



Experience of a First World War Soldier: John Alex Veitch

Lesson Plan for Unit 1

Intro to Unit

This unit will use primary sources, taken from Perth & Kinross Archive, to engage students with a young soldier stationed at the Front Line during the First World War.

The purpose of this is to:

- educate students on the use of primary, archival resources
- teach research skills through interactive participation and group discussion
- encourage critical and interpretive thinking
- use first hand sources to emotionally engage with collections and people

This unit comprises of six activities with identified learning outcomes. The unit takes approximately 1 hour to complete with some additional time for settling down and finishing up. If this is the first visit to the archive a 20 minute introduction to the archive should also be factored in.

Links to Curriculum for Excellence

- I can show my understanding of what I listen to or watch by commenting, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts.
LIT 3-07a/ LIT 4-07a
- Using what I know about the features of different types of texts, I can find, select, sort, summarise, link and use information from different sources.
LIT 3-14a / LIT 4-14a
- To help me develop an informed view, I am exploring the techniques used to influence my opinion. I can recognise persuasion and assess the reliability of information and credibility and value of my sources.
LIT 3-18a/ LIT 4-18a
- I can use my knowledge of a historical period to interpret the evidence and present an informed view.
SOC 3-01a
- I can describe the factors contributing to a major social, political or economic change in the past and can assess the impact on people's lives.
SOC 3-05a
- I can discuss the motives of those involved in a significant turning point in the past and assess the consequences it had then and since.
SOC 3-06a/ SOC 4-06a

Activity 1. (15mins)

Reading and engaging with a letter from John Alex's Mother

Resources

MS323/3/8 - Letter from his mother to John Alex, 25 November 1917

Divide letter into 3 extracts (show full letter on screen)

Extract 1 – Top of letter down to 'safe and well'

Extract 2 – Top of page 2 down to 'for a certainty'

Extract 3 – Last page of letter

Transcriptions for all extracts

Five groups of five/six students – two groups receive extract 1, two groups receive extract 2, one group receives extract 3

Questions and answers

W: WWW.SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK/EDUCATION

E: CONTACT@SCOTTISHARCHIVES.ORG.UK T: +44 (0)131 535 1367

A: GENERAL REGISTER HOUSE 2 PRINCES STREET EDINBURGH EH1 3YY

A Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC044553)

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Who wrote this? – Mother, Mam, Mum, woman 2. When do you think it was written? – 25 Nov 1917, War, Pitlochry, Perthshire, Dunmurray 3. What is it? – Letter, soldier's letter, war letter, local news, family news, letter from a mother, news from home 4. Why was it written? – keeping in touch with someone who is far away, pass on news, couldn't phone him 5. What is interesting? – open question 6. What else can you tell me? – open question
Learning Outcomes
Skills – critical thinking, group discussion, triangulation of data
Outcome - students understand that they are reading a letter within a family from the first world war, that this is a unique, historical record
Activity 2. (15mins)
Reading and engaging with a letter from John Alex stationed in Belgium
Resources
MS323/1/144 - Letter from John Alex 1st London Scottish attached to 1st Entrenching Battalion B.E.F. to his mother in Pitlochry Transcriptions of the letter One of the five pages to each group
Questions and answers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Where is he? - Belgium, Germans 2. What's happening? What is he doing? - bombardment, guns, digging trenches 3. Is there anything unusual or that you don't understand? - being far away, villages, restrictions, bully beef, 'up the line', Revielle, aerial bombardment 4. How is he feeling? Why is he always saying 'he feels safe'? – being safe, reassuring, hungry
Learning Outcomes
Skills - critical thinking, group discussion, triangulation of data
Outcomes – understanding a collection of letters from a First World War soldier called John Alex Veitch to and from his family, understanding of aspects of everyday life at the front line in France/Belgium
At this point you reveal the photograph of John Alex (MS323/3/3) and a bit of background info. DO NOT mention that he did not survive the war and try to deflect any questions surrounding this.
Activity 3. (5mins)
Discussing the photograph
Resources
A4 copies of MS323/3/3 - Studio photograph of John Alex in his uniform
Questions and answers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How old is he? – 19/20 2. When do you think it is taken? – before going to fight 3. Where is he? – in a photographers studio 4. What else does the picture tell us?
Learning Outcomes
Skills – critical thinking, group discussion, interpretive thinking
Outcomes – identifying the significance of the photograph, identifying the context of the photograph, to develop an empathy with John Alex
Activity 4. (5mins)
Still image activity where the groups recreate the taking of the photograph. Select one group to begin with and direct them. Be fast and frantic, shout out directions, don't give them the chance to feel silly or self-conscious. Once in position shout freeze. Try to push someone over, get them to switch it off and back on, hold it tighter. Get all the groups to join in.

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Resources and Roles
Sticks to act as John Alex's cane
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. John Alex 2. Mother 3. Photographer 4. Extra soldier 5. Soldier's parent
Once everyone has participated for a few minutes get them to FREEZE
Learning Outcomes
Skills – group working, interpretive thinking, confidence building, dramatic characterisation
Outcomes – to embody the character of John Alex Veitch through dramatic interpretation using empathy and imagination

Activity 5. (5mins)
Thought tracking for each character, selecting one group for everyone to gather around (don't move them from their position in the room)
Questions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is he thinking? 2. What is he feeling? 3. What might they be saying?
Learning Outcomes
Skills – group working, interpretive thinking, imaginative speculation
Outcomes – voicing the possible thoughts and feelings of John Alex, his mother and photographer during the portrait, deepening a connection with the character, finding a personal comparison with John Alex and his mother

Activity 6. (10mins)
Role on the wall exercise
Resources
Large scale outline of Veitch on interactive screen
Questions and Answers
Using all the information gathered throughout the session fill in the outline with external facts on the outside and internal influences on the inside
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Date of birth - 20 March 1897 2. Where is he from? – Dunmurray, Pitlochry, Perthshire 3. Where has he been in the war? – Belgium, France 4. What has he been doing? - digging trenches, watching aerial bombardments, visiting Belgian village, getting his photo taken, reassuring his mother that he is safe, well fed, that he writes home, that his family write to him, up and down the line, watching planes, sleeping in a tent, inspected by officer, being censored 5. What is he feeling? worrying about death, what's going to happen...
Learning Outcomes
Skills – collation of data, sorting data between factual and speculated, group working, summarising information
Outcomes – students create a diagram by sorting the information they have gathered into a coherent picture