

Lesson Plan: An Unexpected Peace - The Christmas Truce of 1914

Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or large sheet of paper
 - Markers or pens
 - Notebook paper or a journal
 - Pencil or pen for writing
 - Optional: Access to the internet to watch a short, age-appropriate video about the Christmas Truce (e.g., Sainsbury's 2014 Christmas Ad)
 - Optional: Printed excerpts of soldiers' letters (simplified for age level)
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Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the setting and context of the Christmas Truce of 1914.
 - Explain what happened during the truce and why it was so unusual.
 - Analyze the event from the perspective of a soldier.
 - Write a creative letter from a historical perspective, including sensory details and emotions.
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Lesson Activities

Part 1: Introduction (5-10 minutes)

Hook: A Question of Empathy

Ask the learner: "Imagine you are in the middle of a huge, serious competition" maybe a video game, a sports match, or even just a big argument. You and your opponent are on totally opposite sides. Suddenly, you both hear a song that you both love. What do you think might happen in that moment? Would the competition stop, even for a minute? Why?"

Discuss their answer, focusing on the idea of shared interests and humanity connecting people, even when they are opponents.

Setting the Stage

Say: "Today, we're going to learn about a real-life event where something just like that happened, but on a much bigger scale. It happened over 100 years ago during a huge war. We are going to explore the Christmas Truce of 1914, a time when enemy soldiers put down their weapons to share a moment of peace."

Part 2: Body (25-30 minutes)

I Do: Telling the Story (10 minutes)

Present the story of the Christmas Truce using clear, simple language. Cover these key points:

- **The War:** It's 1914, the first year of World War I. Millions of soldiers from different countries (like Britain and Germany) are fighting.
- **The Trenches:** Most soldiers lived in long, deep ditches dug into the ground called trenches. They were cold, muddy, and very dangerous. The area between the two enemy trenches was called "No Man's Land" because it was so deadly to cross.
- **Christmas Eve:** After months of fighting, soldiers on both sides were tired and missed their families. On Christmas Eve, something amazing started to happen. German soldiers started putting up small Christmas trees and lighting candles along their trenches.
- **The Singing:** Then, they started singing Christmas carols, like "Silent Night" ("Stille Nacht" in German). The British soldiers heard them and started singing carols back in English.
- **The Truce:** Slowly and cautiously, soldiers from both sides climbed out of their trenches into No Man's Land. They weren't fighting. They shook hands, shared gifts like chocolate and buttons from their uniforms, and showed each other pictures of their families. Some even played soccer games together!
- **A Moment in Time:** This was a "truce"—an unofficial agreement to stop fighting. It wasn't ordered by the generals; it was started by the ordinary soldiers who realized the "enemy" was a person just like them.

(Optional: Show a short, age-appropriate video clip or read a simplified letter from a soldier who was there.)

We Do: Brainstorming a Soldier's Experience (5-10 minutes)

Say: "Now, let's put ourselves in the boots of a soldier. Let's imagine what it was like to be there."

On the whiteboard or a large piece of paper, create a mind map or list. Ask guiding questions to brainstorm sensory details and feelings:

- **What would you SEE?** (Mud, frost on the ground, candles, faces of the other soldiers, gray sky)
- **What would you HEAR?** (Singing in another language, laughter, men trying to speak to each other, the quiet after so much noise)
- **What would you SMELL?** (Cold air, smoke from a small fire, maybe chocolate or tobacco being shared)
- **What would you FEEL?** (Cold, nervous, excited, confused, happy, sad that it couldn't last)

Collaborate to fill out the list. This builds a "word bank" for the next activity.

You Do: A Letter Home (10-15 minutes)

Instructions: "Your main task is to write a letter home as if you were a British or German soldier who just took part in the Christmas Truce. Describe what happened to your family back home. Use the sensory details and feelings we just brainstormed to make your letter feel real. Explain what you saw, what you did, and how it made you feel."

Success Criteria (What makes a great letter):

- [] It is written from the first-person point of view ("I saw," "We sang").

- [] It mentions at least one specific event from the truce (e.g., singing carols, exchanging a gift, seeing a photo).
 - [] It includes at least three sensory details (something you saw, heard, or felt).
 - [] It expresses an emotion or thought about the experience (e.g., "It was strange to shake the hand of the man I was supposed to be fighting," or "For a moment, it didn't feel like a war.").
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Part 3: Conclusion (5-10 minutes)

Sharing and Recap

Have the learner share their letter aloud. Give positive feedback, pointing out specific parts that met the success criteria.

Ask recap questions to reinforce the main ideas:

- "What was the name of the area between the trenches?" (No Man's Land)
- "What were two things the soldiers did together during the truce?" (Sang, exchanged gifts, played soccer, etc.)
- "Why do you think the Christmas Truce is such a famous story?"

Final Takeaway

Conclude by saying: "The Christmas Truce didn't end the war, and the fighting started again soon after. But it's a powerful reminder that even in the worst of times, people can find common ground and share a moment of peace and humanity. It shows us that the world isn't always just 'us vs. them'."

Differentiation and Extensions

- **For Support/Scaffolding:** Provide a letter template with sentence starters like, "Dear Mother, The strangest thing happened today...", "First, we heard...", "I couldn't believe it when...". Provide the brainstormed word bank directly on their paper.
- **For Extension/Challenge:** Ask the learner to write a second journal entry for December 26th, describing their feelings now that the truce is over and the war has resumed. Or, have them research a real soldier who participated in the truce and write the letter from that specific person's point of view. They could also draw a picture or comic strip depicting the events of the truce.

Assessment

- **Formative (During Lesson):** Observe the learner's participation in the brainstorming session and their answers to the recap questions to check for understanding.
 - **Summative (End of Lesson):** The "Letter Home" serves as the final assessment. Evaluate it based on the Success Criteria to see if the learning objectives were met.
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