

SEBASTIAN FAULKS'S

BIRDSONG

STAGE VERSION BY
RACHEL WAGSTAFF



EDUCATION
PACK 2018

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1. Creative Team Interviews

The Adapter Rachel Wagstaff

How would you describe the skill of adapting a play or novel?

I suppose you have to understand and find the heart of the novel. What is it about this work to which you - as a reader, as a fan - respond? And then you have to transpose it, by turning it into a play, which lives and breathes in its own right and requires no knowledge from the audience of the original work, but remains utterly faithful to the spirit of it. In practicality, that means tough decisions, such as which characters to keep, which ones to elide, and which ones to lose; which episodes to dramatize; and in which order to tell the story. Sometimes something that works really well on the page doesn't work at all on the stage. You have to be ruthless when necessary, but never alter for the sake of altering. I apply the Sebastian {Faulks} test. Would he approve, understand or even notice? If he doesn't or wouldn't object, then perhaps we're okay!

You clearly love this book. What is it that you are most keen to preserve and present in the play script?

The reason Sebastian wrote it. You can really sense the writer who went to France and was appalled and deeply moved by all those symmetrical, matching white graves. The quiet beauty of it all, which of course belies the horror of what so many went through. How can human beings have allowed and justified so much suffering? And how can we have allowed it to happen again, only twenty-one years later? Reading the novel made me begin to understand what it might have been like for an individual caught up in such an extreme historical episode. I wanted to bring that to life on the stage; to re-tell those stories which we must not forget.

Where did you start when tackling this novel?

I read it about five times, taking copious notes each time. I then went through, making a detailed breakdown of every event, every character choice, and every great line. I then put the book away and tried not to refer to it again.

Are there other practical, perhaps theatrical challenges that you had to consider when creating this draft?

I was deeply aware that to do justice to the characters, we would have to narrow down the extensive 'cast list' from the book. By trying to cram in every character, how could an audience member ever get to know anyone, care about anyone, let alone differentiate between them all? There was also the practical consideration of cost. No producer wants a cast of thirty. I had to think about which characters were essential to Stephen's story, and how many of these parts could be doubled with other similar parts, to make interesting thematic points, as well as saving money and making the whole piece more viable to produce! Another major headache: how to create tunnels onstage. I decided to leave that problem to the director...

How many drafts of this have you written, and how do you know when it's finished?

No idea. At least one hundred. I realised the other day I first approached Sebastian seven years ago. I can't believe I'm still rewriting it. It's still not finished. I am still getting notes or finding things that need work.

Speaking to people who have read the novel, they all have a bit they treasure, a moment of poignancy. Do you?

The letter Jack receives from his wife to tell him that his son has died. It still makes me cry. And the extraordinary description of the first day of the Battle of the Somme. Oh, and the moment when Michael Weir goes home. And Stephen's epiphany in Norfolk. And the birth of Elizabeth's child. I still very much admire this book, don't I?

With the 100th anniversary commemorations of the First World War happening all around us, do you feel a sense of responsibility in helping retell this story?

I don't want to be caught up in any bandwagon jumping. I've been approached about various projects to do with commemorating the anniversary. I have no desire to be involved in anything cynical or moneymaking. For me it was the death of Harry Patch, the last living British army veteran to have fought in the Great War, which instilled in me the sense of responsibility. With no one left now, the stories must be told and re-told second, third, fourth hand, so that those who fell, those who fought to keep us free, are never forgotten. And although it seems we never learn, we have more of a chance if we remember and humanise history.

What advice would you give to young people wanting to become writers?

Write. Read, watch, and listen. Devour fiction. But above all, write, for as many hours, days, and weeks, years as you can. Writing is a skill, a craft, and I'm certainly still learning, but you only get better by doing it. Never give up but get a job in the meantime as, unless you're exceptionally lucky, it does usually take years to get anywhere....

Preservation is a theme throughout this story. Preserving life, a way of life, a love, and sanity even. What things in your life would you be most keen to preserve? .

Family; friendships; integrity. In this industry, it seems difficult to preserve any of these, let alone all three!

Why Not...

Try taking a chapter or small section from one of your favorite novels and turning it into a scene from a play. Think about who speaks and what they say? What needs to be said that is hidden in the author's narrative and who is going to say it? Do you need to bring in other characters from the novel into this scene?

Start by asking yourself some simple questions about the chapter and write them down.

Who is in this chapter?

What do they know at the start of the chapter?

What do they know by the end of the chapter?

What does the reader know by the end of the chapter, that the characters might not?

Remember what Rachel says about finding 'the heart of the novel' She says 'What is it about this work to which you - as a reader, as a fan - respond?

Try doing this as a whole class exercise. You must all read the same chapter. Take Rachel's example from above. She says, "I read it about five times, taking copious notes each time. I then went through, making a detailed breakdown of every event, every character choice, and every great line. I then put the book away and tried not to refer to it again."

After you've read the chapter several times, put it away and try to turn it into a short scene. You'll be amazed at how different all your scenes will turn out, based on your own individual interpretations.

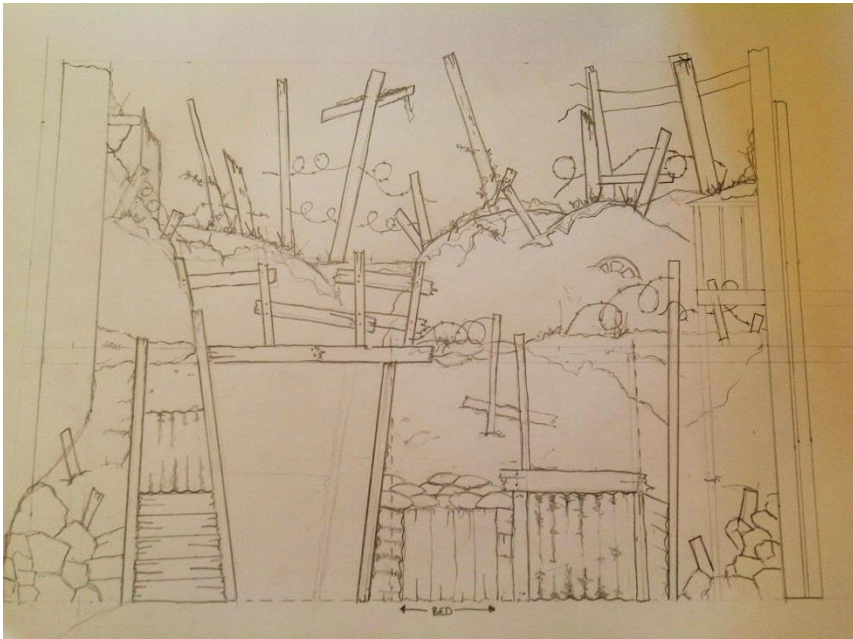
The Designer Victoria Spearing

Where do you start with a design process?

