

The British Indian Army World War I



When you go home tell them of us and say,
For your tomorrow we gave our today

Kohima Epitaph - John Maxwell Edmonds (1875-1958)

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Classroom Resource for Curriculum of Excellence Second Level

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Overview

Introduction

- This unit is about the contribution of the British Indian Army to World War I (WWI).
- The information in the teachers' notes section has been collated from historical documents and from research carried out by historians and Colourful Heritage.
- The unit can be taught as a stand-alone topic or linked to a World War theme.

Suggested Methodology

- Colourful Heritage would suggest that the teachers' notes are used in conjunction with the PowerPoint supplied.
- This will help you in your teaching to convey the main messages.
- You may wish to photocopy the teachers' notes and use them as 'Information sheets' to help your pupils in answering the questions.
- The Information sheets may also be used to help pupils in their research task when they are asked to become journalists and report on how the British Indian Army helped in the wars.

Further Activities

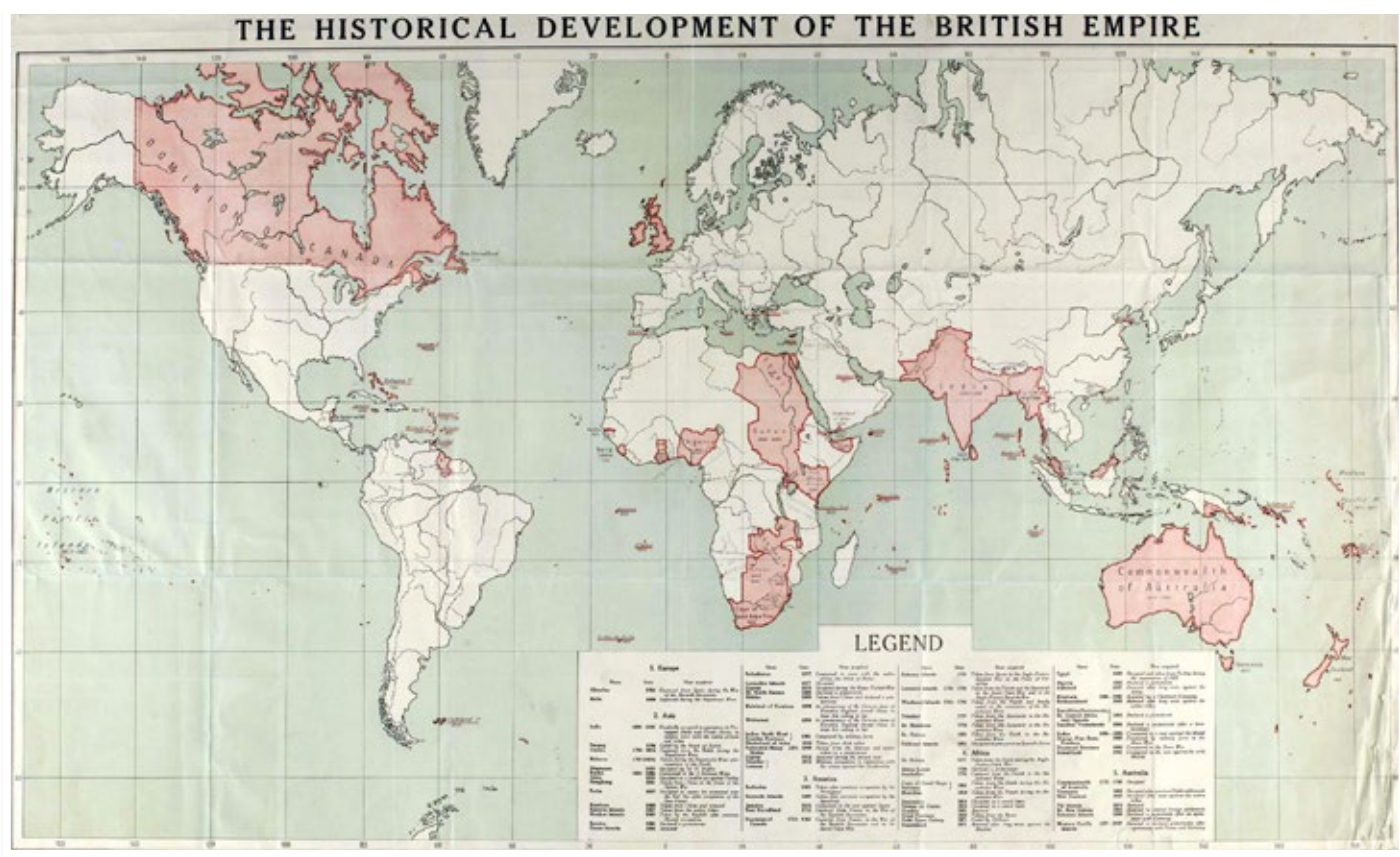
You may wish to develop this aspect further. For example:

