Remembrance Assembly

On 11 November every year, we mark ‘Armistice Day’. On this day in 1918, the guns fell silent on the Western Front, bringing the First World War to an end. The nearest Sunday is known as ‘Remembrance Sunday’, when we pause to remember those who died in the war and in all conflicts since then.

Finding a direct connection to your local area can help students to connect with this important national event.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission’s records are the complete and official register for all of the fallen from Britain and the Commonwealth, in both World Wars. These records are all available via the CWGC website, cwgc.org.

You can use the website’s ‘nearby’ search function to discover your nearest CWGC grave or memorial. There are so many war graves in the UK that it is likely you are within 10 miles of an official point of commemoration, and probably much closer than that. Your nearest site might be near enough to visit easily, but even if it isn’t, by looking up who is commemorated there on the CWGC website you can still select, research and present on the people ‘nearest’ you.

All points of commemoration, from small to large, isolated to central, are treated with the same care and attention, ensuring they are places of dignity. If your nearest site is a churchyard or cemetery, you could research a person named on a CWGC headstone or screen wall there and present the story as a school assembly. If your nearest site is a CWGC memorial to those with no known grave, then you could choose one or a few of the names upon it to research and present.

If you have a private war memorial nearby – in your town or village, in your school, or in a nearby church – you could visit this memorial. Not every private memorial carries names, but if it does, you can find out more about the people it commemorates by searching for them in the official register available on the CWGC website, cwgc.org.

From cwgc.org it is also possible to download certificates of commemoration, and in some cases find copies of paperwork about the individual’s commemoration.

NOTE: It is a good idea to use as many details as you can when searching, to help you narrow down the results, especially if it is a common name.
British Values/SMSC Assembly – Equality as a theme

The First World War was a global conflict. Serving alongside British servicemen and women were others from across the world, including India (which then included Pakistan and Bangladesh), the West Indies, Africa and elsewhere.

You could use your ‘There But Not There’ Tommy as an opportunity to explore the importance of equal remembrance, regardless of class, rank, race or religion.

After the war was over, this idea was far from established.

Students could present some of the arguments for and against equal treatment, and look at how the arguments are about being ‘fair’.

Arguments for equality of treatment included:

- Making no distinction between rich and poor in how their dead were honoured.
- All who died, died serving together, so should remain together in death, where they could be remembered together.
- Keeping graves together made them easier to maintain and keep as places of dignity.

Arguments against equality of treatment included:

- Families should have the right to make their own decisions about how to bury and honour their dead.
- Official organisations should not be able to overrule families’ personal wishes.

Students in your class could decide on whether they agree it was fair, and present some photographs or designs of the cemeteries or memorials to show how equality or treatment was created.

Orchard Dump Cemetery Plan from the CWGC archives ©CWGC
Commonwealth Day

Commonwealth Day is marked on the second Monday of March each year. It is not a public holiday in Britain, but is marked in some member countries or territories as such. It presents an opportunity to reflect on the historic bond shared by the member countries and territories, and to look at common values and beliefs. There is a different theme each year.

The work of the CWGC is an incredibly strong example of shared beliefs and values. The CWGC is funded jointly by the governments of Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa and the UK. It commemorates 1.7 million servicemen and women in 23,000 sites in more than 150 countries and territories. Those who served were drawn from all over the globe, with many different experiences, faiths, and customs, and all are honoured equally, and in accordance with their faiths.

You could use cwgc.org to research graves or memorials from just one of the 52 countries of the Commonwealth (see the complete list at thecommonwealth.org/member-countries) or set your class the challenge of investigating one of the CWGC's sites around the world to show the extent of the work. You can use the 'find cemeteries and memorials' function at cwgc.org to help. You could present these findings using maps, flags, and photographs.

From each memorial or cemetery, it is also possible to select individual servicemen and women’s records, which will show their names, the unit they served in (which may give some indication of where they were from), where they died and when, and possibly some information about their families. The World Wars brought people from all over the world to other places, to fight together. Students could then present some of these different people’s stories to show some of the differences and similarities of their experience.

‘Class presentation’ Assembly

The work done in class could contribute to an assembly reporting work done on the First World War. You could use the short film, available here (insert web address), as an introduction to the work of the CWGC, and what and who it represents.

Students could then report on their history skills or creative learning sessions.