What generally happens is I will read the script and the Director will have an initial conceptual idea. I will read the script with that concept idea in my head but also it's important to have an open mind too, because things can change so quickly, as they have with Birdsong. The ideas have changed radically from our original conversations and the original sketches that I produced. I suppose it's the same with actors. You read a script and think 'well this character could go left or it could go right' Some Directors will give me images as an idea for starting points but others will just say 'Do what you like, go for it!'

Which approach do you prefer?

I think it depends on how well I know the Director. Some Directors will want the set to be interactive. They want a moving living piece, whereas other Directors just want a backdrop for the play. With the former, which is how Alastair sees the set for Birdsong, it's often best having some conceptual guidance because he knows more precisely what he needs or wants the set to do. So, as in this case, I feel until I can unlock what the Director has in his or her head, it's often hard to know what questions this set needs to answer. So, it takes a lot of discussion to understand where the creative heart of the production lies. For instance when I first read the play I felt the focus was the love story, but Alastair feels that the focus should be the war. Maybe that's a male/female thing, I don't know! So now I feel we are looking for that balance.



Early Scale hand sketches of set concept design

This play is going to be touring to theatres of such varying sizes. Are you going to have to create many variations of this set

In some respect yes. It's going to have to contract and expand depending on where we go. On the whole it's going to look the same, and has to fulfill the same brief, but it will have to adjust to the venue as opposed to being an independent touring unit, which will mean lots of little additions and adjustments. It's tricky thing to consider. It's not as simple as taking a bit off stage right in one venue and adding a bit on in another. You don't want to give people half a show in one venue. So I will need to condense rather than reduce. Reduction suggests losing something. I don't want that.



Final Model Box by Anne-Marie Woodley

How did you get into Theatre Design?

I enjoyed Art and Design at school and I was always good at it, but the reality is I thought I probably shouldn't do a degree in it, as I don't think I'll be able to get a job after that! Funnily enough it was doing English at school, going to see plays and reading plays that I realised that I could turn my love of Art into something that might be a real job! I did a lot of school plays and then started to get involved with things outside of school and my interest blossomed from there. I think was like a lot of young people who enjoyed the backstage work. I realised I liked theatre but knew very early on that I had no interest in being on stage.

What advice would you give to young people who want to be Designers?

I think it's important to get involved in real theatre. Go and volunteer, ask questions, see how things are done. As important as my degree was, I think there is that slightly cocooned world of a degree. You have an imaginary but endless budget, you can build anything you want. It doesn't ever need to tour or conform to any requirements. It's important to see and understand the realities of a real brief early on. There are many ways into theatre design. A degree is obviously useful but not the be all and end all. I have a friend who dropped out of his first year course and went to apprentice with Cirque du Soleil.



Final Watercolour Set Concept image by Victoria

Why not...

Take the scene you created from the exercise at the bottom of 'The Adapters' interview and try to imagine a design. Ask yourself some simple but important questions.

Where does the scene take place?

When does it take place? (What period in history)

What things are needed in the scene to aid the actors and what things are for effect?

Victoria says that Directors will often provide her with images to help her. Why not search the Internet for pictures that best suit the images in your head. You could take photos of materials, rooms, places and furniture. Make a mood board that charts the colours, materials and location ideas that you might have over a period of time. This might sound basic, but a lot of designers work this way and it helps with creative thinking. It may sound strange but some Designers can't draw and so they use mood boards and computer design instead. The process isn't about your ability to draw; it's about your creativity and your ability to communicate those ideas.

Once you're happy with the decisions you've made, why not get the whole class to present their designs. If you ask your teacher to be the Director then he/she can question each of you about the designs. It sounds quite scary, but this is what Designers have to do all the time.



Final Model Box by Anne-Marie Woodley

The Director Alastair Whatley with Charlotte Peters

Why this story?

To answer that I have to look back at two of the shows I have done before. I have done Journey's End, which is a classic World War 1 play. A great example of a well-made play set in one location that explores the relationship between an officer and his younger pupil at school that became his idol. Then I did Dancing at Lughnasa a couple of years later and that is about a young Irish man exploring the memory of his childhood. Within those you have two themes that fascinate me. The past lives. The intermingling of past and present lives, ghosts of family memories. Also with the wider issue of war and the bonds that are forged in war and the effect it has on the human condition. And all underpinned uniquely with this amazing love story. Put those things together and you get something of what first fascinated me about Birdsong.

The play has been done before, but this a very different version.

I saw the production in the West End and I thought it didn't quite get to the heart of it. It felt like a shortened version of the book to me, but I was sure there was a theatrical telling in what Rachel had written that didn't quite find a voice in that production. This is just a personal opinion, but it left me cold and the one thing that Birdsong does - what it should do is hit the heart before it hits anything else. Working now with Rachel has been great. We've managed to turn what was a straightforward narrative story, which was a filleted version of the book, into a memory play. A stage play that exists in its own right. Rachel has done a brilliant job.

What difficulties have you come across in realising this piece?

Well, what we're in the process of doing now is pushing the ideas forward. Seeing how all this can work on stage. There are complicated demands made of the designer. There are hundreds of locations. We're trying to create naturalistic environments like the world of the tunnels, which is a key part of the book and the play. The first thing any actors and audience asks is 'how are you going to show the tunnels on stage?' So the difficulty now is to try to marry the vision with what we want audiences to feel and with expectations that come with this very big very popular story. There are big philosophical things at work in this story and we have to try to get that into the design, so the design has something to say. On top of that, this show is touring to 28 different venues, so that puts a lot of demands on the set and the designer.

