

War Game

Bristol Old Vic



11-22 Nov

TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Bristol Old Vic's Teacher Resource Pack on 'War Game'. This resource aims to provide teachers with contextual information and drama activities which will help students to gain a further understanding of the First World War and "War Game". These Packs are aimed at the higher end of Key Stage 1 & Key Stage 2.

The pack also provides teachers with an interview from the Director and Actor of the show, Toby Hulse and Robin Hemmings.

Bristol Old Vic's production of *War Game* is a devised show which pays timely and moving tribute to the young men who did not return from the fields of France. Adapted from Michael Foreman's novella for younger readers, *War Game* tells the story of the opening months of the First World War, following a young man's journey from playing football with his local village team, to taking part in the famous Christmas Truce as a soldier.

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INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR, TOBY HULSE AND ACTOR, ROBIN HEMMINGS.

It's the 100th anniversary of the First World War and the Christmas truce. The history of the story is 3 generations old. What decisions have you made so that a young audience will relate/connect to this story and why?

Toby: The play opens with a 5 minute sequence in which we see our performer Robin arrive on stage in a modern football kit and miming a modern football, so immediately we have a character that a younger audience will be able to identify with. During the course of the opening 5 minutes he takes us back in time from 2014 to 1914 through the medium of the kit and his football. He talks about how synthetic fabrics wash and dry very quickly and easily in contrast to fabrics from 100 years ago, which are much heavier and take longer to dry. When they become wet they become very heavy and difficult to wear. He talks about how modern football boots are specifically designed for playing football, where as 1914 leather football boots become heavy when they become wet and muddy. Also he mimes his 2014 football differently to the 1914 football which is leather and would sound heavier.

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Through that seemingly innocuous conversation about football kit we take the audience back in time to 1914. We are also in some way alluding to the problems the British army faced in the opening months of the war, it had been a very long and dry summer and when they arrived in France the ground was completely dry, but over the course of the autumn it became much wetter and muddier, and more difficult to move across the landscape. This is one of the enduring images of the Western Front. Recreating the image of mud and being bogged down and not being able to move. So in a sense the history of modern football kit against 1914 football kit is also the history of the journey of the English army. So we have created a metaphor to show that time slip. Also, we tell the story through the eyes of a single character, so although it is a story of a global generation it's told through a single identifiable character who's a young man, not much older than the younger members of our audience. It becomes a personal story as well as a global story. Interestingly Michael Foreman who wrote the picture book makes it a personal story, as he actually writes about 4 of his uncles who signed up and fought in the First World War.

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Our source material is a picture book for younger readers, typically for Key Stage 2 readers, so the language we use is friendly to a younger audience and we go back to the source material if we begin to get too complicated. Also, like any good picture book the story is told through the illustrations, and the way they communicate with a young reader has given us a style and an approach which should transfer onto stage, so it will give its information through the images and movement we see as much as what is said.

Also, what's particularly interesting by making a piece of theatre for a family audience or school audience is that if our performance raises questions in a young audience, they can then turn to an adult and ask those questions. Then in some way we have done our job, we've aroused an interest in this important period of history. Theatre is very good at provoking questions and not so good at giving information. It often feels too stodgy if it does give lots of information. So if the audience leave asking questions about terminology they've learnt etc. then the theatrical experience has broadened beyond the hour they spent in the auditorium.

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Why did you make the decision to follow a 5 act structure all with different genres?

Toby: It wasn't a decision that I thought I was going to make; the way I started working on the text was by reading the book over and over again until I was completely familiar with it. As I was reading the book I was asking myself questions such as, how does this transfer onto stage? Is this an important section? Are these events in the right order? And so as I was reading I was beginning to order and structure the book in a way that might be suitable for stage. Books can exist in many different time frames, and places and many different characters, whereas theatre at its best deals with a single person in a single place at a single time. So in trying to shape the book for a theatre performance rather than a reading, this idea of 5 acts started to emerge. Interestingly, there are a lot of theories about how Hollywood films are made, and 5 acts is a classic storytelling device, any books you read about DreamWorks and Pixar they talk about a 5 act structure. A lot of teachers will be familiar with Pie Corbett's Story Mountain which in essence is a 5 act structure.

