

Schools pack

We Are Poppy

A conversation between today's teens and the young women who lived through the trauma of World War One.

Daisy as Poppy, Photograph by Lotti, 19

MAKE
(GOOD)
TROUBLE





What is in this pack?

In this pack, you will explore the history of women in the First World War; find suggestions of what to read, hear and watch to get a better understanding of what they experienced. At the end of each section, there are research and creative tasks for you.

This project has been created and developed by [Make \(Good\) Trouble CIC](#) and supported by [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#).

Lesson 1 – Introduction and Podcast	Page 3
Lesson 2 – Life in the First World War	Page 5
Lesson 3 – Shining a Light on Mental Health	Page 12
Lesson 4 – Recreating Poppy in the Classroom	Page 20
Lesson 5 – Make Your Own Podcast	Page 28
Resources and Credits	Page 32



Tiana and Amelie having fun on the We Are Poppy photoshoot. Photograph by Lotti, 19



Lesson 1 – Introduction and Podcast

We Are Poppy is an investigation into what happened to women during and after the First World War (1914-1918) and uncovers the stories of how the War affected women's mental health (a story that hasn't really been told).

It explores what this story might mean to young people today. Created in a time of Covid-19 and lockdown, there are new parallels to be explored.

Working with young people aged between 14 and 19, we brought to life a fictional character called Poppy who lived during the First World War. This allowed the young people to really start to understand the challenges she may have faced.

We look at how the war affected Poppy's mental health. In positive ways – at how she might have been empowered by being part of the suffrage movement which paused campaigning to help with the war effort; or by going out to work, perhaps for the first time. And in negative ways – she may have felt discriminated against by earning less pay than men doing the same work.

After the war, it is likely that Poppy would have had to give up her job for the men returning from the front line. If Poppy was a nurse, she would have been affected by the horrific injuries she had to help treat and the long, gruelling hours. She was likely to have lost someone close to her – most families lost someone, a father, brother, husband or friend – or was affected by frightening air raids and bombing. How did Poppy cope and what did women do to deal with this kind of trauma?

This is the story of how women experienced the First World War and how it affected their mental health. It is a story developed and told by young people who ask: what has changed in the past 100 years, and which challenges do young women still face today?



Daisy then and now. Photograph by Lotti, 19



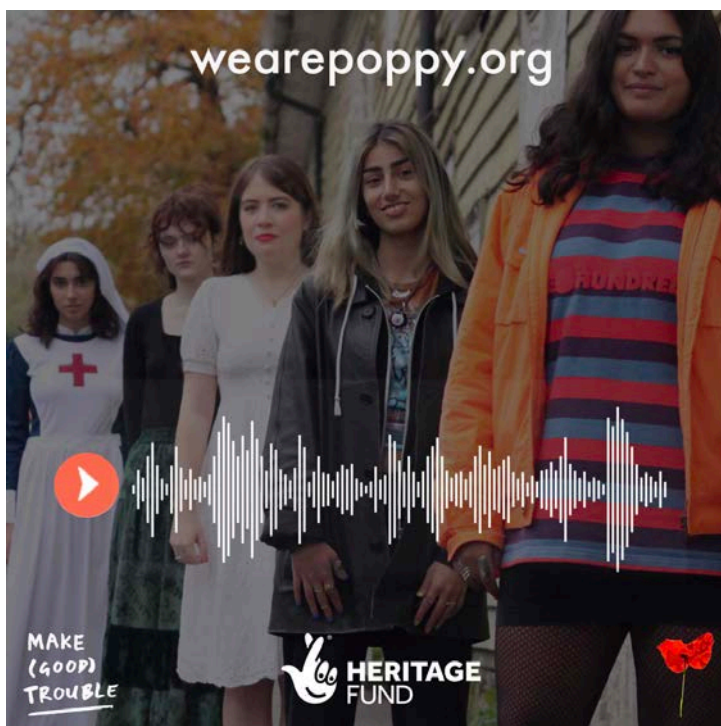
The Podcast

A good place to start your journey back to the First World War is with our podcast, called **Dear Poppy**, which imagines a conversation between today's young people and the young women who lived through the First World War.

Using sounds to describe the era, the podcast transports us from the 21st Century, with its busy roads and digital technology to the First World War over 100 year ago with the sound of older forms of transport and grandfather clocks marking time. **Dear Poppy** looks at how the war shaped the lives of a generation of women as they dealt with trauma, shellshock, loss as well as new-found freedoms. We hear women's voices through the letters, diaries and medical records kept during and after the War. There are interviews with trauma experts and historians, and we ask why women's experiences and mental ill health were ignored for so long.