- comparing what other sources say about WWI.
- what happened to the British Indian Army after WWI?
- produce a short display about the British Indian Army.
- You may wish to relate what happened during WWI to what is happening in the world today. This could be developed under the theme of – **'Conflicts and Peace around the world today'** – where pupils are asked to research conflicts in other parts of the world; and the role of the United Nations.

Teachers' notes

An Overview of the British Empire

- An empire - a group of countries ruled over by one government or monarchy (royal family).
- The British Empire was made up of Britain and its colonies.
- The British colonies were countries ruled by Britain.



A world map highlighting the British colonies in pink in 1915.

Courtesy of britishempire.co.uk

- The British Empire began during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This was a time when England was becoming more powerful and wealthier.
- The growth of the British Empire was mainly due to economic reasons and trade links around the world. However, the British wanted more political power over its territories too. This resulted in conflict: The Indian Mutiny in 1857 and the Boer War in Southern Africa in 1899.
- India became part of the British Empire in 1858. India was seen as the 'jewel in the crown' of the British Empire due to its huge population and products to trade such as spices, textiles and jewels.
- Because the British had a powerful military, they could effectively march into a country and say 'We are in charge now'.
- However, after World Wars I and II war Britain was left weaker, and eventually, by the end of the 1960s, most countries in the British Empire had become independent.

WWI Background Information

- 28th July 1914 – the outbreak of the First World War, also known as World War I or The Great War.
- Europe had split into two large sides:
 1. The Allies – The British Empire, France, Belgium, Russia.
 2. The Central Powers – Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria and Turkey.
- 4th August 1914 – Germany invaded Belgium because Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was assassinated. Standing by its promise to stick up for Belgium, Britain declared war on Germany – the war had begun.
- Many British people thought the war would be over by Christmas of the same year as they thought Britain was so powerful it could win the war quickly.
- By the time the war ended, 18 million people had been killed worldwide.
- World War I ended four years later on 11th November 1918.

British Empire during WWI

- The war involved people from all over the world.
- Britain's colonies sent over 2.5 million men to fight for Britain during the war.
- **India** sent the most soldiers. At that time, pre-Partition India included both **Pakistan** and **Bangladesh** and its army was known as the **British Indian Army**.
- **Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa** and **Rhodesia** (which is now **Zimbabwe**) also sent thousands of soldiers.
- This meant Britain had soldiers from five different continents: Europe, North America, Australasia, Asia and Africa.

British Indian Army in Belgium and France

- The battlefields in France and Belgium were the scene of very intense fighting and bombardment during WWI.
- The area around the Belgian town of Ypres was known as the **Ypres Salient** and saw some of the largest battles of World War I.
- By the time the war had ended in November 1918, **over 1.5 million** Indian personnel had been sent overseas, all of them volunteers.
- India's contribution was not confined to the army. The Royal Indian Marine (Navy) was armed in 1914, some of its ships serving with the Royal Navy.
- India also provided over 170,000 animals and 3,700,000 tons of supplies and stores.
- The supreme sacrifice of Indian soldiers in Europe is recorded in the major World War I memorial at the Menin Gate in Ypres, Belgium, and at the memorial for Indian soldiers in nearby Neuve Chappelle in France.

Belgium - Detailed description of India's involvement in the Ypres Salient

- The Indian Army's involvement on the Western Front started on 6 August 1914.
- To the Indians, Europe was a completely new and very strange experience. They did not understand the language and the culture was completely different too.