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When Shakespeare and his contemporary's plays were first published, printers and publishers choose to put them into a five act structure although they may not have been originally written in this way. There is something about human stories and the stories we tell each other that fits very well into a 5 act structure. Once I had split the story into 5 acts, it was then a question of finding the best way to tell that section of the story. We have so many different techniques and strategies available to us on stage, so rather than finding an overarching technique or strategy I wanted to find the best way to tell this specific part of the story. I found in rehearsals that some of my instincts were right, some were wrong, but each piece can exist in its own particular style. Young readers will be familiar with this, there has been an extraordinary explosion in children's literature and what's interesting at the moment is that it's playing around with genre and style. The wonderful picture book by Lauren Child 'Beware of the Story Book Wolves', matches different styles against each other. Books like Lemony Snicket play around with style and how each piece is presented so although it's quite a sophisticated thing to do, it's also something young audiences are increasingly familiar with through children's literature.

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In the book there are lots of different characters to tell the story but in this production the story is told and portrayed through just one character. Why did you make this decision how does this decision benefit the performance?

Toby: Robin started to talk about there being a single identifiable character so that an audience can somehow find that character representative of the millions of people affected by this historical event.

Theatre is really good at characterisation. We chose to focus on a single person and their personal experiences and that way this character may become emblematic of the experience of many men in the early months of the World War. We have many significant groups in this story, the 4 young men who sign up together, a village football team against another team, then of course the entire English army, German and French armies so the groups that Robin has to represent are varying sizes which forces us to make some interesting theatrical choices.

A single actor on stage has no one to have a conversation with; you can sometimes cheat it and play two characters which often have a comic effect, which we have exploited now and then.

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One of the main constructs of theatre is dialogue and action happens through dialogue. We don't have that but what we can do is talk directly to the audience. We are still early on in the devising stage but we already have 2 moments when Robin poses very specific moral questions to the audience; obviously we can't actually change the plot but the feeling should be that were we to receive certain answers the story could change. These are real questions, should you continue fighting after you have played football across the trenches in the truce? Should you stay at home and look after the farm and your family or should you sign up with your friends and go to the front? How significant is the spirit of adventure in comparison to the spirit of loyalty to your own home? These are important moral questions that the young men of 1914 would have had to face, and by having a conversation with the audience, the audience can face the moral dilemma as well. So that is one decision that is greatly to our benefit.

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Why do you think it is important to include an interactive element in this production of War Game?

Robin: I think there are possibly 2 main reasons why it's important; the first being that I feel theatre should be inclusive to an audience and one way of including them is to actually get them involved in the telling of the story as well. Involving them in capturing sounds and their voices and playing football with me is one way to get them to really engage and to invest in the story. This will hopefully lead them to take more of an experience away at the end of it. I think the second reason is by letting them be involved in this way and asking them direct questions about the decisions that various characters should make. This could potential make them feel culpable for the events that take place, not completely but maybe partially, so that again that investment not just in the physical participation but also the theoretical decisions of the first World War may make them feel more strongly about it then if we just told them the story.

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And finally, what do you want the young audience to take away for this performance?

Robin: I would like them to take away a greater understanding for certain events in the First World War, but the main thing is to inspire them to take more interest in it if it's something they don't know much about it. It would be nice if they felt compelled to read about it some more or visit some exhibitions. It's an understanding and a feeling of appreciation of what those men on both sides of the trenches went through 100 years ago, so when people wear Poppies or mark the 2 minutes of silence it's not just a formality it comes from a very real suffering that happened and if we can make them somehow experience that viscerally then I believe we have achieved our goal.

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THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

Before the First World War, Europe was made up of 6 Empires.

- 1) British-Empire
- 2) German Empire
- 3) Austro-Hungarian Empire
- 4) Russian Empire
- 5) Turkish Empire
- 6) French Empire

In 1914, on the 28th of June, the heir to the Austrian emperor, Franz Ferdinand, was shot dead.

Ferdinand was killed by a Serbian man, Gavrilo Princip, who wanted all Balkan states to be free from Austrian Reign.

The Austrian empire blamed Serbia for the death of Franz Ferdinand, and declared war on them.

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ALLIANCES AND INVASION

As news of the war spread, empires began to reform alliances -

Russia had an alliance to Serbia and Germany had an alliance to Austria.

Germany prepared a plan.

With France to the West and Russia to the East, Germany decided they would need to attack both ways.

They decided to invade France first which they thought would be 'easy'. Then after France, they would attempt to invade Russia, which they thought would be more of a challenge.

In order to attack France, Germany decided to travel through Belgium. Unfortunately, Belgium did not want the German Army travelling through and formed an alliance with the British Empire to stop them.

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THE WESTERN FRONT

In France, surrounding the Belgium border, the trenches were dug out by opposing armies, German Trenches facing British Trenches.

So it began that all over Europe young men were signing up to the army, to serve their country in the war. They would travel across to France and into the trenches, where the conditions changed from hot and dry to exceedingly cold, damp and muddy in the coming winter months.