[Listen to the podcast Dear Poppy...](#) (29 minutes)



Photograph by Lotti, 19



Lesson 2 – Life in the First World War

War was declared on 28 July 1914. Crime writer Agatha Christie, who was just 24 at the time, wrote:

"Extraordinary rumours got about, rumours of that fantastic thing – *War!* But of course, that was only in the newspapers. No civilised nations went to war. There hadn't been any war for years; there probably never would be again... It was all rumours – people working themselves up and saying it really looked 'quite serious' – speeches by politicians. And then suddenly one morning *it had happened*. England was at war."

Agatha Christie: An Autobiography, 1977

The War meant that life changed for everyone.

In 1900...

- 1,740,800 women were domestic servants
- 124,000 were teachers (mostly in nurseries and junior schools)
- 68,000 were nurses
- 212 were doctors (it was only recently possible to qualify as a doctor if you were a woman –and women only treated women & children)
- 2 were architects

Before the war

- Only 24% of women were in paid employment. Most were expected to be managing the home and raising children. Marriage usually meant a woman had to leave her job.
- Women in employment would be earning about half of what men did. Female teachers earned 80% less than male teachers!
- Many women were seen as more delicate members of society – needing to be looked after.
- Women had fewer rights than men – they couldn't vote or open their own bank account.
- Pretty much everything they owned before marriage became the property of their husband on marriage. They weren't just giving up their name! Although this was starting to change...
- Laws assumed a man (their father or husband) would look after and take responsibility for them.



Once war broke out, women were called on to take up not only the positions left by the men who enlisted but also positions in new jobs like in munitions factories making bombs – this was dangerous work because of the daily exposure to toxic TNT and risk of explosions.

After long exposure to TNT, workers risked toxic jaundice – this dangerous substance seeped into their skin and would cause headaches, digestive troubles, and more. The explosive would turn the workers' hair and skin yellow, which is how munitions workers gained the nickname 'canaries'. In the next section on **Women's Stories**, we will hear from a 17-year-old girl who worked in a munitions factory.

Information from: *Women in England 1760-1914: A Social History* by Susie Steinbach (2004) and [History Learning Site](https://www.historylearning.site/).



Posters aimed at women during World War One, from the Imperial War Museum and National Archives



Graphic for social media promotion of We Are Poppy podcast by Make (Good) Trouble



Lucy Noakes is Professor of modern history at the University of Essex, where she researches and teaches modern 20th Century British history.

[Listen to the full interview with Lucy Noakes](#) to find out what life was like for women in the First World War (20 minutes). Lucy is interviewed by Daisy, 14.



Professor Lucy Noakes

How did the First World War affect women's lives?

In Britain it was in three main ways. The first way is that, at least to begin with, it derailed the suffrage campaign. A lot of historians have argued that women were rewarded with the vote for their work in the First World War. But I think you can equally argue that at least some women would have got the vote far earlier if the war hadn't come along.

In terms of work and paid work, it opened up all kinds of opportunities for women. They worked in all sorts of industrial areas that they hadn't worked in before. Loads more women go into nursing, female doctors get opportunities that they hadn't had before. Some women go into the women's armed services. But I think the other way that it affects women, that we tend to forget

because we look at it all as a sort of liberation, is that for most women it was really stressful and really difficult and people that they loved died.

Why is it so important to hear the stories of women in the war?

For way too long, the only history that we heard about was top-down history. It was all about men, and not only was all about men, it was almost all about white men and almost all about ruling-class men. In the 1960s, you get the emergence of social history, which is all about understanding people's experiences of the past and women's history came out of that. It was this idea of recovering people's voices that otherwise hadn't been heard.

And it's a bit like how Black Lives Matter is showing us at the moment, at least in my field, that if you don't have black faces or women's faces, then why would anybody want to study the history of just the white ruling class men? I think it's really important to hear women's stories, especially with war in the 20th century, because it affected civilians so much.

Would you like to have lived at that time during one of the wars?

No, absolutely not! Especially the First World War. I think that would have been really, really miserable because, you know, we've got a pandemic but we've got better medicine. They had a war and a pandemic. For women, there was no legislation to stop women being paid less, there was no welfare state to help you if you didn't have any money. If I had a time machine I'd be really interested to go back and see what it was like...

I'd be really interested to go back; I'd really like to see what London was like in the Blitz. But you must've got so tired. It must have been so miserable. You could only have a bath with that much water in and queuing for hours for food and not enough heating – no, it would have been horrible. I'm very glad not to live there.



Women's Stories

Meet seven real people who lived through World War One. Their stories will help us to imagine what life was like for women during the War and help you to create a profile for Poppy, her life and her family.

Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisolm

Elsie Knocker, later Baroness de T'Serclaes, and her friend Mairi Chisolm were nurses and ambulance drivers working at the front line in Belgium during the First World War. They set up a hospital in Ypres, just 100 yards from the front line, and were credited with saving the lives of thousands of soldiers. Elsie and Mairi were nicknamed 'the Angels of Pervyse'. Mairi was just 18 when war broke out, Elsie was 30. They were both keen motorcyclists before the war and, like many women at the time, keen to help with the war effort.

"I drove off into the dark drizzly , cold night, my head stuck out of the side because the fixed windscreen was blurred and there were no lights except from star shells and the occasional conflagration... [Afterwards, I was shattered,] my arms seemed to be coming out of their sockets and my eyes were not focusing properly, and all the time shells were screaming and whistling so that it was hard to think straight." Elsie Knocker, quoted in *Female Tommies: The frontline women of the First World War* by Elizabeth Shipton, 2014



Elsie Knocker and Mairi Chisolm driving an ambulance in Belgium

Read [this article in The Vintagent about Elsie and Mairi](#)



Women's Stories

Dr Helen Boyle

Dr Helen Boyle was a pioneering doctor who set up a clinic in Hove before the War to help working class women and children suffering from mental health issues. During the War she went to Serbia to help treat wounded soldiers.

The article below, from the Westminster Gazette in 1919, just after the War ended, shows how unusual (and needed) her services were. Dr Boyle's work was ground-breaking. Previously, working class women would only get help for mental ill health once they were at crisis point, and had been certified insane. Her hospital in Brighton made treatment available to patients before the crisis for the first time.

Read [this article from the Brighton Argus about Dr Helen Boyle](#)



Dr Helen Boyle by Lafayette 6 September 1927
© National Portrait Gallery, London

OCTOBER 29, 1919		THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE	5
<p>NERVOUS BREAKDOWNS.</p> <p>GOOD WORK OF A HOSPITAL AT BRIGHTON.</p> <p>AN APPEAL FOR HELP.</p>			
<p>"Do you really mean to tell me that there are only thirty-five beds to meet the needs of all the nerve shattered women and children in Brighton?" was my question to Dr. Helen Boyle, as I sat in her large richly furnished parlour, half consulting room, half boudoir—enjoying a daintily served tea.</p> <p>"I do," was her reply, "and more than that. The Lady Chichester Hospital is the only one in all England for cases of nervous breakdown, where women and children suffering from these difficult symptoms which are known as 'borderland' conditions, can come and be saved from mental breakdown."</p> <p>"Only thirty-five beds! and are there many applicants?" I asked.</p> <p>"Hundreds," replied the doctor, "and how to select who is to come in and who to be refused is a heart-rending business." And taking up a bundle of case papers she introduced me to some of these waiting women.</p> <p>Here is Mrs. A. She has had eight children, the eldest twenty-three, the youngest three. Two have been at the war, one missing, one killed. Her eldest girl "took on so" that she lost health and work and had to return to burden the already overburdened mother, who has now broken down herself. She has odd ideas, is losing weight, refusing food, unable to sleep, and taking aversions to her younger children.</p> <p>"If she could come in and be controlled, sheltered, interested, and treated, she would probably recover. If not, well! to certify her will be my next duty. Aversions to her own children cannot be safely ignored."</p> <p>Victim of Air Raids.</p> <p>Here is B., an undergrown girl, of fourteen</p>			
<p>from East London. Father at the war, mother an invalid, all the duties of mothering, besides her own schooling, devolved on this small joyless atom of female humanity.</p> <p>"It was the raids as begun it," she told the doctor, "I was always listening for them and so afraid baby would be crushed in the rude crowd that ran to the Tube; and now they're over I can't seem to believe it and go to sleep."</p> <p>So she gets more thin, more peaky, and more irritable, and the children shrink from her who, before the raids, was just everything to them all. Physical as well as nervous breakdown is the next phase for her.</p> <p>Miss C., not an attractive woman of forty, a shop assistant and one whose family and friends are quite ready and able to pay for her if she could be admitted, as they are all puzzled and distressed by a nervous condition of health which seems to have no adequate cause.</p> <p>"I suspect secret drinking," said Dr. Helen, "but no one could tell unless she were closely watched. She is a very clever woman, and a Sunday Church worker. But in these cases the condition of the body sometimes creates the craving, sometimes the satisfaction of the craving creates the condition of the body. In secret drinking the conscience is awake, and the ingenuity in hiding it is almost incredible. When well she is an asset to the community—but now!"</p> <p>"And you can't take her in?"</p> <p>"How can I? Thirty-five beds will only hold thirty-five patients. But the Committee are just about to buy a larger house in Hove, where more women can be accommodated and enjoy a beautiful and productive garden. It is so good when sick people can work on the soil."</p> <p>"And do you want much money?" was my next question, for it seemed to me dreadful to know that there were hundreds of nerve shattered women waiting to be restored to health, and who would in most cases finish as mental wrecks because money was not forthcoming.</p> <p>"Ten thousand pounds now, but later £50,000," was Dr. Helen Boyle's answer, "for Dr. Harris, Dr. Shearer, and I would like to build a really beautiful open-air hospital, with enough garden to occupy the patients, and enough accommodation to permit of workshops</p>			
<p>for handicraft and art creations. That is our hope, but what we want now is to get more room without delay, and we can then work and wait for the realisation of the larger plan."</p> <p>Sympathetic Patrons.</p> <p>"Have you got a good Committee? Does your President work?" I inquired.</p> <p>"Without doubt. Lady Chichester is not only a splendid President, but one who finds nothing too much trouble if she can serve the cause of women and children."</p> <p>"And your patrons—are they any good? I see you have the Marchioness of Dufferin, Viscountess Falmouth, Lady Frances Balfour, Lady Lytton, and Mrs. Barnett."</p> <p>"Our patrons are truly sympathetic with our aims," was the reply. "Of course some work more than others, but all help the hospital in one way or another."</p> <p>And so they ought, I thought, for what they can do is as nothing compared to the gift of the staff, who are offering time and strength freely for the benefit of those difficult, overworked, unhappy members of their sex. But I was aroused from musing by noticing that Dr. Helen Boyle was anxious to get rid of me. Small in stature, well-dressed, unaffected in speech, kind in expression, she yet carried the dignity of manner of a woman of the world, and knew how to conclude an interview.</p> <p>"Yes, I will go," I said, "but is it true that 80 per cent. of the female cases in the mental hospitals might have been saved had there been early treatment such as in your hospital?"</p> <p>"Figures are difficult to give accurately in such cases," was the reply, "but I do not think that estimate is beyond what we might expect with improved methods of treatment, and better knowledge of their cases."</p> <p>"Then there ought to be such small, nervous-breakdown hospitals all over England," I exclaimed.</p> <p>"Certainly," she said, "but I am glad you used the word 'small.' Directly you get giant institutions it is not possible to deal in the same effective way with these cases. Each one has to be dealt with as an individual."</p> <p>And with that I really had to take my leave.</p>			