The First Battle of Ypres 19th October 1914 – 22nd November 1914

- This was an attempt by the Germans to end the war to their advantage in 1914. On 22 October 1914 the Indian Army Ferozepore Brigade entered the freshly dug trenches with the Irish 1st Battalion Connaught Rangers.
- On the very same day, **the first Indian casualty of war on the western front fell**. His name was **Naik Laturia** from the 55th Coke's Rifles (Frontier Force) and 57th Wilde's Rifles (Frontier Force). He was son of Phehu, of Tikar, Hamirpur, Kangra, Punjab and is now commemorated on the Menin Gate Memorial to the Missing in Ypres.
- The Indian troops continued to be brought in. Achiel Van Wallegghem, a priest in Dikkebus, writes in his diary that, for the whole night from 22 to 23 October, the Indian troops were brought in with English double-decker buses (see image).



Indian soldiers arriving to take part in the first battle of Ypres, Belgium on double decker buses, 1914.

DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA/ De Agostini via Getty Images

- The next day, on 23 October, the 129th Baluchis made their way to the trenches and the last battalion of the Ferozepore Brigade, the 9th Bhopal Infantry, arrived.
 - The German attack was finally halted by the British Army.

The Second Battle of Ypres 22nd April 1915 – 25th May 1915

- In the first months of 1915 the Germans had prepared a new attempt to break through the Allied lines at Ypres. Under the instruction of Fritz Haber - later chemistry Nobel Prize laureate - a chlorine gas offensive was being prepared.
- On 22 April 1915 at 5pm, the Second Battle of Ypres made history in the north of the now infamous Salient with the first successful chemical attack.
- That evening and night this new weapon took the life of some 2,000 French soldiers. The breakthrough the Germans were hoping for did not materialise because their commanders were quite suspicious of the promised success of the gas attack and saw the event rather as an experiment. They therefore omitted to plan sufficient reserve troops to consolidate and exploit a possible breakthrough. Still, the German front moved a few kilometres nearer to Ypres.
- Again, the Indian Corps was deployed to close a gap in the line.
- On 23 April, the order was given that the Lahore Division had to get ready to move shortly. The division marched north the next day.
- On the morning of 25 April they arrived in Ouderdom, a hamlet between Reningelst and Vlamertinge. The men were exhausted. They had marched for 24 hours in sometimes hilly landscape along cobbled roads, slippery from the rain.
- They were only given a short break in Boeschepe on the French-Belgian border.
- The warning was issued to the Indian troops that when gas was used, they had to place a handkerchief or a flannel over their mouths. It was recommended to soak the handkerchief in urine as the ammonia in urine could neutralise some of the gas. After the gas offensive the Germans had gained much ground in the region of Langemarck and Sint-Juliaan.

Menin Gate memorial in Belgium

- On 24 July 1927, the Menin Gate was unveiled in Ypres, arguably the most important Memorial to the Missing on the Western Front. It is the only place in the world where a remembrance ceremony for the casualties of World War I has taken place every day since it was founded.

Examples of bravery

Bhan Singh, a Sikh of the 57th Wilde's Rifles, had been injured on the face early on in the offensive. He nevertheless stayed close to his officer, Captain Banks. When Banks fell, Bhan Singh thought of only one thing: bringing him back, dead or alive. As weak as he was, he stumbled under heavy fire, carrying Bank's body until he fell down exhausted and had to give up. Still, he did not return before first saving Bank's personal belongings.

The contribution of the Indian Troops on the Western front, though largely underplayed by their British commanders, was hugely crucial.

They strengthened areas of weakness - gaps that could have potentially allowed a German breakthrough.

Despite the Indian Army continuously being deployed in counter offensives where all circumstances were to their disadvantage, they gallantly continued to prepare the field so it could be expanded into a new allied line of defence.

France - Battle of Neuve Chapelle

10th March 1915 - 13th March 1915

- First planned offensive by the British Army on the Western Front.
- Nearly 40,000 British, Canadian and Indian troops took part.
- The Village of Neuve Chapelle had been identified as a weak position in the German defences.
- The battle began in the early hours of 10th March with heavy artillery bombardment from hundreds of guns.
- When the artillery fire lifted, the infantry assault commenced with the Indian battalions in the lead.
- Neuve Chapelle was captured but this victory had been limited and came at a cost of heavy casualties.
- More than 11,000 were killed, wounded or missing including almost 5,000 from the Indian Corps.

