



Journeys in the Spirit

inward outward upward downward

World War I. Children's work special edition



White feather stories - conscience, courage and cowardice

Getting ready

Prime Minister David Cameron has promised a “truly national commemoration” to mark 100 years since the outbreak of World War I. From 2014 to 2018 he wants to see a “commemoration that, like the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, says something about who we are as a people”.

Will this commemoration be used as an opportunity to show the horrors of war, or to celebrate it? Will it portray war as something historical, or as something Britain is still very much engaged in?

This special issue of *Journeys in the Spirit* children's work edition offers ways to introduce to children the topic of WWI and explore dilemmas faced by Quakers, and others, opposed to the war at the time. It offers activities to help you examine with children notions of conscience, courage and cowardice, and explore the qualities of a peacemaker. It invites you to discover local peace heroes and 'reclaim' the white feather. It seeks to help you use the centenary as a way to question war, and war-making, and help children think about how we can create a more just and peaceful world.

For more *Getting Ready* information see *Resource 1* in this pack or online, with other *Resources*, at: www.quaker.org.uk/white-feather-stories-resources



- This resource has six sections:
- Getting Ready:** preparing as adults
 - Gather:** a time for quiet and worship and beginning together
 - Engage:** getting into the theme
 - Respond:** responding to the theme
 - Reflect:** ending worship
 - Review:** looking back



We are called to live 'in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars'.
Quaker faith & practice - Advices & queries 31.



Gather *Resources for this session: World War I objects or pictures: a picture of a soldier (or an action man figure), a picture or model of a tank, a gas mask, graves (17 million people died and in trench warfare over half the troops were wounded or killed), medals, red and white poppies, a football (Christmas truce), ration book, a white feather (used to symbolise cowardice).*

Set out a circle of chairs or cushions on the floor. As children arrive welcome them into the circle. When all have arrived, ask everyone to sit relaxed and quiet for a few minutes in Quaker worship. After a little while say that today there is going to be talking and doing about something called the First World War that happened 100 years ago. Try to set the scene of 100 years ago – few cars, no television, no computers and planes were new ideas and so on. Talk about how old they are, how old their parents and grandparents are – just to give some idea of what 100 years is like. Carefully lay down the WWI objects or pictures in the middle of the circle of chairs. Invite the children, in their own time, to choose an object. One by one, they say why they chose it. Did they like the look of it? Does it relate to them in some way? Go on to say what the object or picture is and means in relation to WWI - use it to talk very carefully about a little of the story of WWI.

Engage

The purpose of this section is, first of all, to offer stories of some people who wouldn't join or support the fighting in World War I. There are then some ways to help children understand 'conscientious objection' and conscience. This is followed by an introduction to the story and meaning of the 'white feather'. You can do one or more element of *Engage* and *Respond* in a single session. It is important to note that some of the content of two of the stories offered here is not immediately suitable for younger children (maybe aged 5 – 8). Adjust the language as you think necessary – you might say something like 'people were hurt very badly to try to make them change their minds' or that 'very frightening things were said in order to scare people into changing their minds'.



Stories from World War I.

Resource 2 has three stories about people who wouldn't fight or support war even though it got them into terrible trouble and danger.

Read, or tell in your own words, one or more of these stories as a continuation of what has been shown and talked about in *Gather*. Ask all or some of the questions that come after the stories on *Resource 2*. There are questions for younger and older children.

Now lay down copies of the posters and pictures of relief workers and the prison camp on *Resource 3*. Say something about what each of the posters is and that they are copies of ones made 100 years ago. Say that about half way through the war men who were aged between 18 and 41 (later 51) had to join the army (so many soldiers were being killed). Men could say they didn't want to go but they had to go to a special 'court' to be asked questions and get permission. It was very hard to get permission not to fight. When men wouldn't join the army lots of people said they were cowards or scared – they should be OK about going to kill people. People, particularly young women, started giving white feathers to men who they didn't think were in the army.

Remind children that two of the men in one of the stories, Harry and Howard, were described as 'conscientious objectors'. This is because something called their 'conscience' told them that it was wrong to join in the fighting and war.



What is my conscience?

It is important that children have a chance to find out about and explore what 'conscience' is rather than just learning a phrase like 'conscientious objector' and not know how it might relate to them. On *Resource Sheet 4* there is a simple activity with questions to help you with this aspect of exploring World War I.



Reclaim the white feather.

Resources: have some white feathers for children to touch and hold - these can be bought from craft shops.

Where did the idea come from that the white feather is to do with being scared or a coward? One idea is that it comes from a time when cockerels (or gamecocks) were made to fight each other. If one of the birds had a white feather it was thought that it was not a pure bred bird and therefore not the best to fight.

There are two stories to help children think about white feathers in other ways - as a symbol of peace and hope.

First, a Quaker story from America called 'Fierce Feathers' in which a Quaker meeting is visited by native/first Americans armed for war. See *Resource 5* for a version of this story to tell children.

Second, in a country called Aotearoa / New Zealand the first people who lived there are called Maori. The white feather was worn by their leaders and as a symbol of faith, hope and compassion for all of mankind and our environment. In the late 1800's after a time of terrible fighting between Maori and English settlers two leaders set up a community committed to being nonviolent. It was called Parihaka. The white feather was their symbol. There is a beautiful and moving film at <http://vimeo.com/35821787> and a story outline also on *Resource 5*.

