# The Unknown Soldier: Media studies

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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 media studies.

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 two sessions but the structure can be adapted to suite your own teaching needs.

The resource encourages young people to consider how media – in this instance film – can be used 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
* consider the technical choices made by the film’s creators and their intent
* critically analyse the film against its aims and intent
* develop and shoot a short film portraying the humanitarian impact of armed conflict.
* reflect on the power of film in depicting or upholding the humanitarian impact of armed conflict.

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

## Media equipment

­This resource will require access to ICT for sessions one and two (including the use of headphones with splitters for paired working) and will need filming equipment for session two.

## Curriculum links

**England**

The tasks in the sessions cover many components in GCSE Exam Specifications, including from AQA:

* Investigating the media;
* understanding the media;
* Responding to a media brief.

**Scotland**

The sessions particularly support Nationals 3, 4 and 5 regarding the need for learners to build their skills, knowledge and understanding in:

* analysing and creating media content, as appropriate to purpose and audience
* knowledge of the key aspects of media literacy as appropriate to content
* evaluation skills
* knowledge of the role of media within society.

**Northern Ireland** *(GCSE Moving Image Arts Specification)*

The sessions relate to all three components of the GCSE listed below in terms of skills-building and addressing particular aspects:

* Component 1: Critical Understanding of Creative and Technical Moving Image Production;
* Component 2: Acquisition of Skills in Moving Image Production and
* Component 3: Planning and Making a Moving Image Product.

**Wales** *(for teaching from 2016)*

The sessions relate to Unit 1 Sections A and B and to Unit 2 of the WJEC GCSE in terms of skills-building and addressing particular aspects:

Unit 1: Section A: Thinking about the Media: Investigating;

Unit 1: Section B: Thinking about the Media: Planning;

Unit 2: Creating for the Media: Investigating and Producing.

## Session one: Discussing audience and producer

1. ­Explain to young people that over the next two sessions they will be critically analysing and responding to a short film (or film short) called *The Unknown Soldier*.

Session one: Young people will view the film and take part in a series of activities that engage with the media form. They will consider production choices in the context of the filmmakers’ aims.

Session two: Learners will create their own short film that depicts the impact of war upon those involved.

Across the two sessions young people will develop an understanding of armed conflict and the humanitarian impacts it has on those involved.

1. Explain to learners that they will be thinking about how different technologies have been used to produce *The Unknown Soldier*.

They will focus on the camerawork (Go-Pro, head-worn camera to portray the perspective of the unknown soldier) and the binaural sound technique used to deliver the film through headphones.

Explain that they will watch the film three times to explore these different elements, as follows:

* **Viewing one:** Watch the film together as a group on one main screen with open sound and use the first of the supporting activities – [Activity one: Watch and respond](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/D678FD21EB2A441AAA779EF14D29ABAB.ashx) to support learners in an initial reaction to the film. [This should take around 15 mins]
* **Viewing two:** Ask learners to watch the film, wearing headphones for the sound.
* **Viewing three:** Repeat the viewing with headphones. This time ask learners to close their eyes and just engage with the sound.

1. Organise learners into pairs and ask them to discuss which viewing/listening experience was most powerful to them and why. Encourage them to think about what made the experience more intense, emotive or realistic.

Once they have considered each other’s views they should compose a response to the viewing they thought was most powerful in the form of a tweet. They can imagine they are sharing the tweet with their followers and at the same time promoting the film using social media.

Discuss some of the tweets. What did learners want to share about the film? Why did they choose to tweet what they did? What language and hashtags did they use?

**Optional extension:** Discuss whether or not tweets are an effective way to express empathy and/or respect around humanitarian issues? What is powerful about them as a form of media? What might their limitations be? If human dignity is considered, does this influence your opinion and if so how and why?

Students could look at the [British Red Cross Twitter page](https://twitter.com/BritishRedCross) to see how a humanitarian organisation uses social media to engage with the general public.

1. The way that the camera and sound were used in this short film were key directorial choices and were made to try and help the filmmaker to achieve his aim:

*“…It was important to us to make a film that told the story of one individual’s experiences. The casualty statistics for WW1 were so huge (17m killed and 20m wounded) it is easy to overlook the smaller details of what life was like for one person.”*

*Joe Higgins, Director, The Unknown Soldier*

Ask young people: How successful is the film in achieving this aim?

Having watched the film in three different ways, do you feel some directorial and technical choices were more successful than others in helping the filmmaker to portray the humanitarian impacts of armed conflict?

1. The next activity explores in more depth one of the production choices made in *The Unknown Soldier* – the use of the first person camera to position the viewer as the soldier. This choice is largely about trying to build empathy for the character(s) in the film.

Watch this [TED talk](https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine) with young people on how another film-maker, Chris Milk, is using emerging technologies to build empathy. [The whole talk is ten minutes long so if time is restricted the section just after the six minute mark may be used as a shorter extract.]

This extracted quotation from the TED talk may aid discussion:

*“So, when you’re inside of the headset you’re not seeing it like this… when you’re sitting there in her room you’re not watching it through a television screen, you’re not watching it through a window, you’re sitting there with her… and because of that, you feel her humanity in a deeper way; you empathise with her in a deeper way”.*

Having watched the TED talk (or an extract of it) ask learners:

* Is what filmmaker Chris Milk is attempting to do similar in intent to the directorial choices made in *The Unknown Soldier*? What might the links be in terms of building the empathy and compassion that Chris Milk talks about? [Remind learners to use media terminology in their discussion and feedback.]
* To create a tagline for each film (*The Unknown Soldier* and Chris Milk film) to promote it, highlighting how the film can affect people or change their thinking.
* To discuss the concepts of empathy and humanity and give learners time to explore what they understand by these. If necessary, use the definitions below to build or clarify their understanding.