The Westminster Gazette.

Copyright holder unknown. If you are the copyright holder, please get in touch.





Women's Stories

Mabel Lethbridge

Mabel Lethbridge was just 17 when she took a job as a munitions worker, making bombs in a factory in London. Working conditions were very dangerous and she lost a leg in an explosion at the factory. Some of her workmates died.

Because she'd lied about her age when she got the job, she wasn't entitled to a war pension for those injured in the war. Mabel is still the youngest person ever to receive the Order of the British Empire in recognition of her war time service.

Hear from Mabel as she looks back on her experience of working in a munition's factory:

[Life as a munitionette | History - I Was There: The Great War Interviews](#)

From the BBC series *I Was There: The Great War Interviews*.



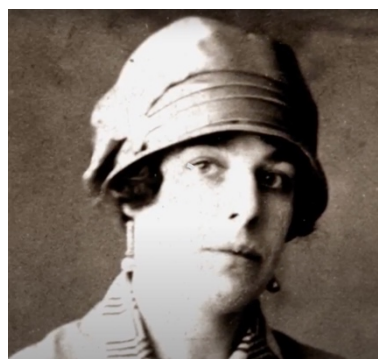
Mabel Lethbridge © IWM

Katie Morter

Katie Morter was a civilian whose husband died in the war when she was pregnant with her first child. She spoke movingly about being severely affected by his death.

Hear from Katie Morter, interviewed by the BBC in the 1960s, about her experiences during the War: [One woman's loss in WW1 | History - I Was There: The Great War Interviews](#)

From the BBC series *I Was There: The Great War Interviews*.



Katie Morter

Read [this interview in the Liverpool Echo with Katie's granddaughter](#)



Women's Stories

Vera Brittain



Vera Brittain left her studies at Oxford to become a voluntary nurse and served in the UK, France and Malta during the war.

She lost her fiancé, brother and closest friends in the war. Her book, *Testament of Youth*, detailing her experiences of the war and arguing for pacifism, became a best-seller.

