

Teaching sequence 4:

The Friends Ambulance Unit

Aim

To offer relevant historical information that supports thinking carefully about the past and making informed responses.

Introduction

Read the letter extract from Corder Catchpool (Resource 4a). Explain that it was written in November 1914. It describes a scene near a railway line near the coast of France. What do the children think is happening? What is the writer's job? Why do the children think he will never forget what he saw? Who do the children think the "we" are who "flung ourselves into this work"? What does "this work" mean?

The Friends Ambulance Unit

In 1914 a group of Quakers formed the Friends Ambulance Unit (or FAU) to provide opportunities for pacifists to help those suffering in the war. This ambulance unit was different because it was not a part of the army. This meant that it could help anyone, from either side of the fighting. Around 1,200 conscientious objectors served with the FAU.

Corder Catchpool was a pacifist and so did not want to fight in World War I. However, he wanted to do something positive to alleviate the suffering caused by the war. Corder Catchpool joined the Friends Ambulance Unit and was trained to help wounded soldiers. The letter extract describes what he found when his unit arrived in France for the first time.

Rachel Wilson

Show the children the photograph of Rachel Wilson and her colleagues (Resource 4b). Who do the children think these people were? Women did not have to fight, so what do the children think their job was?

Many women signed up as nurses to support the war effort. If they joined the army's Medical Corps (the RAMC) they could only help British



soldiers. However, the Friends Ambulance Unit could help anyone who was suffering because of the war, whether 'friend or foe'.

Ask the children to think about why Rachel would have decided to join the Friends Ambulance Unit rather than the army's Medical Corps. How important do they think the difference was? Why do they think pacifists joined the Friends Ambulance Unit?

Show the children the sketch Rachel Wilson drew of herself on duty (Resource 4b). Look at the hats she is carrying. What do the children think the hats were for?

Read the letter extract from Rachel Wilson (Resource 4b).

Teachers might use sound effects of a battle played at high volume to help the children understand the source of Rachel's headache.² The children could use the letter in groups to create a role-play to perform for the class playing Rachel and the patients. As they play their scene the teacher could call 'freeze frame' at different points and the class could ask the players what their character is feeling

or thinking. What qualities as a person might Rachel Wilson have had?

Plenary

Reflect on what the class have read and discussed in the different teaching sequences. Where would they place themselves on the wall chart now? Would they fight, not fight or are

they not sure? Take their sticky note from the chart and place it in the middle of a piece of paper. Write their decision on the sticky note and their reasons for it around the outside. If they are not sure they must also think about their reasons for this decision. They must use evidence from the source material they have read to support their decision.



Interior of a ward at Sacre Coeur Hospital, Ypres in 1915.

2. The website 'FindSounds' (www.findsounds.com) has sound recordings that could be used in this way, and teachers could also use film clips from films or television programmes (sound only). As with any internet resource, teachers will need to listen to recordings carefully and read the whole web page before deciding whether to share them with the children.

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Resource 4a: The Friends Ambulance Unit

Extract of letter from Corder Catchpool

This letter was written about the Friends Ambulance Unit's arrival in Dunkirk. They found many wounded soldiers waiting for help near the railway line:

November 1914

"I shall never in my life forget the sights and sounds that met us. Figure two huge goods sheds, semi-dark, every inch of floor space... covered with the flimsy French stretchers, and on each stretcher a wounded man, desperately wounded nearly every one. The air heavy with the stench of putrid flesh, and thick with groans and cries. Four hundred wounded... Half dead as we were with fatigue, we flung ourselves into this work throughout the night, the need was so great..."



Two Friends' Ambulance Unit (FAU) members transporting bread. Date unknown.

Resource 4b: Rachel Wilson

Extract of letter from Rachel Wilson

Rachel is describing a naval attack on the army unit near her hospital:

Dunkirk, France, 1918

"I was sitting comfortably before the firing [began] surveying the prospect of beginning work again when the sound of guns close to made me automatically spring from my chair and turn out the light. The firing continued and the cow [a type of siren] chimed in, the patients of course woke up...

The noise was deafening and one could hear the shells whizzing through the air while the boom of our guns made a background of sound – I sat on one of the beds and chatted with the patients and longed for one moment of quiet to give my head a rest. After a bit I groped my way to the door and looked out at the blue glare of light outside – after about ten minutes the cracking and whizzing of the shells died down and only a more distant booming could be heard...

Our first report was from the ten casualties [...] who were admitted at 9am and who all survived – one man in spite of gas-gangrene."



Nurses at Queen Alexandra Hospital. Rachel Wilson is second from the right at the back.



Going on duty, a sketch Rachel Wilson drew of herself.