Also, Rachel and I have been trying to set the rules and understand the logic of the memory play. It's exciting, because this play was never done as a memory play before, but we need to know what the rules are. If we leave the real time of the play, which is 1916 -1918 and go back to 1910 to the world of the memory, can you then leap forward to a different geographical location and then return to the memory? All the time we're conscious that there maybe too much happening and we don't want to lose the story or confuse the audience. As, always we've found that simpler is better. So we're in the process of pairing things down, removing the fat and arriving at something that is cleaner and easier to understand. It is difficult but it's all very exciting, because it's not as if this is an already well-established play that can't be messed with. We've been able to work, as a team to tell this magnificent story how we feel is right.

What advice would you give to young people wanting to become Directors?

Watch as much theatre as you possibly can, read as many plays, talk to actors - get to know how they work. Visit lots of art galleries. Read lots of books. Then work as broadly as possible all over the place, everywhere and anywhere.

Everything is useful, watching the way people sit opposite each other in cafés is fascinating, and people are fascinating - ugly, beautiful, malodorous at times but always enduringly fascinating. To survive in the Theatre you need passion and commitment so in the first instance if you are not interested in people and telling stories, do something else.

What things do you think are worth preserving?

My freedom to dictate my own life. To work on projects, which I love, working in a job, which I would do for free. I would also try and hold onto my friends and family. But above everything I would preserve a personal liberty to say what I wanted, believe freely and be the person I want to be. Personal choice, free will, cocktails and love - all are things, which I could not live happily without, and things we take for granted every single day.

The Costume Designer

Ed Holland

Where did you start with this design?

With my head in my hands going 'oh no, classic military costume!' It's notoriously difficult to do period uniform justice, and make it look accurate whilst being true to the story you're telling. For the civilian elements of costume I also wanted to keep a uniformity and have the boundary between Stephen's experiences during the war run into his memories of the past



Was this quite a research heavy process?

Yes, but thank God for military advisors. Tony Green has been a blinding help for us on this, keeping us on our toes and making sure we know where the bounds of realism and fantasy are. Hopefully, we've kept the two on first name terms.

How closely did you work with the Set Designer on this?

Not as closely as one would usually think necessary, and this is mostly because our ideas and prerequisites have been similar from the word go.

What are the main challenges of this design?

Realizing the recollections, hallucinations and memories of Stephen as he occupies a world of past and present. I naturally use the word 'present' loosely as his contemporary is 90 plus years ago.

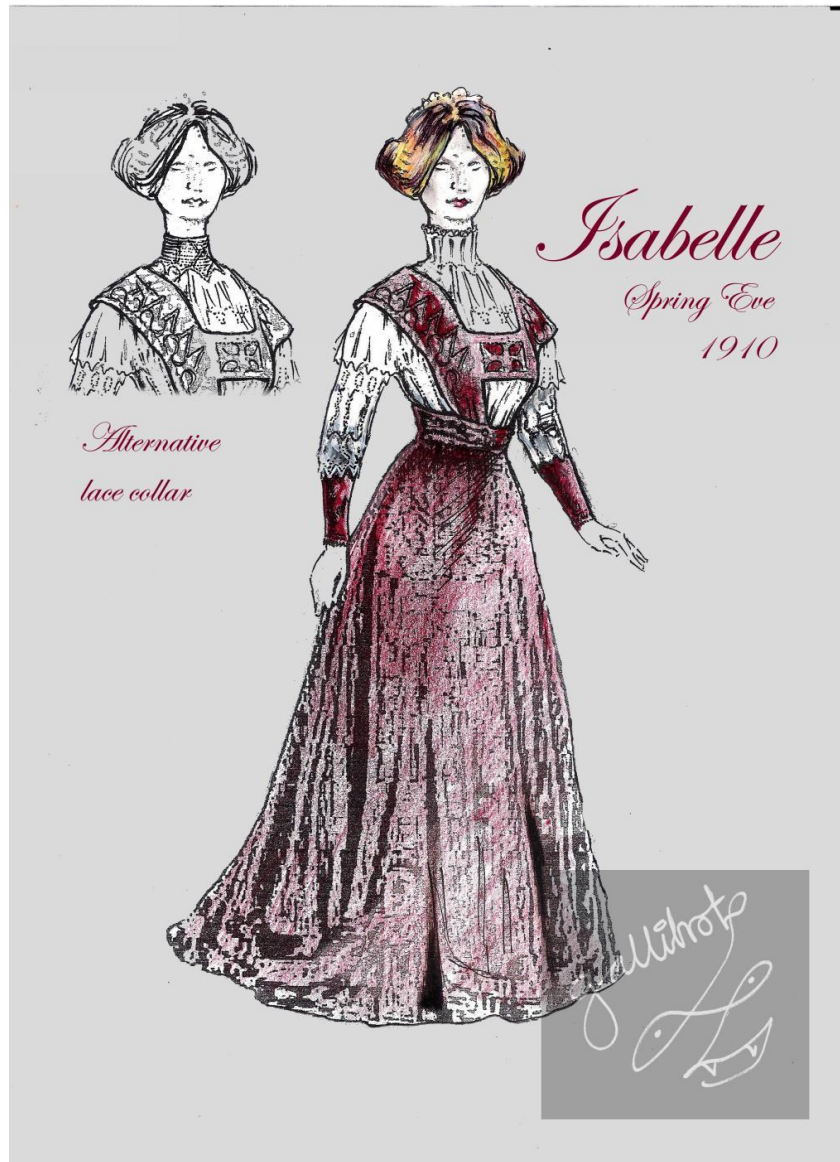


Isabelle - blouse detail

What must a costume design do in the context of the wider production?

Endure the rigors of a 6-month tour. If the costumes don't do that, then there will be a certain element of nudism unexpectedly entering the Great War.

What advice would you give to young people wanting to get into your line of work? Being good is never good enough. By that I mean, get a back up plan for those times when employment is scarce. If you're going to study a creative discipline, make sure you support it with a business course or corporate subject of sorts - boring, I know, but essential if you don't want to become irrecoverably disillusioned with the theatre and media areas at some point in your career. Oh, and never expect too much too soon. It truly takes time to get somewhere.