References & other resources

Resources 2, 3, 4 and *5* are available at:

www.quaker.org.uk/white-feather-stories-resources

'*The Story of Ferdinand*' by Munro Leaf ISBN-13: 978-0448456942

'*Peaceful Heroes*' by Jonah Winter ISBN-10: 0439623073

'*Truce: The Day Soldiers Stopped Fighting*' by Jim Murphy ISBN-13: 978-0545130493

'*War Horse*' by Michael Morpurgo, 2006 ISBN-13: 978-1405226660

'*Teach Peace Pack*' by the Peace Education Network: *Assemblies and activities for exploring peace themes with 5 to 11 year olds*. This includes an assembly on the Christmas Truce.

All the books listed in this issue can be ordered or bought from the Quaker Bookshop:

020 7663 1030 or www.quaker.org.uk/shop

References & other resources



A Britain Yearly Meeting resource that includes this issue and also the young people's work edition on WWI:

"Witnessing for peace on the centenary of World War I: a resource pack for Quaker Meetings"

This pack draws parallels between then and now and invites a reflection on how we as individuals today might respond and how the issues are of continuing importance.

As well as exciting and challenging resources for engaging children and young people in the issues raised by the centenary, the pack also includes a fictitious newspaper, postcards with images from the archives, a timeline poster and a white feather bookmark.

Available free at www.quaker.org.uk /WWI and from 020 7663 1030

Respond



Exploring the stories - two activities.

A courage/bravery spectrum. Explain that you're going to draw an imaginary line down the room. One end represents courage and bravery, the other cowardice (not very brave). Ask the children to position themselves along the line according to what they think about the following words or you could find and show pictures of:

A mountaineer climbing Everest; a kitten; an environmental campaigner chained to a tree; a well armed Roman soldier; a First World War soldier; someone who is upset but doesn't show it; a bully; someone standing up for someone being bullied; a child stopping the traffic in a busy road to save a hedgehog.

At various points ask the children to explain the position they've chosen and see if anyone wants to move.

A group definition of bravery. What does it mean to be brave? A dictionary defines it as: capable of dealing with danger or pain without seeming to be frightened, e.g. *brave soldiers who fought and died for their country*, it also mentions a brave act, e.g. *rescuing a child; a child trying not to show that they are scared or feeling pain, e.g. she's been a very brave little girl*. Read these examples to children. Ask children to come up with examples and ideas. Go on to a peace activity below.



Qualities of a peacemaker - three activities. Resources for these activities: flipchart or wall paper; large felt pen; small felt pens; voice recorder; copies on A4 white card of feathers on Resource 6; scissors.

What does it mean to be a peacemaker? Ask children the question. It might be someone who tries to bring different sides together, someone who tries to stop injustice nonviolently, a person who cares for others. What qualities does a peacemaker need? Say that you're going to make a picture of 'your' peacemaker together. Ask for a child who doesn't mind being drawn around. On a couple of pieces of flip chart (already stuck together) or wall paper they lie down and another child draws carefully around them. This represents the peacemaker. As a group then try to work out the qualities and skills of a peacemaker and label these on the body, e.g. eyes – notices what's going on around them; heart – caring; arms – prepared to reach out to others; ears – good at listening. Ask the children: *do you need to be brave to be a peacemaker? Does it take courage to stand up for what you believe in?*

Find a peacemaker. Is there someone from your meeting, or school or family that is a peacemaker? Has anyone in your meeting taken a stand on an issue which was difficult and challenging? What was it, and why did they feel they had to do it? Or is there someone who is always looking after others, showing love and care in quiet ways? You may want to make some suggestions and try to set up a couple of interviews. Help the children work out some questions in advance, and explore what they learnt. You could record the interview and play parts back.

Reclaim the white feather. Have cut out white card feathers ready – see Resource 6 available at www.quaker.org.uk/white-feather-stories-resources. Ask children to choose a peacemaker to receive a 'reclaimed' white feather. To honour their bravery they write on the feather:

My peacemaker is... because they...

You could make a display of feathers for your Meeting House. Please take photos of your displays and send them in to us, we'd love to see them! The address is in the sidebar at the bottom of page 4.



Reflect

During WWI and in every other war, newspapers and others on all sides spread terrible lies about the enemy and what they had done. Why do you think this is? Think about when groups of people are suspicious of each other and what can be done to help break down the barriers. Why do you think some people do not want these barriers to come down?

Think of times when people around you might want you to do things which you are unhappy about. How hard is it to stand out and refuse, to follow your conscience? Why is that?

The armed forces are playing an increasing role in schools, keen to ensure understanding and support. What do you think about the military offering activities and materials to schools?

Have you ever helped someone new settle into your class or stood up for someone who has needed it, even though you didn't really know them? Have you been a friend to someone who needed you? How did it make you feel?

Ask everybody to close their eyes for a moment and imagine themselves in a peaceful place, where they feel safe, secure and happy. Think about what can help us to be courageous about our ideas and beliefs.

Review

Have the children been able to explore what it means to be courageous?

Have they been able to see that during WWI many people resisted the war, following their conscience in different ways, despite all the difficulties this brought?

Have they made any connections with the Quaker peace testimony?

On reflection, is there anything that you would do differently?

Is there any follow up needed as a result of children talking about war, cowardice, courage and conscience?



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