It was thought that the war would be over by Christmas, however it lasted for four years. In 1918 the formal agreement to stop fighting (armistice) took place at 11.00am, on the 11th of November. Each year on this day remembrance day takes place to pay respect and remember all

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WAR GAME

The book is often used as an introduction to the First World War in Primary and Secondary Schools. It tells a very personal story of a collective history. The opening months of the First World War are seen through the eyes of a village football team who sign up as soldiers, train, and are despatched to the Front. Detailing the famous Christmas Day football match between British and German troops across No Man's Land, The book evokes the spirit of adventure the young men went to war harbouring, soon to find themselves making the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Michael Foreman is one of the worlds best-loved children's book illustrators. He has written and illustrated a vast range of books and has collaborated with many leading children's authors. Michael Foreman wrote War Game in memory of his 4 uncles, who all died in the First World War .

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THE TRENCHES

The Trenches... were dug by armies in the First World War to protect soldiers from bombardment of shells and gunfire. They were dug in paths that were zig-zagged rather than linear so that if a shell was to hit, there would be walls and turns to stop explosions from travelling along the trench.

The Conditions... of the trenches were horrific to live in. They quickly became very wet and muddy, so a typical job of a soldier was to make sure they did not flood and to build and maintain duck boards, (raised wooden boards so that soldiers feet were not drenched in water). There were also many rats in the trench which would multiply and sometimes grow to the size of a cat.

The Smell... toilets were just holes in the ground, so the trenches were constantly smelly. Toilets were often dug closer to the enemy line so that soldiers would be quick and would not hide there. In addition to this, the smell of dead bodies and poisoned gas caused the general smell of the trench to be almost unbearable.

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THE TRENCHES

The Danger...Trenches were incredibly dangerous places. For many reasons...not only the frequent bombardment of shells and gunfire from enemy lines. But also...

The Mud & Dirt... Men were not able to wash often, especially their uniform, which resulted in lice breeding in their dirty clothes causing itching. Due to the wet soggy conditions, many men suffered from trench foot, a condition which caused feet to become numb, turn red and blue, create an extremely bad odour, open sores, ulcers and often resulted in having to amputate the foot.

The Tiredness...The opportunity to sleep was so rare that men would try and find any moment to sleep when they weren't required to be on the look out or carrying out other trench duties. Sleeping on duty could result in a very serious consequence, in some cases, a penalty of death.

The Food... was limited, which is known as rationing, and was often described as tasteless and stale.

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THE FOOD

Menu -

Bully Beef (otherwise known as corned beef)

Bread (Which was often stale)

Hard Biscuits

Bacon

Tea

Sugar and Salt

Oatmeal

Sometimes family's could send the soldiers packages which contained food such as cake, chocolate and tinned food which would have been luxury.

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NO MAN'S LAND

No Man's Land represents the area of ground between opposing armies trenches, in this case, between the British Armies and the German Armies. The area of No Mans Land ranges in width—but were often close enough for opposing armies to hear each others conversations. The bombardment of shells destroyed all living things between the two trenches, leaving debris and shell holes filled with mud and water. The bodies of men who has been killed were left on No Man's Land as it was far too dangerous to move them.

After the war ended, red poppies began to grow on No Mans Land around the fallen soldiers. Poppies are now a symbol of respect and are worn on Remembrance Day in honour of all the men who died in the war.

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ACTIVITY 1

SIGNING UP TO THE WAR

Aim: Think about life in 1914, and what it meant to be a young person in that time. Introduce war propaganda. Create a soundscape & thought tunnel to create theatrical experience.

Tools: Photo's of Propaganda (found in appendix). Paper and Pens for writing.

Groups: Initially as a whole group, then into smaller groups of 4-5.

- 1) Get the class into a circle. Introduce the idea of a warm summer, where young people are on school break.

Ask the participants what kinds of things they would be doing on their summer break? What things do they do in their spare time? In the circle ask each participant to give an example of this.

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ACTIVITY 1

SIGNING UP FOR THE WAR

- 1) Explain that 100 years ago, there were no computers/ phones/video games. Young people would be outside doing sports & games.
- 2) Explain that 100 years ago was when the First World war started. Young men would be encouraged to sign up to the army and to fight for their country. This would be seen as a really exciting opportunity, not only because these young men/boys could represent their country as a soldier, but at this time there was little opportunity for young people to travel, so by signing up for war, it was an opportunity to see other parts of Europe. At this point, people thought that the war would only last until Christmas...
- 3) Ask the class to get into groups of 4 and give them a propaganda picture (Appendix 1-5). Ask them to discuss how these posters would encourage young men to

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ACTIVITY 1

SIGNING UP FOR THE WAR

4) After discussing the Propaganda photos as a class, ask the groups to come up with 3 different quotes, as if they were bringing the poster to life and were trying to encourage their audience to join the army. In groups, share with each other.