2. The Royal Engineers

'Sappers', 'Clay Kickers', 'Moles', 'Sewer Rats'. Whatever name you may have heard, these often forgotten brave men of the Royal Engineers spent the war in near total darkness, crawling through tunnels they dug by hand, in constant threat of being blown up by enemy explosives, asphyxiating on natural gases and gases given off as a result of explosions. Buried alive by the collapsing earth, drowning in the accumulating tunnel water or gun fire and hand to hand combat with the enemy in these cramped under ground battles. The things that happened to Jack Firebrace, Captain Weir and the rest of the tunnelers in the novel and play, really happened.



Image of an actual German Trench

25,000 men were recruited to dig beneath the enemy lines during WW1. These men were mostly civilians recruited from the mining communities throughout Britain, but as mentioned in Birdsong, because of their expertise other useful professional subterranean workers were employed such as sewer and London underground tunnelers. The idea was to dig beneath no-mans-land and under the enemy trenches to blow them up with high explosives.

By 1915 the British realised that Germans were mining to a planned and more advanced system and thought that it was essential that they had a counter attack. Even though the British had trained engineers, there was no core team, so recruitment became a priority. The plan was to employ experienced miners to make the tunnels safer, and to quickly make up for lost time. The recruitment was aggressive. Posters were put up outside mines, offering financial incentives that were often much better than their regular pay. Those first regiments were under trained. There are stories of miners leaving their jobs and being on the front line battlefields less than a week later!

The 'Clay kickers' as they were often called, refers to a mining technique. The miner would sit up against a wooden support facing the wall and dig away the earth with small tools. They would pass the dirt back to be bagged up and removed. Can you imagine the hard work needed and the conditions that they had to endure? Even though it was possible to stand in some of the tunnels, the majority was only big enough to sit up in and many allowed only a single line of men to crawl through. It was often hot in those tiny claustrophobic conditions and although the miners were used to similar conditions back home in coal mines, their professional soldier colleagues who were enlisted to help them were often devastated by the experience describing the 'suffocating hell' and 'crushing darkness'.

Using a Geophone



Whether they were 12 metres under ground or 20 metres, the only thing the miners could see by candlelight were the tunnel walls and the faces of their colleagues. They relied on their hearing. In fact listening carefully could be the one thing that saved their lives. Other than the noise of the surface shelling that must have shaken the tunnel walls as well as their nerves, they were listening for the enemy. German tunnelers could be digging beneath them, above them - in fact all around them. There was no clever heat sensing equipment in 1915, and so the men would listen for the sound of digging, crawling, talking and even breathing! Stethoscopes and other simple metal listening devices would be placed against tunnel walls, everyone would fall silent and hope that they would hear the enemy before the enemy heard them. At those moments the men would say that they didn't know which was louder - the outside sound of the bombing or their hearts beating hard inside their chests.

If enemy tunnels were located, the men would pack the walls with explosives, retreat and light the fuse in the hope of killing the enemy and destroying their tunnels. Often the two opposing sets of tunnels would meet and there would be a fight to the death under ground. During the years of stalemate along the Western Front, the Germans and the Allied forces used the tunneling tactics in order to break the deadlock. At the Battle of Messines in 1917, British tunnellers placed 455 tons of explosive in 21 tunnels. It was an enormous undertaking. The enemy positions were not that far away but 21 tunnels took more than a year to prepare. The huge explosion killed 10,000 Germans. It was described as the biggest explosion in the world. So many of those men that worked under ground never saw light of day again. The battles, tunnel collapses and explosions means that they are to forever remain beneath the fields of Northern France and Belgium.

Tunneling Officers



Why not...

Imagine the conditions under ground. Mark out narrow passageways on your drama classroom or hall floor with coloured tape. Now create a scene using some of the information contained in the description above. Work in groups in different tunnels, making sure that one person is the clay kicker, mining up front and the others behind are removing the earth in bags. As a mime, do this silently. What happens when one person needs to go ahead of another? How do you cope? What happens when a message needs passing on to someone ahead in the tunnel? Remember that noise was kept to a minimum in case of nearby German tunnels. Do you have to create a sign language or is it too dark in your tunnel? How close to you have to be to whisper?

Try the same exercise but with two competing tunnels close to each other. In two groups, pretend to be two opposing forces silently tunneling. Once you are comfortable with your job/action in the tunnel, wear blindfolds so that your sense of hearing becomes more focused. Listen out for the opposing group of tunnelers. How do you feel when you hear them? What do you do? Pretend it is a game of 'grandmother's footsteps' and stop when you hear a noise. Only continue mining when it's quiet again. This exercise should help you understand the conditions and it should focus your attention on the small detail of the life underground. Only when your team is working well should you attempt to add any real dialogue.

See what else you can find out about lives of the Royal Engineers and the conditions under ground?