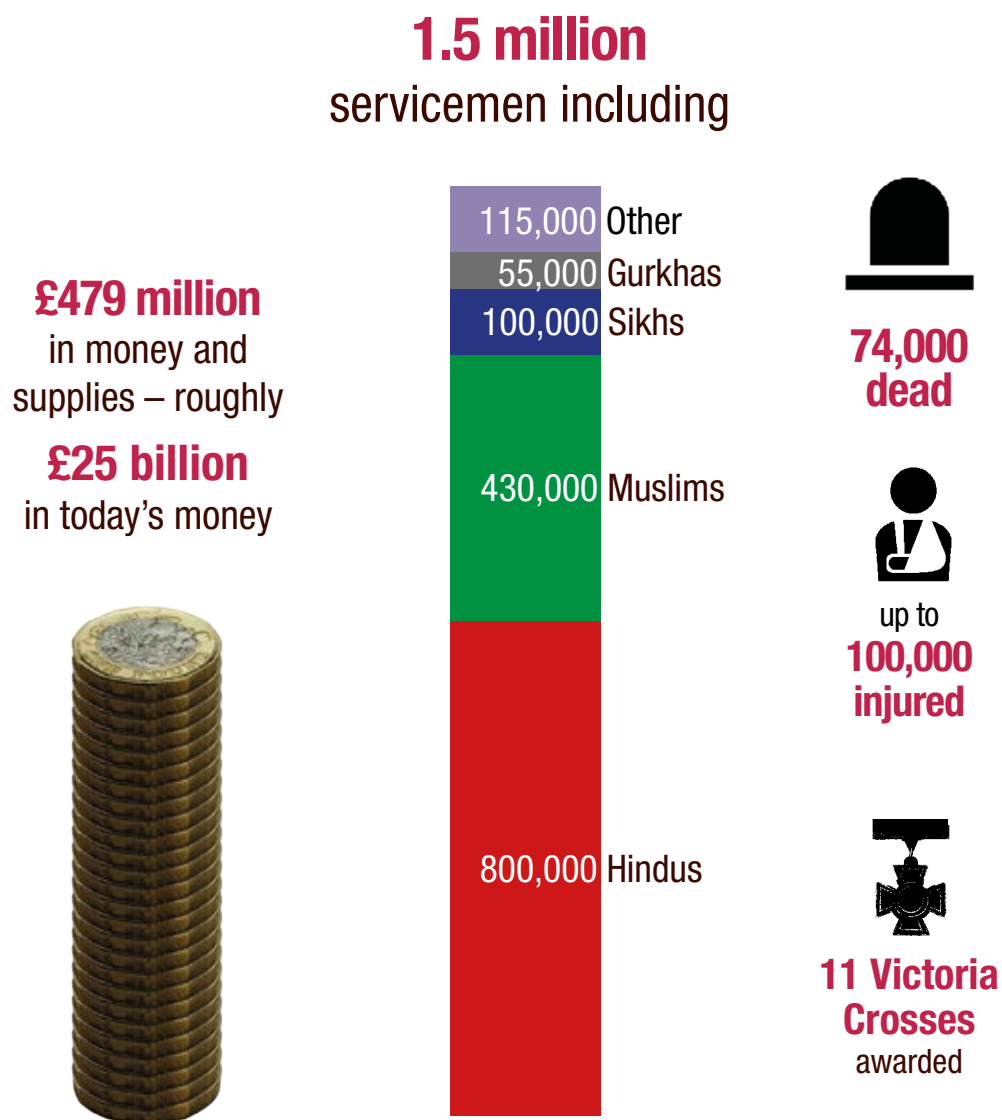
Neuve Chapelle Indian Army Memorial in France

- Commemorates more than 4,700 Indian soldiers and labourers who lost their lives on the Western Front during World War I and have no known grave.
- Engraved on the memorial are the words:

“To the honour of the army of India which fought in France and Belgium, 1914-1918...”



India's contribution to World War I in Numbers



Source: *Glasweg Asians* exhibition at
Scotland Street School Museum, Glasgow

Victoria Cross Recipient - Khudadad Khan

First Battle of Ypres

What is the Victoria Cross?

