum needs, for example, to provide a stimulus for Creative Writing Coursework or Controlled Assessment.

Equally, sessions will meet many SMSC requirements and may be specifically tailored for this.

England:

* Link to England KS4 PoS: drawing on knowledge of the purpose, audience for and context of the writing, including its social, historical and cultural context and the literary tradition to which it belongs, to inform evaluation.

Scotland:

* Link to Scotland NQ3: understand and evaluate written texts and spoken language.

Wales:

* Link to Wales KS4 PoS: engage with and respond critically to a wide range of continuous and non-continuous texts, showing creative and sustained interpretations; consider what they read/view, responding orally and in writing to ideas, language and organisation/presentation, selecting textual detail to support and articulate their views.

Northern Ireland:

* Link to CCEA GCSE Exam Specification Unit 1: Reading multi-modal texts: read and understand texts; select material appropriate to purpose; make connections between ideas, texts, words and images; analyse how language varies according to audience.
* Unit 3 Speaking and Listening: Discussion.

## Session one: Responding to the film and critically questioning the ‘text’

1. Explain to young people that over the next three sessions they will be critically analysing and responding to a media ‘text’ which is a short film called *The Unknown Soldier*.

In this first session they will be responding as individuals and in small groups. In later sessions additional content will support them to question, analyse, compare and evaluate, and undertake their own creative writing exercise.

As well as using English skills and techniques, the texts, activities and film will give them insights into the experiences of WWI soldiers and other people living at that time, as well as those who are affected by armed conflicts today.

1. Introduce the film and ask learners to watch – you might like to inform them that it is a short film (less than 3 minutes) and that the sound is an important part of the viewing experience. Because of this, they should watch the film in silence, saving any reactions until after the showing.

You can choose to use [Supporting activity 1](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/D678FD21EB2A441AAA779EF14D29ABAB.ashx): ‘Watch and respond’ or [activity 3](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/D678FD21EB2A441AAA779EF14D29ABAB.ashx): ‘Writing home’ to guide the group through initial reactions to the film and get them thinking about the content. To watch the film and complete one of these activities should take 20-30 minutes.

1. Organise learners into small groups so that they can broaden and explore their response to the film by sharing ideas with others. In their groups ask learners to consider what questions the film leaves them with, or makes them ask.

Write each question on separate sheets of A4 paper. These could be questions about WWI itself, about the characters and their experiences, or about the film-making. These questions will guide their next learning sessions, forming an investigative enquiry.

Some example questions that might come up could be:

* Did everyone die?
* Why was the non-commissioned officer (the shouting character) so brutal?
* How might the unknown soldier have been feeling?

Here you may choose to introduce [the script](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/1E2CEAF7C87C43939C6FF9AACE7F72A3.ashx) or part of it as a written text to read and analyse critically during the question-forming activity, or you may choose to focus on the dramatisation of it in the film.

1. The questions can then be interrogated using the question quadrant approach as follows:

Clear desks and tables to the side, making a space in the middle of the room, and lay down string, rope or duct tape in a cross shape on the floor [the session can begin with desks clear and chairs in a circle or horseshoe if this is easier].

This will create a question quadrant (each quadrant being formed by one section of the cross. Explain to young people that the question quadrant will help them to share learning and consider good or helpful questions to ask about texts, and about the impact of conflict.

Label each section of the quadrant using the following labels and be clear that learners understand the difference between each as you build the quadrant with them.

* “Look and see” - questions that can be answered through re-watching the film, such as “What was in the cups?”
* Ask an expert” - questions about the history, setting or technical aspects of the film-making, that would require research to answer. E.g. “How was the film shot?” “Is this what WWI was really like?”
* “Use your imagination” - questions about the thoughts and feelings of characters, or what happened next, that could be answered through reflection and imagination, or through creative writing exercises. (“Did the unknown soldier survive?” “Was he married?” “What would you do?”)
* “Think it over” - large ethical questions such as “What is the place of war in society?” or “Does the end of war justify the means?”

[This question quadrant is from Philip Cam’s *Teaching ethics in schools*]

Ask groups to try to critically analyse their questions against the four question criteria in the quadrant, and place each of their questions in the relevant quadrant.

There will be some discussion about the ‘right’ category of some questions, as this is a challenging task. All discussion is fruitful so do not emphasise the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer, but instead focus on the critical thinking involved.

5. Take some example questions from individuals and model how their question will enable new information and insights to come to light about the film and its context.

You might ask, for example, “Why is this question important?” or “How might answering this question improve our understanding of the text (*The Unknown soldier* film)?”

The purpose is to help young people appreciate that critically engaging with texts and questioning them in different ways can deepen both their understanding and engagement.

[Please note that the questions should be retained for use in session two.]

## Session two: Building understanding

Set up a carousel in the room. Print out [three types of texts](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/E12DFDD9AD9B47CE867BD220FBC33763.ashx) (news articles, play extracts, poems) in A3 format. Stick these in the centre of flip chart paper and place in three distinct areas or ‘stations’ around the room.

If there is a group of thirty, you will need around three sets of each text in each area so that there are no more than three or four group members working around flip chart paper. [Note: if there is limited space, groups can stay in one place and pass the papers from group to group instead]

1. Explain that you are going to be exploring the humanitarian impact of conflict. Ask learners to consider what that phrase might mean, and how conflict might affect people. You could capture the group’s ideas on a flipchart or whiteboard. Then share the definition below of ‘the humanitarian impact of conflict’:

*The effects that conflict has on people; these might include death, injury, mental trauma, loss, emotional distress and practical problems such as reduced access to food and water, etc.*

Explain that young people will work in small groups looking for evidence of the humanitarian impact in three different text extracts: a play, a poem and a newspaper article.

