

## Investigating the First World War with our local primary school

Working with primary pupils is something I have always found quite daunting, I feel I know teenagers and what they can do but with primary pupils I always wonder: What do they actually know? What skills do they have as historians? What history do they cover? Are they used to enquiry style lessons? Though daunted, I decided that as a department it was time to move into the primary schools and to make some really good links with the history co-ordinators in our feeder schools. With the centenary of the First World War, I was given a golden opportunity to do this and as a school we invited all our feeder schools to bring a group of pupils from year 5 to participate in a one day workshop. On arrival, it was clear that the some pupils had some knowledge but it was very simple, but these pupils were obviously keen historians so the first part of the workshop was to establish some basic knowledge on trench warfare and the experiences of the soldiers. With the help of members from the Toynbee Time Team (our student history club), we then moved on to look at our local war memorial and each school was given a soldier to investigate. The local war memorial had names from men and we selected men who were killed at the Somme, Ypres, Jutland and Vimy Ridge. Pupils were given some basic information regarding their soldier and then set to work on not only using the Commonwealth War Graves site to find out further details, but they also had to investigate the area they fought in and the warfare they would have experienced. The pupils showed amazing independent learning skills and I was impressed at how well they were able to research. After completing their research and producing a presentation on their soldier, the groups used a rotation strategy to listen and learn from the other schools about other soldiers on the memorial. The pupils were brilliant all day and demonstrated key skills we look for in historians – independent enquiry, team work, research skills.

Following this, I was contacted by one of our feeder schools to go in and teach year 3 and year 6. Year 3 was a challenge and the Toynbee Time Team were of great use here as they were much more aware of the skills pupils have in year 3, so alongside them we devised a lesson on the changes to warfare over time to accumulate an analysis of trench warfare, and year 6 were to go through the alliances lesson that can be found on [www.thinkinghistory.co.uk](http://www.thinkinghistory.co.uk). Again the pupils were brilliant, and the alliance lesson gave them some solid understanding of why a murder led to the start of the war. Due to the success of these sessions, we are now going into another feeder school to deliver them with their year 3 and year 5 pupils during their First World War week and I hope that this school enjoys it as much as the previous.

Working with primary schools has been a real eye opener as it has allowed not only myself and my department to gain a greater understanding of the type of history our feeder school pupils are being taught, but it has also created great links with the co-ordinators in primary schools. Resources for the new curriculum can be shared to help the primary schools with their task of meeting the new curriculum requirements, our community is more aware of the history being taught at Toynbee and it has given Toynbee pupils the chance to be part of lesson planning and teaching of the workshops. And the most important thing for me is I now know what primary history is about and the daunting feeling I had when I thought about primary schools has now disappeared.

***Mary Shepherd, Deputy Director of Specialism***

***The Toynbee School***