Read [this article about Vera, written by Vera Brittain's daughter Baroness Shirley Williams](#)

Activities

- ☐ **Group discussion:** how are women portrayed in posters, films and history books about the First World War. How does that compare with the women's stories you've learnt about in this pack?
- ☐ **Pick one** or two of these women that you'd like to know more about. What else can you find out about them online?
- ☐ **Find out about a woman** who lived through the First World War and create a short biography about them and what happened to them during the war. She could be a relative or someone from your local area.
- ☐ **Make a list** of how the war affected their mental health – both in positive and negative ways. How might those feelings relate to what's happening today with the Coronavirus pandemic.
- ☐ **Write about** how their story might help you to think about developing your character 'Poppy'.



Lesson 3 - Shining a Light on Mental Health

Trauma and shellshock in women

"When questioned about her experiences, she became quite emotional and refused to tell about them but admitted that she used to have nightmares about them and dreaded going to sleep. In my experience, this reaction is diagnostic of those cases in which the stress of war has played an active part in inducing mental breakdown."

Medical notes from Mary Cleverley's records, held in the National Archives

"The picture came back to me of myself standing alone in a newly created circle of hell during the 'emergency' of March 22nd 1918, gazing half hypnotized at the dishevelled beds, the stretchers on the floor, the scattered boots and piles of muddy clothing, the brown blankets turned back from smashed limbs bound to splints by filthy bloodstained bandages. Beneath each stinking wad of sodden wool and gauze an obscene horror waited for me and all the equipment that I had for attacking it in this ex-medical ward was one pair of forceps standing in a potted meat glass half full of methylated spirit."

Testament of Youth by Vera Brittain, 1933

Before World War One, women essentially had one job, to be a wife and mother. They had no voice, couldn't vote and couldn't speak out if they were facing domestic abuse or suffered sexual assault. Women weren't taken seriously even when during the war they did the men's jobs.

Young women had to struggle through many issues and uncertainties. One of these unknowns was whether they would ever again see the men who had gone off to war. Their fathers, husbands, brothers and friends left, and nobody knew if they would ever return.

Shellshock, now known as post-traumatic stress disorder, was very common among men who had been to war. But nobody seemed to remember that women had been affected too. Nurses working on the front lines saw terrible things. Women at home had their houses destroyed and workers in ammunition factories often had life-changing injuries. They may have become depressed after the war if they had to stop working and suddenly become housewives again, maybe feeling irrelevant or invisible, like they suddenly don't matter anymore.

By Amelie and Daisy, 14

Activities

- ☐ Read this blog post about women and trauma: [World War One's Forgotten Female Shell Shock Victims](#) by Hannah Groch-Begley, research fellow at Media Matters for America
- ☐ Read this article about [Vera Brittain and the shellshocked women of World War One](#) by Jobe Close



Denise Poynter is a Therapist and is one of the few people to have researched and written about women and shellshock in the First World War.

[Listen to the full interview with Denise Poynter](#) to hear the stories of women who suffered from shellshock (29 minutes)



Historian and therapist Denise Poynter

How did trauma affect women in World War One?

For a lot of the nurses, the general view was that they were protected from the front line – they weren't seen as being near the shells and bombs and gunfire. There was a huge amount of development into understanding what it was that the soldiers were suffering from. What was this thing called shellshock? Why were these soldiers, that were being exposed to bombs suffering from something that occurs after the shells had gone off?

There was a lot of research into [shellshock] and they said it wasn't just the consequence of being near the bombs or being in the trenches. It was more to do with the fear, and the lack of sleep, and the fear that you could lose your life in the next five or ten minutes.

They started to think differently then. They said

it wasn't specifically to do with being near the trenches, it was more to do with something psychological. And with that, I thought, there are actually a lot of females and a lot of nurses that are near the front line, so what's happening to them?

So I thought, it does seem like there are quite a lot of women that are being exposed to shelling and trauma – they're not sleeping, they're having to nurse people that are dying, etc – all the things that we now know can have an impact on people developing PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder]. With nurses and VADs [Voluntary Aid Detachment nurses] going out into France and Flanders, they started to show the same kind of symptoms: shaking, sleeplessness, just pure fear when it looked like there was an air raid. They were really struggling to continue with their work. They had lots of strange symptoms: psychosomatic pains, headaches, crying, loss of sensation in limbs.

How was their trauma treated in World War One versus how it's treated today?

I don't think they were treated at all because they thought, 'well, you're a woman, you didn't go anywhere near the front line, so I think you just need to go home and have a rest and your family will look after you'.

We might call it combat stress now but essentially, the women wouldn't have been treated... well, they wouldn't have been given the urgency, put it that way. They had to treat soldiers pretty quickly to get them back out onto the front line.

Why is it seen to only affect men?

It was seen as a soldier's thing, if you like. Millions of men went out to fight in the First World War and they associated shellshock with being in the trenches and in the front line where women were supposed not to be. But as the war went on, more and more women were in that area, that forward zone, so they started to have to include women in their figures towards the end of the war once they knew a bit more about it.