They should:

* use highlighters to capture the phrases and words that they particularly respond to;
* annotate the texts to show their thoughts and responses to the feelings of characters and people depicted in them.

Learners should use their questions about WWI (that were created in session one) as a starting point to engage with the different text types at each of the stations. They should be seeking to develop their thinking about their questions through the different texts – What do they confirm or challenge? Do they raise additional questions? What discussions do they spark with peers?

If learners need additional support the following prompts might be useful:

* How are different people affected by the conflict? Can you highlight and annotate some different ways?
* Are some effects of conflict more or less obvious than others?

1. Give learners around 15 minutes responding to each text type before moving them on to the next station. When it is time to change groups, learners should leave their ideas in place for the next group to build on. [It may be useful to remind learners that they are looking for the ‘humanitarian impact of conflict’ at each changeover and to display the definition of this and perhaps the prompt questions.]

1. To conclude this activity, ask young people to either:

* Pair up with someone from a different group and discuss their learning for a few minutes, sharing what they think are the key humanitarian impacts of conflict;
* Return as a group to the first text they were working on and review the contributions that others have made to their ideas. What new insights have been shown? How have their ideas been built upon or challenged?

Ask a few learners to feedback from either of the above activities to give the whole group a feel for the learning. Support the group to draw out key ideas about the humanitarian impacts that are contained in each text, for example: *coping strategies in crisis, dealing with trauma, physical wounding and death, the effect that conflict has on whole lives and family members also, for example through separation.* These themes could be written up somewhere collective.

4. To complete this session, young people again watch the film *The Unknown Soldier*, and discuss as a group how their research and reading of texts from the time has brought new insights to their understanding of the humanitarian impact of conflict.

Introduce learners to the following question as a stimulus for a piece of individual analytical writing:

“How did the different text types (including the film) deal with humanitarian impacts of conflict in ways that were similar and how did they differ?”

An example of an analytical paragraph (such as that below) may be useful to clarify their task:

*The Unknown Soldier, like Journey’s end, deals with humanitarian impacts of war such as mental trauma through individual characters’ reactions… An example of this is when one of the characters vomits through what appears to be anxiety, before climbing the trench ladder. This is similar to the neuralgia that the character of Hibbert describes experiencing in Journey’s end. In both texts about WW1, a psychological or mental impact of conflict is presented to the audience as real and debilitating. Both writers draw out these lasting impacts in their work.*

If learners require further inspiration for their writing then you may like to remind them of the annotations they made around each text type and leave these available so that they can draw on the collective imagination for their own individual writing.

Extension: Extend this analysis to look at a contemporary news article about a current conflict situation.

How is armed conflict reported today? How have text types and forms changed? How are they similar to those from WWI?

Does the way conflict is reported impact on the real and perceived humanitarian impact of it?

## Session three: Text types, the power of language and creative writing

1. Explain to learners that in this third session they will briefly revisit the four different text types

([the film transcript](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/1E2CEAF7C87C43939C6FF9AACE7F72A3.ashx), [play, poem and newspaper article](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/E12DFDD9AD9B47CE867BD220FBC33763.ashx)) that they reviewed in earlier sessions. This time they will be considering which text type is most effective in engaging its audience and why. An [example table](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/B536ED4DB2AF41FCAD618F9E6D12A7F2.ashx) showing suggested intentions and audiences supports this activity.

1. Working in small groups ask learners to prepare a short (two-minute) pitch to give to the rest of the group on the text type that they think was most effective. [To avoid the risk of all groups choosing the same text type you might like to allocate one of the four types to different groups so that all types are considered and pitched to the wider group. In this format their task would be to use persuasive language to advocate for their given text type and this may encourage deeper engagement.]
2. Ask each group to present their pitch to the wider group who should then provide constructive feedback on the presentation including both the quality of the points being made and the persuasiveness of the pitch. At the end of the pitches perhaps ask the question: did anyone change their mind as a result of listening to their peers? This is not always easy to admit within the context of an activity that has been presented as a competitive exercise, so it might be worth the educator promoting changing minds or shifting thinking as a positive thing.
3. The results of the above activity should be used to inform an extended creative piece of writing that they can start in this session but that may be continued independently as a homework task for example. The piece asks learners to explore and take on the role of being a war writer – either as a journalist, a poet or a playwright.

You could provide additional support by using a mind map to consider the key features of the different text-types with the whole group. Revisiting the collective list of themes developed earlier might help young people decide which type of text they want to write and what they are trying to communicate to their audience.

Ensure learners have a large chunk of individual writing time to develop their thoughts. You may wish to include peer sharing and feedback by breaking at some point to allow reading/review in pairs. This will enable encouragement and appreciation of each other’s writing so far.

1. Decide with the group an appropriate format to share and celebrate their creative writing. The format may wish to reference the text-type chosen, the period in which it is set, the humanitarian message that it is trying to communicate, or the key audience that it is trying to reach.

You may wish to consider sharing at a whole-school level, perhaps linked to Remembrance Day events or to wider work within the school that is considering the centenary of WWI.