Check out the **Royal Engineers Museum** at <http://www.re-museum.co.uk>

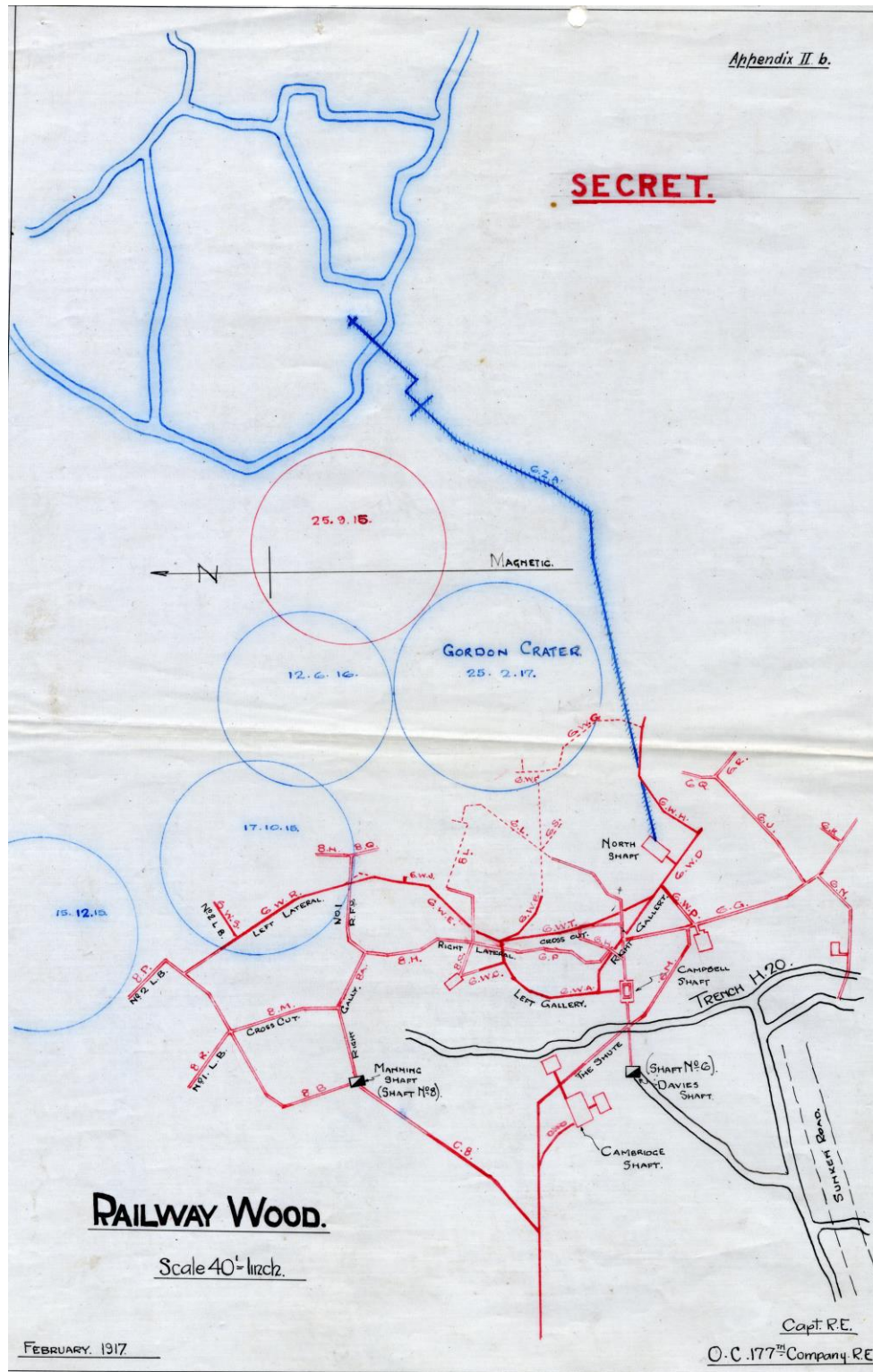
You'll also find some interesting news articles and there will be a lot more as we get closer to the 100th anniversary of the start of First World War. Here are two recent news stories

Hero Tunellers THE MIRROR

<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/the-real-hero-tunnellers-of-world-war-165110>

Heroic Sewer Rats THE DAILY MAIL

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2091868/The-heroic-sewer-rats-Somme-Truly-humbling-stories-horrors-tunnel-warfare-80ft-underground-seen-BBC1s-Birdsong.html>



Railway Tunneling Plan

3. Letters and Memories

So much of Birdsong is about memories. It talks about remembering a love, a life, a better time. Sebastian Faulks describes these memories, both good and bad, with such vivid colour.

The majority of young men who fought on the battlefields during the first world war had never been out of their own country before and now found themselves sat outside, exposed to the freezing cold and baking heat in unsanitary conditions surrounded by death and destruction.

The one thing they would look forward to was the arrival of mail. The words written from loved ones would keep them connected to the lives they once knew. Although the war had become a new reality, the letters helped remind them not just of people but of the world they once inhabited. It reminded them of a humanity that still existed and that they were fighting for. It reminded them of the small details that had made up their home lives.

As the landscape around them was being destroyed and becoming increasingly featureless, the colour, vitality and features of their own lives were treasured in memories.

The letters below are from the novel. Here Sebastian Faulks has imagined the letters that are written by the soldiers to their loved ones back in Britain. It is the night before they are instructed to leave the trenches and go into battle - going 'over the top' as it was known.

Michael Weir

Dear Mother and Father,

We are going to attack. We have been making preparations for some days underground. My own unit has been involved and we have now done our bit. Some of the men have volunteered to help as stretcher-bearers on the day. Morale is very high. We expect that this push will end the war. It is unlikely that many of the enemy will have survived our bombardment.

Thank you for the cake and the strawberries. I'm glad the garden is such a joy to you. We certainly all enjoyed the fruit. I think often of you both and of our quiet life at home, but I ask you not to worry about me. May your prayers be with the men who will go over the top. Thank you for the soap, Mother, which I assure you was put to good use. I was pleased that your evening with the Parsons was such a success. Please pass on my sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Stanton. I have only just heard about their son.

I am sure I paid the account at the tailor's when I was on leave but do settle it on my behalf if I am mistaken and I will repay you on my next leave. Don't worry about me, please. It is warm enough here. A little too warm if anything - so there is nothing further I need, no more socks or pullovers.

*From your son,
Michael*

The Somme as it is today



Tipper

Dear Mum and Dad,

They sent me back to join my pals and I am so proud to be back with them. It's a terrific show with all the bands and the men from other units. Our guns are putting on a display like Fireworks Night. We are going to attack and we can't wait to let Fritz have it! The General says we don't expect no resistance at all because our guns have finished them off. We were meant to go over yesterday, but the weather was not so good.

The waiting is awful hard. Some of the chaps are a bit downhearted. That fellow Byrne I told you about, he come up and told me not to worry. I'm pleased to hear Fred Campbell has kept safe so far. Good show.

Well, my dear Mum and Dad, that's all I've got to say to you. Tomorrow we will know if we will be seeing each other again one day. Don't worry about me. I am not frightened of what is waiting for me. When I was a little lad you were very good to me and I won't let you down. Please write to me again, I do like so much to hear the news from home. Please send me a couple of views of St. Albans. Give my love to Kitty. You have been the dearest Mum and Dad to me.