Darren Abrahams is a trauma therapist and also trains and supports people who work with refugees and asylum seekers.

[Listen to the full interview with Darren Abrahams](#) to hear about how trauma affects people today (21 minutes)



Trauma therapist Darren Abrahams.

How are the people you work with affected by trauma?

In all sorts of different ways. Trauma is about how the nervous system responds to overwhelming experiences. When we get traumatised, we have four different ways that we defend ourselves against a threat. Our body can go into fight mode – fighting off our attacker; flight mode – which is escape; freeze mode – which is getting very still and quiet so that you're not seen; and faint mode – which is like full collapse as if you're playing dead.

An overwhelming event or experience will be something that pushes you into your defence mechanisms, but you fall down into the freeze and the faint space, which means that you can't mobilize your body to fight off your attacker or run away.

So being traumatised means that you've got all this defence energy trapped in your nervous system but no way to let it out.

What is PTSD and how does it affect people today, with their daily lives?

PTSD is a post-traumatic stress disorder and it mostly comes from very severe shock traumas. There are different kinds of traumas. PTSD is often associated with people who have been in very difficult, shocking situations, so you'll often find that soldiers coming back from war have PTSD, or obviously people who have gone through this refugee experience who might be running away from a war situation.

People with PTSD find it very hard to feel safe. They often find it hard to sleep or they have nightmares, night sweats. They could find it difficult to eat because the digestive system is disrupted. It's difficult to feel close to people because when you have that kind of trauma in your system, everybody feels unsafe, so it's hard to open up to close, loving relationships. Even if there are people around you who want to support you, it can be difficult to make those connections.

Do you think it's important to hear the stories of those affected by trauma?

Many veterans end up on the streets as a consequence of having PTSD because it's difficult to live with someone who has those kinds of presentations. If you don't hear their stories and support them to tell their stories, it can often lead to much worse situations. It can lead to addiction. It can lead to really difficult behaviours. As a society, we need to be prepared to listen to people and believe them when they tell you about the things they've been through.



How did the War affect women's mental health?

Students discussed what might have contributed to Poppy's during the War. Freedoms such as going out to work and, for some, earning their own money for the first time, gave women a sense of independence. But students realised that the gruelling four years of war took its toll with loneliness, unequal pay and family loss all having a major impact on their mental health.



Mind maps, created by students at Hove Park school, looking at what might have affected women's mental health during the First World War



Your first Mind Map



Activities

- ☐ **Create your own mind map** of ideas around mental health and how women were affected in the First World War.
- ☐ **Discuss what the consequences** might be of not including women's experiences when it comes to medicine or history.



Trauma in the 21st Century

Daisy and Amelie, both 14, share their thoughts on how life has changed for women since the First World War...

Since World War One women have made lots of progress towards being equal to men. They can now vote and there are many important women in positions of power all over the world. However, this doesn't mean there isn't still much more to be done.

On the legal aspect, our society is much more equal. The Equal Pay Act was introduced. Women got the right to vote, the right to open their own bank account, to buy land or a house on their own and to divorce their husbands. On the social aspect, women are much more free to do what they want, there is much less stigma to being a single mum or to go back to work after having kids. Women can do the same jobs as men and can dress much more freely.

I'd say the main issues that young women face in 2020 are being held to patriarchal expectations and ideals. Being told they're too political or serious, not being taken seriously, pressures about body image, being sexualised from a young age - so slut-shaming, being told that they were asking for it, sexual assault, stigma of being a young and/or single mum and casual sexism – for example someone supposedly in a chivalrous act, offering to do a job that requires manual labour, but then saying it's because girls don't like to ruin their nails.

Women are often presumed to be less good at something than a man, and they often feel they have to bring each other down to get a man's approval. Also, women still suffer assault and abuse, and there's still quite a prominent rape culture. Some men still think it's acceptable to comment on a woman's body like it's an object.

Catcalling and street harassment is something girls as young as nine have to cope with. Period poverty is something else that affects girls and young women. Also, the gender pay gap is prominent in even the biggest organisations with men being paid significantly more than their female counterparts. All of these issues make normal life difficult for young women.