The Victoria Cross is the highest and most prestigious award of the British Honours system. It is awarded for acts of bravery "in the face of the enemy" and is the most important medal a soldier can get.

- Khudadad Khan was born on 20th October 1888 in the Punjab, in what is now Pakistan, to a family of Pathans who came originally from the North West Frontier, bordering Afghanistan.
- He served in **World War I** with the 129th Duke of Connaught's Baluchis, in the first battle of Ypres.
- He was the first soldier of Indian origin to be awarded the Victoria Cross.

What did he do?

- The 129th Baluchis faced the advancing Germans in the village of Hollebeke in Belgium under terrible conditions - water-logged trenches, insufficient hand grenades, barbed wire, and gaps in the line due to a shortage of soldiers. In fact, the 129th Baluchis were outnumbered five to one.
- On 30th October 1914, the Germans attacked and many Indian soldiers were killed or wounded.
- During the night from 30th to 31st October the Baluchis had lost their position because they could not distinguish German soldiers from the French. They therefore noticed too late that they were being approached by Germans - and not by the French who were fighting to their left.
- Khudadad Khan's machine gun crew, along with one other, carried on fighting until they were overrun by Germans and everyone was killed.
- Khudadad Khan was badly wounded but continued to operate the only remaining machine gun for as long as possible.
- He was the only survivor.
- He pretended to be dead and then managed to crawl back to his regiment under the cover of darkness.
- The bravery of Khan and his fellow Baluchis gave the Allies enough time for British and Indian reinforcements to arrive and stop the German army from reaching the vital ports. He was treated for his wounds at a hospital in Brighton and was later decorated with the Victoria Cross by King George V at Buckingham Palace.
- Khudadad Khan continued to serve in the Indian Army, and he died in Pakistan in 1971.



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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Khudadad_khan_vc1915.jpg



Khudadad Khan

© Charanjit Singh Sangha

British Indian Army in pictures



Indian soldiers arriving to take part in the first battle of Ypres, Belgium on double decker buses, 1914.

DEA / BIBLIOTECA AMBROSIANA/ De Agostini via Getty Images



Men of the 4th Gurkha Rifles attending the graves of their fallen comrades, France, c. 1915.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 81620)



A group of Indian soldiers, possibly soldiers of the 9th Hodson's Horse (wearing just shirts and trousers), stand round the improvised cookhouse at an Indian cavalry camp near Querrieu, France whilst two seated cooks prepare some food. Indian Cavalry Camp. 29 July 1916.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 4072)



Troops of the 29th Lancers Regiment (Deccan Horse) near Pys, France armed with lances and making their way through a shell-torn landscape, March 1917.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 4997)



A line of Islamic Indian troops kneeling down and in prayer at their camp in Mesopotamia, part of which can be seen in the background.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 24572)



Wounded Indian troops at a hospital in Brighton, August 1915.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 53887)



A woman pins a flower to an Indian soldier during a march past, 1914.

©Imperial War Museum (Q 70214)

Suggested Lesson Plans

The following are suggested lesson plans that teachers may use along with the learning intention for each lesson (all materials can be found in relevant folders on the USB stick and posters and videos can be found on www.colourfulheritage.com):

- 1. Lesson 1 - Learning Intention: We are learning to use primary and secondary sources to investigate the role of the British Empire in WW1.**
 - a. Locate and identify British colonies on a world map to demonstrate the vast scope of the Empire.
 - b. Create a brief timeline of the rule of the Empire.
 - c. Show some of the images of the British Indian Army and ask what the pupils see - think and wonder for each. Zoom in on some photos and slowly zoom out, asking children what they can identify.
- 2. Lesson 2 - Learning Intention: We are learning to use primary and secondary sources to investigate the role of the British Indian Army in WW1.**
 - a. Use the text from the Unit 1 PowerPoint, videos and digital resources and the pupil research worksheet (from Task B) to build a profile of the British Indian Army at Ypres.
 - b. Use images in Unit 1 and other research to create a poster, either in pairs or groups which focuses on one aspect from the research sheet. Each group could do a different aspect to build towards a whole class display.
 - c. Create a class list of questions about the role of the British Indian Army and say how they would find the answers.
- 3. Lesson 3 - Learning Intention: We are learning to discuss the concepts of sacrifice and bravery.**
 - a. Watch the video, 'First-hand account of Indian Army contribution at Ypres in World War I' (in Unit 1 folder of the USB stick) and listen to the description of Khudadad Khan. Ask the children to research him further to learn about him and what he did to be awarded a Victoria Cross and discuss definitions of bravery and your own experiences of bravery etc.
 - b. Take a look at what a Victoria Cross medal looks like and design a medal of your own for bravery.
 - c. Write a personal recount about an experience of bravery.
 - d. Design a memorial for the British Indian Army (which consisted of Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus and Christians) using images of bravery, strength and sacrifice in your design.