From your Son,
John

The bank of the River Somme Today



Jack Firebrace

Dear Margaret,

Thank you for your letter. My words cannot say how sad I am. He was our boy, he was the light of our life.

But dear Margaret, we must be strong. I worry about you so much, what it must be like for you. There are things here to take my mind off it all right.

I believe it was God's will. We would have kept him, but God knew best. Do you remember how he used to chase the dandelion seed down the canal and the funny words he had for things he couldn't say when he was a baby?

I think about these things all the time and God is merciful. He has given back to me memories of him when he was a little boy, lots of little things have come back to me. I think about them when I lie down at night and they are a comfort to me. I imagine he is in my arms.

His life was a blessing to us, it was a gift from God. It was the best gift we could have had. We must be thankful.

Tomorrow the men are going to attack and I think we will win a big victory. Soon the war will be over and I will be home to look after you. With love from your husband,

Jack.

An Unknown Soldiers Grave at The Somme



Why not...

Try writing responses to the letters? Choose one of the letters and imagine being a parent, brother, sister or partner. There are no TV's. There are not even any accurate newspaper reports about what is happening on the battlefields and so what would you want to know? How would you feel about being so far away from them? Read carefully about the things that they mention about their lives back home. What are they asking about? What would they want to hear?

Think about your life - where you live and the people you know. What and who would you want to know about? What would you miss and what is important to you? Pretend you are far away from home and write a short letter to a friend or relative asking about all those things. Be specific.

Look at the detail in the things that Michael, Tipper and Jack mention. They thank people for cake, strawberries and soap. They mention Fireworks Night, pictures of St. Albans, gardens, fruit and 'chasing dandelion seeds down by the canal'. Think of the colours, feeling, sounds, smells and tastes that are contained within those words.

These are the things that have been lost to the soldiers thanks to the dehumanizing nature of war. Write a list of all the things that go into making your life. The experiences you've had, the places you know, the things that you own. Now create a senses chart and see how many senses the things in your list touch upon.

For example, I would say that my dog is very important to me. He often smells like mud and wet grass. He's soft and warm to touch. He has a loud deep bark and is a deep brown colour. Try doing this with all the things in your list and perhaps display it like this.

My life	Smell	Touch	Taste	Sound	Sight/colour
My dog	Like mud and wet grass	Soft and warm		Loud and deep	Brown
Walking by the beach	Salt			Gentle waves Seagulls Children	Yellows (sand) Blues/green (sea)
Chocolate cake	Sweet, rich	Sticky, soft	Sweet, sugar, cream		Brown, white,

When you see your life broken down this way, you can begin to see the evocative elements that go into building our memories.

Why not try to take this information and make a colour map of your life? Count up how many times each colour is mentioned in that column and fill a piece of paper with blocks of each colour making sure that the one mentioned the most gets the biggest block. I wonder what that predominant colour says about you? The artist Pablo Picasso went through a period where he only painted using the colour blue because he felt that the colour dominated his life due to his depression. He had turned the feeling of sadness into a colour.

Why not use the abstract sounds, colours and tastes to produce some creative writing? Use your chart to write a poem. How does your life taste? What are the favorite sounds of your life? The Australian Poet Dorothea Mackellar wrote a beautiful poem describing how the colours of all the things in her life have 'steeped my soul in colour'

COLOUR by Dorothea Mackellar

*The lovely things that I have watched unthinking,
Unknowing, day by day,
That their soft dyes have steeped my soul in colour
That will not pass away -*

*Great saffron sunset clouds, and Larkspur Mountains,
And fenceless miles of plain,
And hillsides golden-green in that unearthly
Clear shining after rain;*

*And nights of blue and pearl, and long smooth beaches,
Yellow as sunburned wheat,
Edged with a line of foam that creams and hisses,
Enticing weary feet.*

*And emeralds, and sunset-hearted opals,
And Asian marble, veined
With scarlet flame, and cool green jade, and moonstones
Misty and azure-stained;*

*And almond trees in bloom, and oleanders,
Or a wide purple sea,
Of plain-land gorgeous with a lovely poison,
The evil Darling pea.*

*If I am tired I call on these to help me
To dream -and dawn-lit skies,
Lemon and pink, or faintest, coolest lilac,
Float on my soothed eyes.*

*There is no night so black but you shine through it,
There is no morn so drear,
O Colour of the World, but I can find you,
Most tender, pure and clear.*

*Thanks be to God, Who gave this gift of colour,
Which who shall seek shall find;
Thanks be to God, Who gives me strength to hold it, Though I were stricken blind.*

The characters in the story are always trying to hold on to their individuality. Not only had they been removed from their lives and families, but they were dressed in the same uniform, issued with the same kit and ate the same food. Steven Wraysford's sense of self is even more vague as he has no established family life that he remembers. Have you ever asked 'who am I'?

An interesting way to start this discussion is to try The Bull's Eye game. Get a piece of flip chart paper and draw a big circle. Inside it draw a slightly smaller circle and finally inside that, draw a third smaller circle. It should now look a bit like a dartboard. Using post-it notes write down all the things that make you - you! Write down all the things that are important to you and the things you hope for in the future. Write one thing per post-it note and place the notes in the outer ring of your 'dart board'. Next, examine what you have written and see if you can narrow that list down to a 'top 6'. Move those 6 post-it notes into the next inner ring on your dartboard. Then, if you can, narrow that list further to the top 3 things that define you the most. You might find it difficult. It's a really good way of starting a group discussion about yourselves.

Why not try a similar exercise but as a group? In groups see if you can list all the things that make your school what it is. Or your city, town or village. When you've got down to your top three, bring all the groups together with their top three and see if you can come to a consensus about what should be your whole class top three defining attributes.

These young men believed they were fighting to preserve a way of life. They were fighting for their families, their countries and of course for the lives of their friends and colleagues who fought alongside them.

What things in this world do you think are worth preserving now? Are there issues that you care passionately about? They might be big things that concern the whole planet and everyone on it, or you might have smaller but equally important concerns that relate to your town, your family or your friends.

Have a look at what our Director, Producer and a few other members of our team highlight as the things most worth preserving in their lives.

Can you rank in order those things that are worth preserving in your life? Is that even possible? Share these ideas with other people in your class and see if you can find others who have similar lists. Why not get together with other people with similar ideas and see if you can think of ways that you can come together to help support your shared cause?