Lola, Tiana, Evie, Grace and Amelie reflecting on past and present. Photograph by Lotti, 19



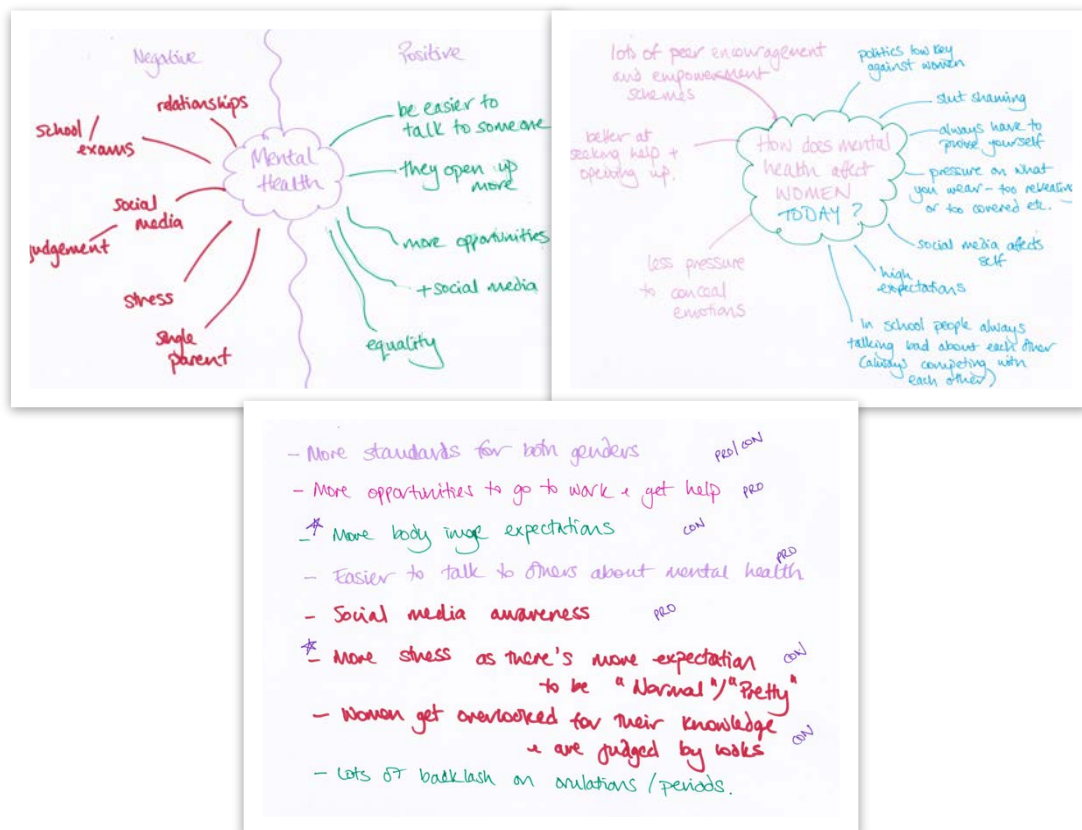
How is women's mental health affected today?

Women's experience of trauma in the First World War has only recently begun to be explored and written about. What are the implications of not listening to or hearing women's stories? How might *not* listening affect their treatment then and now?

"For millennia, medicine has functioned on the assumption that male bodies can represent humanity as a whole. As a result, we have a huge historical data gap that is continuing to grow as researchers carry on ignoring the pressing ethical need to include female cells, animals and humans, in their research. That this is still going on in the twenty-first century is a scandal."

Caroline Criado Perez, *Invisible Women*, 2019

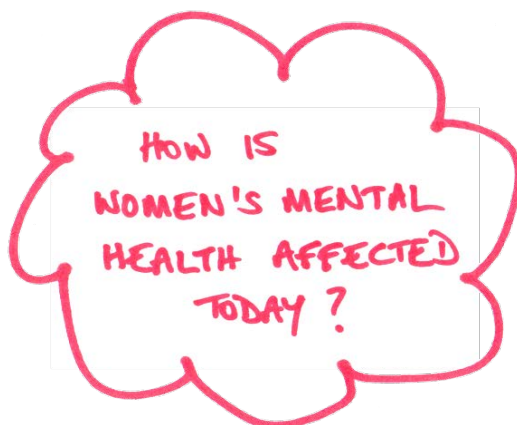
Students looked at what affected their mental health today. Pressures of social media, school and exams, body image all featured in their mind maps created for this project. But there were many positives too. When comparing today with Poppy's time, they felt that women can open up more and have more opportunities in terms of work and leisure time than their First World War counterparts.



Mind maps, created by students at Hove Park school, looking at what might affect women's mental health today



Your second mind map



Activities

- ☐ **Create your second mind map** exploring how young women's mental health is affected today.
- ☐ **Discuss the similarities and differences** between your two mind maps – what has changed (for better or worse) since the First World War and what is still an issue?



Lesson 4 - Recreating Poppy in the Classroom

Who is Poppy?

Poppy is a fictional character who lived during World War One – the rest is for you to decide!