5) Ask the class to get into two lines facing each other. The class should use their arms to create a tunnel. Ask them to say their motivational and encouraging things, as though they were a crowd cheering on the young men. One by one, each pair from the end should travel through the tunnel whilst the rest of the class continue to be the crowd. This will create a thought-tunnel.

6) Sit class in a circle and feedback on thought-tunnel that often when young men officially signed up for war, they would be cheered by a crowd, they were seen as noble and heroic, fighting for their country.

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ACTIVITY 2

LETTERS AND CENSORSHIP

Aim: Discuss and explore the idea of being away from home and family, living in the trenches. Introduce the idea of censorship in the war. Use creative writing.

Tools: Poem 'my little wet home' (found in appendix). Paper and pens for writing.

Groups: This activity can either be done as a whole class, or in groups of 5-6.

- 1) As a class introduce the idea of trenches, giving information and allowing discussion. Following on from this, read poem (appendix) 'my little wet home' -
- 2) Provide the participants with facts about life in the trenches (see historical context) and if possible, show images of trenches. Ask for their feedback and opinion.
What do they notice?

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ACTIVITY 2

LETTERS AND CENSORSHIP

- 3) Ask the class to get into pairs. Ask them to think about how they would feel to be living in the trenches, over Christmas where they were away from their family and in constant danger. Feedback after.
- 4) In their pairs, instruct them to mould each others body into a pose (freeze) which would physically represent how they would be feeling. After all pairs have finished, ask the class to all hold poses.
- 5) Explain to the class that when you tap them on the shoulder they will say one word to describe how they feel. (Give them an example: lonely/scared). Walk around the room, tapping the participants one by one on the shoulder. Pick out a few examples, and ask the class to elaborate and discuss.

eg. why might you feel lonely even though you are constantly surrounded by people?

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ACTIVITY 2

LETTERS AND CENSORSHIP

6) Ask the class to get into groups of 4, all sitting with pen and paper. Explain that the only way to communicate with loved ones would be to write a letter. Using the information about the trenches, and using the feelings from their freeze frame, ask them to collectively write a letter home about their time in the trenches. Share readings.

7) Ask class if they know what “censorship” means. Discuss this and give definition. Go on to explain that in the World War information about the conditions in the trench was prevented from getting back to the families at home. This was achieved by each letter being read through and censored before it was sent.

9) Ask the students to go back through their letters and take out anything that they think they army would not like them sending home. Discuss bits that were taken out and why?

10) Finish by explaining that soldiers were sometimes asked to “go over the top” which meant emerging from the trench to attack enemy. There were rarely survivors.

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ACTIVITY 3

1914 CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE

Aim: Introduce the famous Christmas Day truce. Create freeze frames and improvisation around the topic

Groups: This activity will work as a class and in groups of 4-5

- 1) Get into a circle. One by one ask each student to say their favourite part of Christmas dinner, what would they usually eat?
- 2) Put the class into groups of 4-5 and ask them to create a freeze frame of a 2014 modern family Christmas. As a class, perform these to each other and discuss what is interesting about each freeze-frame. eg. giving/receiving presents/carving the turkey.
- 3) Then ask the groups to repeat the activity but this time to show Soldiers in the trenches over Christmas and what they might be doing. Perform and discuss.

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ACTIVITY 3

1914 CHRISTMAS DAY TRUCE

4) Leading on from the freeze frames, choose half the groups to focus on Christmas at home and the other half to focus on Christmas in the trenches. Ask them to create a short 1-2 minute improvised scene to carry on from the freeze frame to show. Give them 10-15 minutes to rehearse these.

5) Pair up Christmas at home groups with Christmas in the trenches groups. Introduce the idea of split stage by one group remaining frozen whilst the other group perform and vice versa. Then discuss what the class liked about the performance.