When people come together with a cause in which they believe, they can be a powerful force. Check out the link below and see how the civil liberties and human rights organisation Liberty started from humble beginnings.

<http://www.liberty-human-rights.org.uk/about/history/how-liberty-was-founded.php>

4. The truth and nothing but...

prop·a·gan·da [prop-uh-**gan**-duh]

Noun

1.

Information, ideas, or rumors deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution, nation, etc.



We are so used to seeing and hearing from modern wars. Our 24-hour news networks broadcast live from war zones, the soldiers are often provided with cameras and the power of instant messaging and a host of other social networking applications allows for immediate updates and reaction.

During the First World War there were no mobile phones or household televisions. The only war

news that civilians would receive would be the letters written by the soldiers, which were heavily censored to prevent the leaking of delicate tactical information, and also from official Government sources via newspaper or news reel. The trouble with the Government stories was that they weren't always accurate.

In an attempt to hide bad news and deflect the enemy from getting hold of battle information, special propaganda departments would alter, leak or give false information to the news agencies. The country needed more and more men to sign up, so the horrid conditions were kept away from the general public. Instead, colourful recruitment posters showed well fed and happy soldiers willing their friends to come over to join the march to victory. Often the huge losses were suppressed too. Artists were commissioned to paint pictures of the happy and brave men out-numbering the enemy.



It was the powerful stories of personal experiences from the front line that started to give a more honest account.

Soldiers such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Both had written poetry before the war, but it was for their work written during the war that would make them celebrated throughout the world. In stark contrast to the patriotic writing and state sponsored propaganda, poets and other artists like Owen and Sassoon created powerful works that described some of the horrors of which they had first hand experience.

Why not...

Compare the colourful poster and the soft toned painting to the words of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen?

Make a list of all the methods that the artists are employing to affect your reaction to them. What sort of things do the painting and poster want you to feel?

See if you can find examples of how these methods are still used today by modern advertising to affect your reaction to products?

Look at the poems and think about how the messages of suffering would be communicated from today's war zones. Choose one poem and study it.

Try to compress the message and the meaning into a 140-character tweet. Which bits do you focus on and which bits do you leave out and is the impact affected?

Choose one of the poems and see if you can turn it into the modern day language of a TV journalist's report and perform it.

Think about where the reporter has obtained the information. Is some of it direct quote from a soldier? Did he or she witness it? What does changing from the reported facts to the first hand information do to the impact of the story and how does it affect the listener?

Dulce et Decorum est.

[To a certain Poetess]

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge,
Till on the clawing flares we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest began to trudge,
Helping ~~the worst amongst us~~ ^{Dragging the worst amongst us}, who'd no boots all
But limped on, blood-shod. All went lame; ~~half~~ ^{all} blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tires, outstrippers ~~for~~ ^{for} five-miles that dropped behind.

Then somewhere near in front: Whew... fup... fop... fup...
Gas shells or duds? We loosened masks in case -
And listened... Nothing... Far rumouring of Krupp...
Then ~~sudden~~ ^{smartly} poison hit us in the face.
Gas! GAS! Quick boys! - And ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets, just in time.
But someone still was yelling out, and stumbling,
And floundering like a man in fire or time.

Dim, through the misty panes and heavy light,
As under a dark sea, I saw him drowning.
In all my dreams, before my helpless sight
He lunges at me, guttering, choking, drowning.

The Redeemer.

Darkness: the rain sluiced down; the mine was deep:
It was past twelve on a mid-winter night,
When peaceful folk in beds lay snug asleep.
There, with much work to do before the light,
We hugged our clay-sucked boots as best we might
Along the trench: sometimes a bullet sang,
And drowning shells burst with a horrid bang.
We were ~~all~~ ^{splashed} soaked and wretched, every one;
Darkness; the distant wink of a huge gun.

I turned in the black ditch, loathing the storm;
A rocket fizzed and fell to a steady ~~flame~~ ~~glare~~ flare,
And lit the face of what had been a form
Stumbling in muck. He stood before me there;
I say that it was Christ; stiff in the glare,
And leaning forward from his burdening task,
Both arms supporting it: his eyes on mine
Stared from the woeful head that seemed a mask
Of mortal pain in Hell's unholy shine.

No thorny crown, only a woollen cap
He wore, — an English soldier, white and strong,
Who loved his time like any simple chap, —
Good days of work and sport and homely song.
Now he has learned that nights are very long,
And dawns a watching of the windowed sky;
He has renounced all happiness and ease;
And dimly in his pain he hopes to die
That Brumagem be safe beyond the seas.

DIED OF WOUNDS.

His wet, white face and miserable eyes
Brought nurses to him more than groans & sighs:
But low and hoarse and rapid rose & fell
His troubled voice: he did the business well.

The Ward grew dark; but he was still complaining,
And calling out for 'Dickie's': "Curse the Wood!"
"It's time to go; O God, and what's the good?"
"We'll never take it; and it's always raining."

