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.

If your school is hosting a ‘There But Not There’ Tommy, why not research the story of local people who lost their lives – perhaps those listed on a memorial in your local town, or even in your school.

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. You could research a person named on a CWGC headstone and present your research. 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.

In contrast, you could research one of the cemeteries or memorials across the world, and try to trace back some of those who lost their lives there.

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.

You could use this research to provide personal context and focus to your school’s Remembrance activity.
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. Looking at this tension could provide an interesting lens through which to investigate the relationship between society and the individual. It could also contribute to Citizenship assemblies on rights and responsibilities, and on ‘service’ to community and country.

Students could present some of the arguments for and against equal treatment.

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.
- The fallen should be brought home (repatriated).

Students in the assembly could vote based on the arguments presented. Compare the results to the actual outcome, where all headstones and memorials were created equal, while individuality was marked by use of names, rank, military unit and personal inscriptions. You could use photographs of the actual headstones, memorials and cemeteries, which can be found in the learning resources, or online on cwgc.org.

Note about repatriation

During the war, in early 1915, British military authorities ruled that no bodies were to be brought home. This policy of non-repatriation was affirmed after the war; although there was some public opposition to this.

Repatriation of bodies was a particularly contentious issue for a number of reasons. Among these were:

- Cost, which would have been high. If borne by families, only the wealthiest could afford it, which would cause great inequality; if borne by governments, all affected governments would have to agree to pay this high cost, which may not have been economically or politically possible.
- Hygiene and public health.
- Logistics, during the war, exhuming bodies would have been impossible or dangerous, and could have caused further casualties transporting bodies from overseas locations would have caused further drain on resources devoted to the war effort.
- Logistics, after the war, the challenge of exhuming and transporting so many remains from so many places to so many places, while maintaining records proving identity for each, would have been immense and the financial cost high.
Commonwealth Day is marked on the second Monday of March each year. This day presents an opportunity to reflect on the historic relationship shared by the member countries and territories, and to look at common values and beliefs.

Your ‘There But Not There’ Tommy could be a starting point for a discussion about the global nature of the world war, with people from British communities serving across the world alongside nationals from today’s Commonwealth.

Research into the CWGC could contribute to an assembly on this theme, showcasing an example of cooperation and respect. The CWGC is still funded by six partner governments – Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand, South Africa, and the UK. Decisions were made which respected the customs and traditions of those of different faiths, and which did not make distinctions between rank and class. Students could be encouraged to research and present facts about one of the 23,000 sites in over 150 countries and territories to highlight the reach of the CWGC’s work, using the ‘find cemeteries and memorials’ search function on cwgc.org.

‘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 (www.cwgc.org), 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, in addition to any wider contextual work you have been doing.