

# A LOCAL TOMMY



The story of a local  
First World War soldier  
from North Tyneside.

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1/11/17

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# A LOCAL TOMMY

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**In Autumn 2018, to coincide with the centenary of end of the First World War, Year 5 children from North Tyneside brought to life the story of a local man who fought in the war – Thomas Baker Brown.**

A rich archive of documents relating to Thomas Baker Brown's life is held at Newcastle University and reflects the life of a "normal" soldier. Thomas from North Shields was a 'typical' First World War soldier. In November 1915, just before his 19th birthday, he joined the army. After completing his training in York, Thomas arrived on the Western Front in 1916, where he served as a signaller. In 1917 Thomas was awarded a medal for his bravery. In 1918 he was captured and taken to a German Prisoner of War camp where he was made to work in the mines. When the war ended on 11 November 1918, Thomas was able to walk out of the prisoner of war camp and make his way home.

Using the archive at Newcastle University as a starting point, young people in North Tyneside created a new piece of theatre sharing the story of Thomas Baker Brown. The resulting play was performed at Whitley Bay Playhouse.

This education pack contains a range of ideas for you to use the Thomas Baker Brown archive creatively with your learners. All the activities have been "road tested" during the project and we hope they give your learners an insight into the experience of a local soldier from the First World War. The activities are aimed at Year 5 pupils but can be re-worked for use with younger or older pupils.

Sources about Thomas Baker Brown and templates to help you with the activities suggested in this teacher's pack can be downloaded [here](#).



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## Introducing the First World War

### ACTIVITY 1

If you haven't covered it already in class, it may be a good idea to give your pupils some background to the First World War in general: the origins, the countries involved, propaganda, fighting conditions and end of hostilities.

There are some great resources for teaching the First World War available. Here's a link to the BBC's primary school material; [www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1)

You can book a Box of Delights from Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. The boxes contain artefacts from the First World War. There is a box for the Front Line and the Home Front. <https://twamschools.org.uk/boxes-of-delight>

The classes in our project also received a visit from the Time Bandits - a local professional team of historical costumed interpreters and re-enactors. This really brought to life the experience of life in the trenches and on the home front. [www.timebandits.org.uk/home](http://www.timebandits.org.uk/home)

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## Exploring the Archive

### ACTIVITY 2: SOURCE EVALUATION

This exercise gets your students to engage with the primary sources and find out facts about Thomas Baker Brown. It also gives them the opportunity to ask any questions they have and to do further research into the life of a First World War soldier.

- Divide the class into groups of 4 - 6 students.
- Give each group a source pack about a particular aspect of Thomas Baker Brown's First World War experiences (Training, Life in the Trenches, Prisoner of War) and an A3 sheet with a photo of Thomas in the middle.
- Ask the students to read the sources and write down or draw any facts they find interesting about Thomas Baker Brown on the A3 sheet.
- Next, using a different colour pen, ask the students to write down any questions they still have about Thomas Baker Brown.
- The students are now the experts on this aspect of Thomas' life and have to 'teach' the rest of the class about this part of his life. This can be done simply by getting each group to tell the rest of the class what they have learnt or by creating a life size 'Thomas' and writing these facts around him. This can be done by getting a student to lie down on a large piece of paper and drawing round them to create an outline of 'Thomas'.

This activity can be extended by getting the students to add in the emotions that they think Thomas Baker Brown may feel or by getting them to research the questions they still want answering about life as a First World War soldier.

### **ACTIVITY 3: 5 Ws**

The 5 Ws (Who, What, Why, When and Where) is an activity that can be used for lots of historical investigation. It can be used as a 'way in' to the topic by getting the students to find out about Thomas Baker Brown and the First World War through primary sources, or could equally be used as a review at the end of the topic by getting them to recall what they have learnt about him.

At the start of the topic:

- Divide the class into groups of 4 - 6 students.
- Give each group a source pack about a particular aspect of Thomas Baker Brown's First World War experiences (Training, Life in the Trenches, Prisoner of War).
- Ask the students to use the source pack to complete the 5Ws s graphic organiser for that aspect of Thomas' life, then get them to feed back what they have learned to the rest of the class.
- Alternatively, you could give each group a mix of sources across all 3 areas (Training, Life in the Trenches, Prisoner of War) to give them an overview of the life of a First World War soldier.

At the end of the topic:

- Divide the class into groups of 4 - 6 students.
- Give each group a 5Ws s graphic organiser and some pens. Give each group 3 minutes to write down as many facts as they can recall about Thomas Baker Brown. You could make this into a competition with a prize for the group with the most facts.

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## **Creating from the Archive**

### **ACTIVITY 4: COMICS AND STORYBOARDING**

Comics provide a fantastic tool for all students to make sense of their learning and can be a particularly effective way of getting those with lower literacy levels to demonstrate what they have learnt.