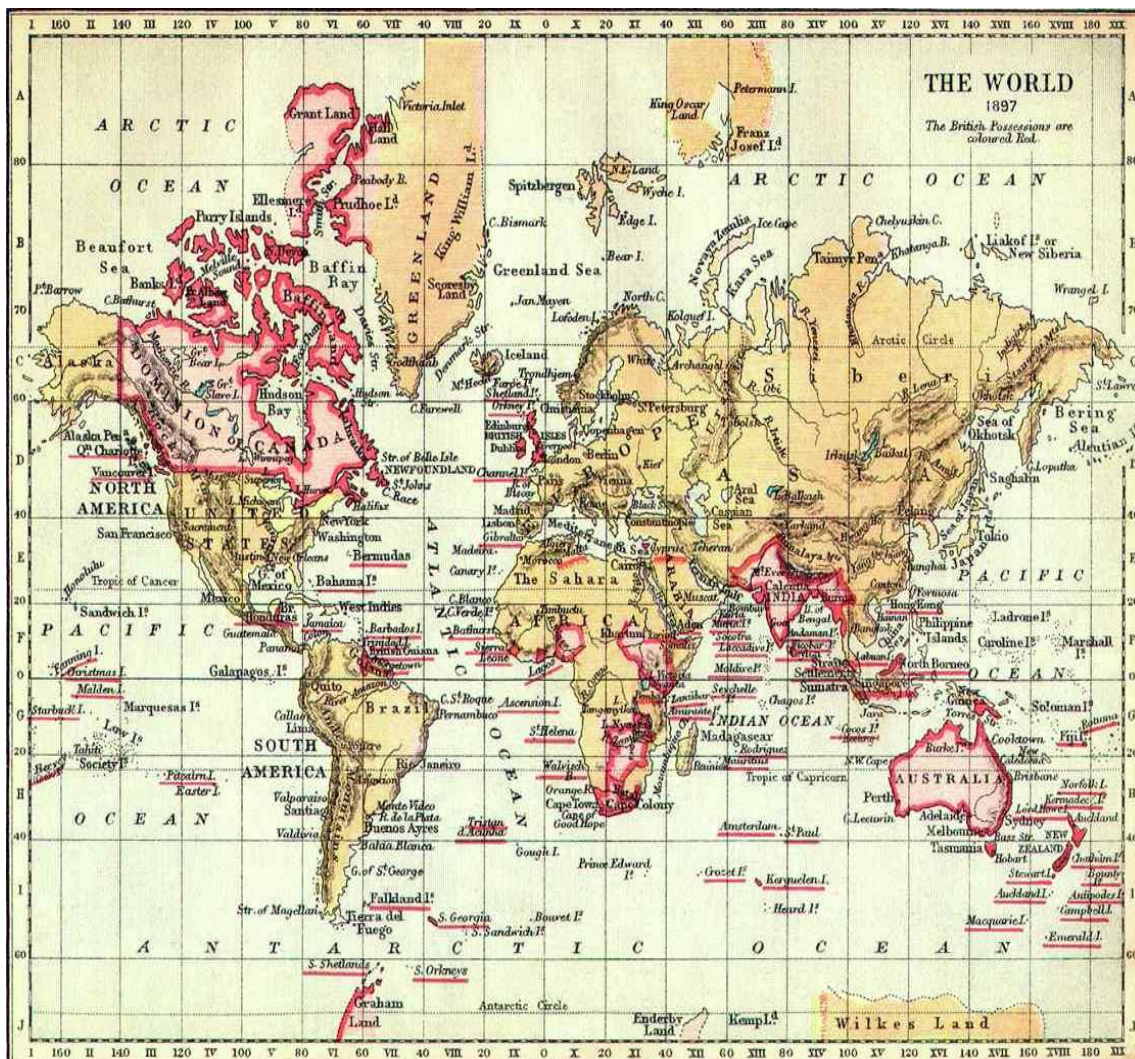
I wondered where he'd been; then heard him shout,
"They snipe like hell! O Dickie, don't go out...."
I fell asleep.... next morning he was dead;
And some Slight Wound lay smiling on his bed.

S. S.

5. The War of Words

The war of 1914 - 1918 was known as 'The Great War' or 'The War To End All Wars'. These words were used to strengthen the resolve of the soldiers and keep the public spirits high. But what's in a word? You'll be surprised to know that a lot of words and expressions used today were invented in the trenches of that war.

In the early 1900's there were no package holidays, no jet setting trips around the world. Travel between the towns and cities was considered expensive for most people. As a result people were not widely exposed to other cultures, other languages or other classes. The war changed all that. All of a sudden soldiers from around the British Empire were fighting together.



Men of different nationalities, class and religions were meeting. Working class men like Arthur Shaw and Jack Firebrace were in constant contact with higher class gentlemen probably for the first time. In this coming together, accents were heard, stories were shared and new words formed. A lot of it was new slang - ways of being able to talk in a secret code away from the earshot of the Generals.

However, so much language was created simply to fill the void. These men were having new experiences and dealing with equipment and techniques never before used.

SWIPE - Most of the English-speaking world uses this now to describe stealing something, but it came from a slang word that the Canadian troops brought with them.

LOUSY - we use this now to describe anything that is simply not very good. However when the soldiers said they were 'feeling lousy' they really meant it. It referred to the lice that infested their uniforms.

SNAPSHOT - This is probably used now mostly to describe holiday photos, but actually came from a term that meant to quickly aim and fire a rifle, not a camera!

SHELL SHOCKED - we say this now to mean any experience that has left us shocked, but it was a real and horrible condition that a lot of soldiers experienced. Their nerves were shattered by the sound and impact of the exploding bombs and large gunfire all around them.

In fact there are hundreds of words that were created by the mixing of these men. Thanks to the French influence 'souvenir' replaced the word 'keepsake' as the more popular expression. The word 'binge' familiar only to Lancastrians at the beginning of the century was spread across the English-speaking world. The lucky soldiers that were able to return to their homes took more than just the friendships and painful memories. They took back new words and phrases to their countries and communities.

Why not...

Do some digging for other words that have come from the trenches. You'll be amazed at how many there are and how easy they are to find.

In groups think of the language you use now. What words do you say that older people don't use. Try them on your teacher to make sure. For instance the word 'cool' was first used by young people in The United States in the 1960's. Since then 'rad', 'boss', 'mint' and 'bad' have all been created by young people to mean the same thing. How many of those are still used now? Once you've written your list of modern slang phrases and words see if you can create a short scene using as many of them as possible.

Think about why you create new words. Just like the soldiers in the early 1900's, you are experiencing new things - things not available to people before you. There was no Twitter, Facebook or even texting when your parents at school. Think about how many words that have been created by people of your age that are related to the computer age. Could you perform a speech written in text speak? Try it and then perform them out loud. Do they make any sense as spoken words?

William Shakespeare created over 10,000 new words and phrases that we still use today. Often he would put two words together to create a new expression, helping him create better pictures inside the audiences' heads. For instance he invented the expressions 'worm-hole' 'hot-blooded' and 'watch-dog'. Try creating your own new expressions by bringing together two words. For instance

Monday + Ache = Mondache - the actual pain you feel on a Monday morning when you have to get up.

Rihanna + Adoration = Rihnnadoration - the complete love of the singer Rihanna.



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