

LIFE IN THE TRENCHES

THE EXPERIENCE OF A CANADIAN SOLDIER IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

SUPPLY LINE LESSON PLAN

OVERVIEW

This lesson uses historical thinking concepts to give an introduction to life in the trenches during the First World War. Students will consider the physical environments in which the soldiers were stationed and will develop skills necessary to understand the network of trenches that covered the Western Front.

GRADE LEVELS:

7 to 12, Secondary 1 to 5 in Quebec

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS:

Social Studies; History; Language Arts; Media Arts; Geography

ESTIMATED TIME:

1-2 class periods

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Evaluate objects as evidence in understanding the experiences of soldiers in the First World War;
- Consider the concept of cause and consequence in relation to trench warfare – changes in weaponry leads to changes in tactics;
- Examine photographs illustrating life in the trenches to develop a more in-depth understanding of the experiences of soldiers.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Objects from the First World War discovery box
 - Barbed Wire
 - Gas Alarm Rattle
 - Mark 1 Helmet
 - Map
 - Periscope
 - Puttees
 - Service Dress Cap and Badge
 - Service Dress Jacket
 - Shrapnel Bullet
 - Small Arms Ammunition Cartridge Case
 - Small Box Respirator
 - Soldier's Photo Album
 - Trench Art
- Corresponding Contextual Photographs
- Corresponding Artifact Labels
- Corresponding Artifact Backgrounders (optional)
- Photocopies of **worksheets 1, 2**
- Photocopies of the photographs in **Appendix 1** (optional)
- Interactive whiteboard (optional)
- Computers with internet access (optional)

Important:

The First World War discovery box includes both authentic artifacts from the First World War (about 100 years old) and high quality reproductions of objects from the First World War (made more recently). All objects, whether authentic or reproduction, should be treated with care.



LESSON

PART A - INTRODUCTION

Discuss as a class the concept of trench warfare. What is a trench? Why were they dug? Who did the digging? What purpose did they serve? What were the conditions like? How did soldiers find their way around in the trenches?

The first battles on the Western Front were highly mobile operations, fought over open ground, much as in the 19th century. This fighting caused hundreds of thousands of casualties, and by the end of 1914 both the Germans and Allies were exhausted. They needed to recruit more soldiers and replenish equipment and supplies. In the meantime, each of the armies dug in deeply, protecting their positions with barbed wire, machine guns and artillery. This phase of the conflict – known as trench warfare – persisted until early 1918. Compared to the opening clashes of 1914, trench warfare was relatively static. The fortifications were so strong that battlefield gains were often measured in hundreds of metres rather than kilometres.

PART B – WHY TRENCHES?

Divide the class into small groups of 3 or 4.

Distribute one object to each group:

- Barbed Wire
- Shrapnel Bullet
- Trench Art
- Small Arms Ammunition Cartridge Case
- Mark 1 Helmet
- Periscope
- Gas Alarm Rattle
- Small Box Respirator

Distribute the corresponding **Artifact Labels** for each object. Distribute photocopies of **worksheet 1 – Trench Warfare: Cause and Consequence**. Instruct students to decide if their object is a “cause” (weapon or tactic) or a “consequence” (adaptation in response to a need) of Trench Warfare during the First World War.

When finished invite groups to organize the objects in groups representing cause and consequence.

What other objects might you add to either group to get a more complete picture of life in the trenches?

PART C – TRENCH LIFE: PHOTOGRAPHS AS HISTORY

In groups of 3 or 4 have students analyze photographs relating to life in the trenches. Distribute copies of the photos in **Appendix 1** to the groups.

Give each group a copy of **Worksheet 2 – Photograph Analysis** to complete.

Further images can be found on the Canadian War Museum’s *Canada and First World War* website.
<http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/guerre/photograph-analysis-e.aspx>

The site also includes a version of the photograph analysis worksheet for grades 7 to 9.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

- For Part C: Have students write a series of diary entries or a scrapbook (see Soldier's Photo Album artifact included in Discovery Box) describing a day, month or year in the life of a soldier in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.

APPENDIX

1 – Trench Life Photographs

WORKSHEETS

1 – Cause and Consequence

2 – Photograph Analysis

TRENCH LIFE PHOTOGRAPHS



Shrapnel bursting over reserve trench in Canadian Lines



A Canadian officer picking flowers among the barbed wire



Smashing barbed wire with trench mortars, Vimy Ridge



Canadians clearing a communication trench near Lens



Canadian pioneers laying duckboards over mud during the Battle of Passchendaele



Canadians sleeping in the front line



Canadians who have been relieved from the line cleaning their clothes, etc. in reserve line



Battle of Amiens, August 1918 - Canadians resting in a shell hole made by our artillery



Soldiers of the 22nd Battalion in the trenches



A Canadian soldier in a front line trench



In the trenches at Ploegstert, Captain W.C. Merston photo album



Lunch in the Trenches

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

Name(s): _____

1. Object name _____

2. Object's purpose _____

3. Is this object a cause of trench warfare? Why?

4. Is this object a consequence of trench warfare? Why?

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS

Are there people in the photograph?	
What are they doing?	
What expressions are on their faces?	
What objects are in this photograph? What is the relationship between the objects and people?	
Where was the photograph taken?	
Where is the photographer standing in relation to the subject (above, below, in front of, beside, etc.)? How would the picture change if he or she was standing in a different place?	
Is this photo spontaneous or posed?	
What is the general mood of this photograph?	

PHOTOGRAPH ANALYSIS

Based on your knowledge of the First World War:

Who are the people in the photograph?	
What is the situation of the people in the photograph? Provide evidence from the photo that tells you this.	
What message do you think the photographer was trying to convey?	
Why is this photograph important to history?	
What questions does this photograph raise?	
Write your own caption for the photograph:	