**Empathy** – trying to understand what an experience or feeling might be like for someone else. Trying to put yourself ‘in their shoes’.

**Humanity** - the condition of being human, of having feelings and of being humane which can be explained as being kind and caring towards others.

* To consider how technology and its use in filmmaking can support us in developing our compassion, and how this might change the way we view ourselves, others and the world.

1. The media forms – binaural sound, 3D sound and virtual reality technology – used in *The Unknown Soldier* were selected to make the film feel as realistic as possible. The session now focuses on how and why making things real might be important in influencing audiences.

Begin by asking learners who they think the intended audience of the film is and what is the message that the filmmakers want that audience to take away?

Young people are the intended audience. Do they think the media forms used in the film are effective in reaching an audience like them?

Explain to learners that they are now going to consider more broadly the reasons and intent behind making films as realistic as possible.

Show the final scenes (from 1:44:18 to the end - less than three minutes) from the 1988 film [‘Journey’s End’](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y98QdRmLfbQ) by Michael Stimpson. Explain to learners that this extract shows similar events to those depicted in *The Unknown Soldier* but with the filmmaking technology that was available in 1988.

Thinking about the reason and intent of the filmmaker, ask learners to consider each of these statements and to what extent they agree or disagree with the purposes of making films more intense and realistic for the audience. [In terms of methods you could show each statement on a screen and create a virtual line in the room with disagree at one end and agree at the other. Learners place themselves along the line according to their own thoughts and you then interview the line to engage the group in a discussion around the statement.]

* Binaural sound helps you feel like you are there, which is more entertaining for the audience.
* Binaural sound helps you feel like you are there, which makes you feel for the soldiers.
* The Go-Pro camera makes the film feel like real-life, which increases the engagement of the audience in the action.
* The Go-Pro camera makes the film feel like real-life, which helps the audience to understand the humanitarian impact of war.
* The film’s different techniques work together to help the audience to see that war can be terrible.
* The film’s different techniques work together to create a full sensory entertainment experience.
* The filmmaker wants people who watch the film to think differently.
* The filmmaker wants people who watch the film to be entertained.

## Session two: Practical film production (50–120 mins)

1. ­Explain to learners that in this session they will build on their learning from session one and consider the practical aspects of creating a short film. They will have to consider audience, story, message, characters, settings, feel and style. Practical considerations like the use of cameras and sound will also play a part in their planning.

A key part of producing a film is interpreting a brief. Share with learners the following brief for their production:

* The film should portray the humanitarian impact of armed conflict.
* The film should be shot from a first person perspective of one of the characters – telling their story.
* The film can be set in the past, present or future.
* The film will be used to engage and inform young people.

1. To help learners to think creatively about the production choices they might make use the following key questions to engage them in discussion. [This could be done as a whole group or in their production groups of two to four people per group].

* *Given freedom of choice what film would you make about the world, and how would you build empathy with people’s situations?*
* *What film would you make about WWI, using the sources available here?*
* *How might you tell someone’s story through film to reach out to others?*
* *How might connecting with someone else’s reality change minds and actions?*
* *Is it necessary to make films of this nature hard hitting? Are there other ways to build empathy?*

1. If not already organised into groups, put learners into production groups (up to four per group). Explain that they will need to plan and make production notes for a short film (less than 3 minutes) based on the brief and their thoughts from the discussion.

This planning may result in an actual filmed piece, but should at least include some of the following: briefs, sketches, scripts, storyboards, mock-ups, drafts, contact sheets, flat plans.

Sample materials, including the [storyboard](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/ABD6F01B7FD740E7AD445C03DBE77743.ashx), [script](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/96771A4DF4E148C98EF44A6650AB09D4.ashx), [sketch-up renders](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/87992797C414489B8ABA55604D8E3AF3.ashx) and [trench route plan](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/80D0FE6DDE4A497885EF5467A992968F.ashx) used in the making of *The Unknown Soldier* may help young people understand the planning process involved in making the film. An [interview with the Director](http://www.redcross.org.uk/~/media/7AA8130D960A494CBCEAB91A3BB9B9A3.ashx) can also support this activity.

1. Once groups have finished their production notes bring them back together and ask groups to review each other’s plans, perhaps imagining they were the crew responsible for turning the ideas into film.

Are the ideas clear? Are there things you need to clarify or question? Do you have advice you can offer to improve the plan? Are you happy that the plan meets the brief?

## Reflecting on the learning

Lead a group discussion drawing out the humanitarian learning. Refer back to the session’s objectives including understanding humanitarian impact of conflict, the emotions and feelings of those involved, and developing greater respect for human life and dignity.

Some prompt questions:

* Ask whether young people now believe that media can help people understand the impacts of conflict?
* Has the media developed more power over time?
* Encourage them to think beyond just film-making to other formats such as news reporting, music videos and the rise in citizen reporting and social media. For example, when aspects of war are reported on the news do we feel the impact as strongly as with the films studied in these sessions?
* If not, why not? If yes, what has the greatest impact?
* Could these films lead to people making real changes in their lives? What kind of changes?

Read this statement and ask whether people agree or disagree with it. You could ask for thumbs up or down to show thoughts, paired talk or a whole group discussion.

*“One concern about the information age is that people experience news reporting of conflict so often that they are desensitised, and may see images of somewhere far away without feeling for the people whose lives are being affected.”*

Ask: to what extent does *The Unknown Soldier* film tackle this problem?