This activity should be done after the students have looked at different primary sources about Thomas Baker Brown's experiences in the First World War. It is a useful way of getting the students to think in detail about one small aspect of the life of a First World War soldier and to empathise with his life and situation.

- Get each student to choose something from one of the sources that interests them about Thomas Baker Brown (e.g. one of his letters home mentions that his Christmas lunch of turkey will be shared with 30 others and that he is grateful for the chocolate his family have sent him as that will be his Christmas treat).

- Get the students to think how they can show this through drawing, including Thomas' thoughts. Show them the Christmas dinner source and the comic Powerpoint.
- Comics can also be used as a storyboarding tool to tell a longer story. This will look like a more traditional comic strip of 6-8 images with accompanying text. The idea here is that each panel captures one part of the story.
- Students could storyboard the whole of Thomas Baker Brown's WW1 experiences (Training, Life in the Trenches, Prisoner of War) with just the key points picked out.

Click [here](#) for some tips on creating comics from Lydia Wysocki of Applied Comics Ltd.

Read a comic about Thomas Baker Brown's wartime experiences by comic artist Terry Wiley [here](#).

### **ACTIVITY 5: TRENCH SENSES**

- Read aloud some of the sources that describe Thomas Baker Brown's life in the trenches. This could be the sources entitled: mud 1, 2 & 3, weather & mud, weather, winter coat.
- Next ask the students to use descriptive language to create the atmosphere of the trenches.
- First, unpack what the best description does - model ideas.
- Next, in silence with a pen and paper, ask the students to record their first responses to the following starting points:

I see...

I hear...

I smell...

I taste...

I touch/feel...

This could be developed further into individual or collective descriptive writing.



## ACTIVITY 6: GONG SOUP

Ask your students to look at the food parcels source and the Soup advert in the comic.

Have a class discussion about what food the students would miss if they were away from home.

Give the students ten minutes to work in groups of three or four. Ask the students to create a short advert for the food they would miss the most - the group should decide on one person's food. Create your own advert for the chosen food, as a piece of drama or as a drawing, in the style of the Gong Soup advert. Ask them to be really persuasive to sell the food.

## ACTIVITY 7: LETTERS HOME

Imagine you are in the trenches. You are only able to give certain information in your letters home. What would you tell your family? What would you miss out?

Ask the students to form still images of people in the trenches. Once they are positioned ask them to freeze. When you tap the students on the shoulder they need to tell you their true thoughts and feelings.

Next ask them to write a letter home using the freeze frame exercise as an inspiration but thinking about what they might not tell their families.

The Batt.  
France  
1/11/17

My dear mother,  
Your letter and parcel I received quite safely to-day. The contents of the parcel were most appetising and soon began to fill its corners to full its parcels were a few. All your orders have arrived ok. The sauce arrived in good order and it made the coloured water go down so nicely. I must be sending you some



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## Sounds and Music

### ACTIVITY 8: TRENCH ORCHESTRA

Think about the different sounds you might hear if you were in the trenches - the dripping of the rain into the mud, the scuttling of rats, the distant gunfire, the birds etc. Each choose a sound and the teacher acts as a conductor, changing the volume and sounds building up and quietening down. The students could also act as the conductor. It might be interesting to think about the sounds at different times of the day or night.

### ACTIVITY 9: SONGS FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

There are many famous songs from the First World War. These were often uplifting songs that even served as pieces of propaganda for soldiers and those on the Home Front.

#### Starting a Song

1. You might sing the first phrase yourself to show your pupils the pitch and the starting words. Or, one of the pupils can play the starting note on a chime bar, glockenspiel, keyboard etc.
2. You might count 1,2,3,4 at the pitch of the starting note. Most songs will fit this model, but some need to be counted in 1,2,3 and then the 'pick-up' note.
3. It's important to get the general range of a song within your pupil's register. As a general rule it helps to suggest getting louder as you sing higher and quieter as you sing lower.

To prepare your pupils to sing, remind them of the three 'S's - Silence, Stillness and Smiles.

Here's the words to some songs from the First World War and links to YouTube videos.

#### **"Pack up your Troubles"**

Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag, And smile, smile, smile!  
While you've a Lucifer to light your fag, Smile, boys, that's the style.  
What's the use of worrying?  
It never was worthwhile.  
So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag, And smile, smile, smile!

#### **"Goodbye-ee"**

Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,  
Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee, Though it's hard to part, I know,  
I'll be tickled to death to go.  
Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee,  
There's a silver lining in the sky-ee, Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin, Nah-poo, toodle-oo, Goodbye-ee.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8aCnmBVtQ4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8aCnmBVtQ4)

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXcs1Vv3YIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXcs1Vv3YIE)

We hope you enjoyed using this education pack.  
Please do get in touch to let us know what you thought of it.

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*Handwritten text on a piece of paper, partially obscured by the book cover. Visible words include: "the", "pretending", "fill up", "which", "All your", "ok", "been", "made the", "good", "really", "you are sending anything", "would you make some", "Long Scraps", "as they put".*