War Game

Appendix 1



Appendix 2

BRITONS



JOIN YOUR COUNTRY'S ARMY!
GOD SAVE THE KING

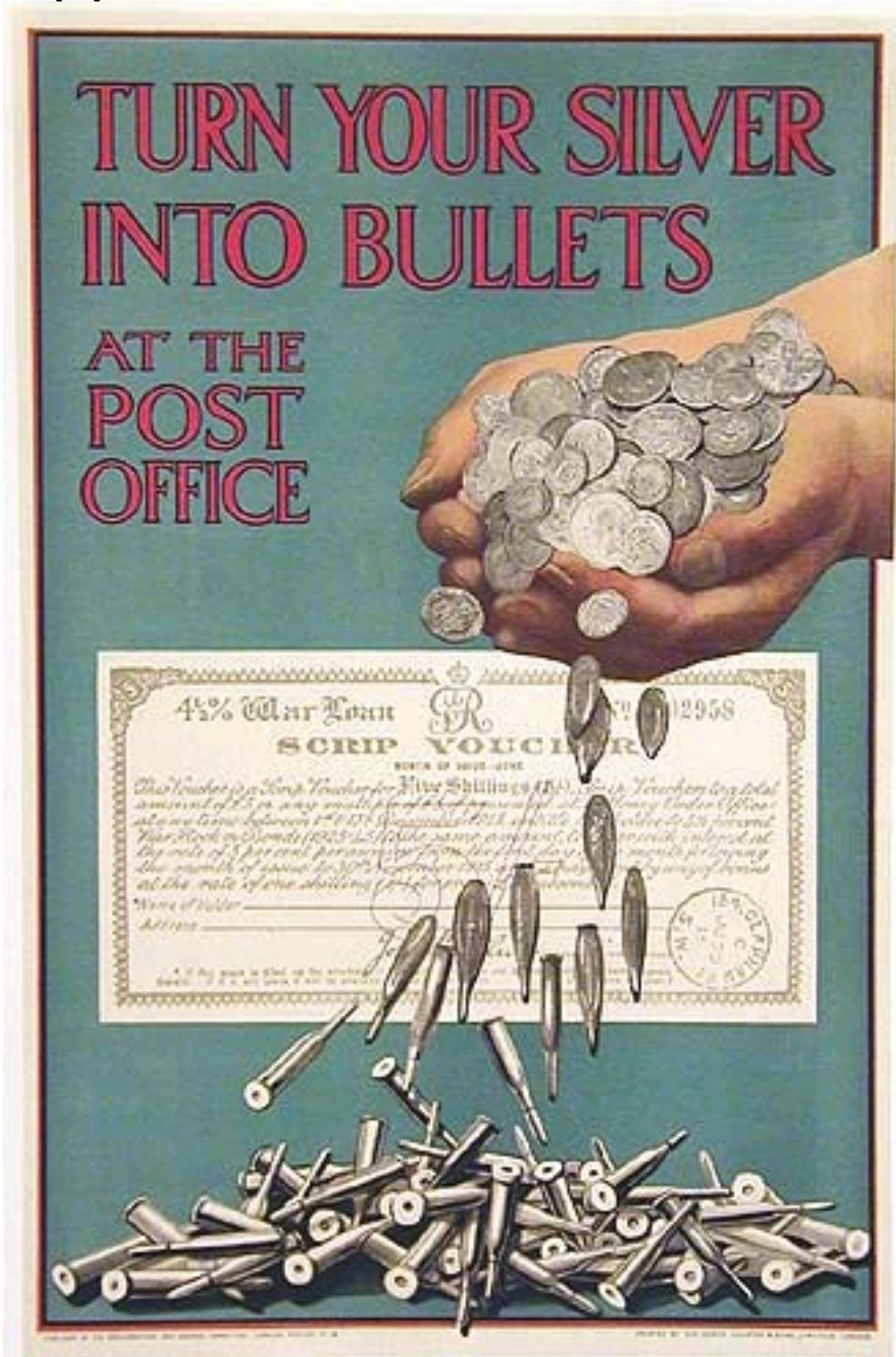
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War Game

Appendix 3



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Appendix 4

THE VETERAN'S FAREWELL.



"Good Bye, my lad,
I only wish I were young enough
to go with you!"

ENLIST NOW!

Appendix 5



Appendix 6

“My Little Wet Home”

1915

I've a Little wet home in a Trench,
Which the rainstorms continually drench,
There's a dead cow close by,
With her hoofs towards they sky,
She gives of a beautiful Stench.

Underneath, In a Place of a Floor,
There's a mess of wet mud and some straw,
And the Jack Johnsons Tear,
Through the rain-sodden air,
O'er my little wet home in the trench.

There are snipers who keep on the go,
So you must keep your napper down low,
And then the shells at night,
Make a deuce of light,
Which causes the language to flow.

Then Bully and Biscuit we chew,
For it's days since we tasted a Stew,
But with Shells dropping there,
There's no place to compare,