British Indian Army World War I Pupil Activity

Introduction

- **Task A** - Bravery. The practical activity will help pupils to understand about bravery and that, although bravery is displayed during war, a lot of people are very brave on a day-to-day basis also.
- **Task B** – Research Skills. Enables the pupils to conduct their own research on the war.

Scan this QR code to download all the activities given on pages 17 – 20 in pdf format.



Learning Intentions

Through this activity pupils will be able to:

- Learn about the sacrifice and contribution of the British Indian Army to World War I.
- Understand that bravery can be displayed in different areas of life.

Curriculum for Excellence: Experiences and Outcomes for Second Level

Social Studies: People, past events and societies

- I can interpret historical evidence from a range of periods to help build a picture of Scotland's heritage and my sense of chronology. SOC 2-02a
- I can investigate a Scottish historical theme to discover how past events or the actions of individuals or groups have shaped Scottish society. SOC 2-03a
- I can compare and contrast a society in the past with my own and contribute to a discussion of the similarities and differences. SOC 2-04a
- I can discuss why people and events from a particular time in the past were important, placing them within a historical sequence. SOC 2-06a

Religious and Moral Education

- I am developing respect for others and my understanding of their beliefs and values. RME 2-07a

Literacy and English

- When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking. LIT 2-02a
- As I listen or watch, I can make notes, organise these under suitable headings and use these to understand ideas and information and create new texts, using my own words as appropriate. LIT 2-05a

- I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience. LIT 2-06a
- I can consider the impact that layout and presentation will have and can combine lettering, graphics and other features to engage my reader. LIT 2-24a By considering the types of texts I am creating, I can select ideas and relevant information, organise these in an appropriate way for my purpose and use suitable vocabulary for my audience. LIT 2-26a
- I can convey information, describe events, explain processes or combine ideas in different ways. LIT 2-28a

Technologies

- I can use digital technologies to search, access and retrieve information and are aware that not all of this information will be credible. TCH 2-02a



Task A: Pupil Practical Activity: Bravery

Create a modern-day medal

Design a modern-day medal which can be awarded to any person from any cultural background for any act of bravery. Once you are happy with your design, source materials to create this.

Think about bravery in any situation, for example:

- Bravery in war
- Being brave by standing up to a bully
- Being brave by speaking up against an injustice taking place
- Being brave by saving someone from a racist attack

Materials

You could use the following materials to make your medal

Paper	Scissors	Cloth	Safety pin
Card	Colours	Needle/thread	Glue

Class discussion - Bravery or breaking the law?

Example of an act of bravery:

- In June 2019, German Navy captain Carola Rackete disobeyed orders from her Generals and saved capsized migrants who would otherwise have died.
- For a lot of people, the example of the German Navy captain rescuing drowning migrants is an act of bravery. She saved people from dying and has been awarded a medal by the City of Paris.

BUT at the same:

She is under investigation by the Italian government and might face prison because of “possible criminal activities in regard to undocumented migration”.

Discussion

- How do we define bravery?
- Does that sometimes mean it is okay to disobey orders and “break the law”?

Task B: Pupil Research Worksheet

Research and answer the following questions

1. When did World War I take place and which countries were part of The Allies and The Central Powers?

2. What was the cause for the start of World War I and why did Britain join the war?

3. In your own words describe what happened during the first and second battle of Ypres. Mention where and when these battles took place.

4. In today's money, how much money did India contribute to WWI?



5. How many servicemen from the British Indian Army took part in the war and what was the largest group? How many soldiers were awarded the Victoria Cross?

6. Research Khudadad Khan, why is he important, what did he do and what did he receive?

7. Describe what happens at the Menin Gate every day and why do you think this happens?

8. Now imagine you are a reporter for a local newspaper. Write a short report on the contribution of the British Indian Army, telling your readers how they helped in the war.



Extension Tasks

1. Choose a word or phrase that best describes Khudadad Khan and explain your choice.
2. Imagine that you are interviewing Khudadad Khan. Write a list of questions you would ask him to find out more about his life and his experiences.
3. What has reading about Khudadad Khan and the British Indian Army taught you about how WWI was fought?
4. Research another Victoria Cross recipient. Compare and contrast their experiences with Khan's.
5. Create a brief timeline of the rule of the Empire.
6. Create a class list of questions about the role of the British Indian Army and say how the children would find the answers.
7. Create a poster either in pairs or groups which focuses on one aspect from the research sheet. Each group could do a different aspect to create a class display.
8. Locate and identify British colonies on a world map to demonstrate the vast scope of the Empire.

Discussion Points

1. Initiate a discussion by asking the children to describe what they thought a British soldier looks like. Then show them pictures of the British Indian soldiers. This is a great way to tackle stereotypes and introduce concepts of identity.
2. Ask the children to ask their parents/grandparents about any relatives that may have fought in World War I or World War II or any other wars, and share their stories in a class discussion.
3. Do you think it is right and fair that just because Britain had a powerful military, they took control of a country on the other side of the world?

Unit 1 Definitions

Allies - A person, group, or country that has joined with another for a particular purpose.

Battalion - A large body of troops ready for battle, especially an infantry unit forming part of a brigade.

Cavalry – A group of soldiers who fought on horseback.

Central Powers - A group of nations fighting against the Allied Powers during World War I. The members included Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, Bulgaria and their territories.

Colonies – Countries or areas under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country.

Colony - A country or area under the full or partial political control of another country and occupied by settlers from that country.

Empire - A group of countries ruled over by one government or monarchy (royal family).

Infantry – A group of soldiers marching or fighting on foot.

Lance - A long weapon with a wooden shaft and a pointed steel head, formerly used by a horseman in charging.

Memorial - A statue or structure established to remind people of a person or event.

Military - The armed forces of a country.

Regiment - A military unit made up usually of a number of battalions.

Shell - An explosive artillery projectile or bomb

South Asian – A person who belongs to one of the countries South of the Asian continent e.g. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Timeline - A graphical representation of a period of time, on which important events are marked.

Trenches – These were long, narrow ditches dug into the ground where soldiers lived.

Scan this QR code to download the 'Unit 1 Definitions' page in pdf format.



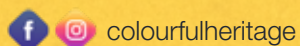
Unit 1 References

1. 11th Infantry Brigade (Manual) - Exercise Commonwealth Soldier - examining the role of the Indian Army on the Western Front 1914-1918
2. Indian Army in the Ypres Salient 1914-1918 by Dominiek Dendooven
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4. Battle of Neuve Chapelle
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6. Khudadad Khan <https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/ww1-pakistani-vc-recipient-khudadad-khan>
7. Video - Khudadad Khan & his Victoria Cross:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/empire/zd676v4>
8. British Empire WWI <https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/articles/z749xyc>
9. British Empire <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/article/historyteaching.htm>
10. World War I <https://www.natgeokids.com/uk/discover/history/general-history/first-world-war/>
11. Contribution of South Asian soldiers during World War I and II
For Further information about Force K6 please see the resources on our website:
<https://www.colourfulheritage.com/projects/british-indian-army/>



Colourful Heritage is the first and largest community heritage focused charitable initiative in Scotland aiming to **capture** and to **celebrate** the contributions of early South Asian and Muslim communities that came to Scotland more than half a century ago.

Colourful Heritage want to **inspire** all parts of Scottish society with the positive contributions the Asian community have made to Scotland, with many of them having turned up with just a few pounds in their pocket and starting their working life as pedlars, bus conductors and drivers.



Colourful Heritage would like to thank all the school teachers, Glasgow Museums staff and our volunteers for their input in compiling this unit.

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