- What did she do during the Great War? Was she a nurse? A volunteer? A factory worker? A mum at home trying to cope with her husband away fighting at the front?
- How did the War affect her mental health? Did she feel empowered by going out to work for the first time? Did she feel discriminated against because she was earning far less money than men for doing the same work? If she was a nurse, how was she affected by the often horrific injuries she had to treat, the long hours? Perhaps she lost someone close to her – a husband, father, friends?
- What are her hopes for the future?
- How does Poppy's life compare with yours?

Activities

- ☐ [Watch this BBC video](#) which asks: “What did World War One really do for women?” It looks at women's work, the role the suffragettes played in the war effort and the legacy of women's efforts during the War.
- ☐ As we travel through this pack, use the next page to make notes about who your Poppy might be and what her experiences of the War could have been.



Bringing Poppy to life

How old is she?	
Where does she live? <i>Is she at home in the UK? Staying in lodgings (if nursing or working on a farm)? Or abroad in France, Malta, Serbia etc?</i>	
Family <i>Does she have a husband, fiancé brothers, father, uncles at the front? Does she live with her parents? Does she have children?</i>	
How does her family situation affect her experience of the War? <i>Are her brothers/father away fighting at the front? Is she looking after her parents or her children on her own?</i>	
Where does she work? <i>Is she at home caring for family? Working in a factory (ie munitions), or hospital (ie doctor, nurse, volunteer)?</i>	
How does her work affect her experience of the War? <i>What is her day like? How different is it to what she was used to before the war?</i>	

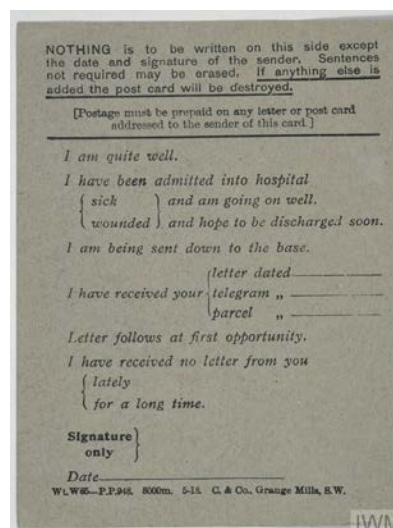


Letters home

Letters between home and the front were a vital way of keeping in touch during the First World War, and of keeping spirits up. Every week, up to 12 million letters and one million parcels were sent via the post office in a huge operation. Letters that didn't arrive could be the cause of great anxiety for women at home waiting for news of their loved ones.

Field Service postcards (right) were often used to send news when soldiers were on active service. These postcards didn't need to pass by censors because soldiers would simply cross out information which didn't apply, then date and sign the card. These postcards would go some way to reassuring friends and family that their soldier sons, brothers, fathers and friends were alive.

Below is an extract from letters exchanged between Vera Brittain and her fiancé Roland Leighton. Vera was just 22 in 1915 and that summer had started working as a voluntary nurse. Roland was only 20 and had signed up to fight at the front as soon as war broke out and had been sent to France.



British Field Service postcard © IWM (MH.34058)

From Vera,

Buxton, 18 July 1915

Whence this long silence, dear? I know of course that there is some good reason for it – I am almost afraid to know what. I am so sorry I have not written for so long. I have been extremely busy, but that is not the reason as I'm never too busy to write to you. But I have been waiting to get a letter before writing again – expecting to get one every day, every post in fact. I have such a dread of writing a letter & getting it officially returned unread by the person for whom it was intended – I think that is the most horrible way of learning about casualties that there is. But I cannot wait any longer now, as if you have not written just because you have too much to do, you must be wondering what has become of me & my correspondence... If there is anything wrong, you'll forgive this selfish anxiety, won't you? As a day or two ago I picked up the 'Times' & saw 'heavy fighting between Arras & Armentieres'... Goodbye, dear. A Field Service postcard is all I ask.



Letters home

From Roland

France, 18-21 July 1915

Your letters to me are like an uninterrupted conversation; and I remember afterwards in odd moments what you said, and wonder sometimes if you get tired talking to a phantom in the void who does not answer or show that he has understood.

This letter is bound to be scrappy, I'm afraid, as it has to be written at odd moments...

Extracts published in [Letters from a Lost Generation](#), edited by Alan Bishop and Mark Bostridge, 1998

Activities

- ☐ **Write a letter to our First World War friend, Poppy, from yourself.** Think about how you might explain your life to someone living over 100 years ago. What might you ask Poppy about how the War is affecting her life, friendships, and her mental health? It could take the form of a postcard, letter or poem and could be illustrated.
- ☐ **Write a letter or postcard back from Poppy to you** (see examples on the next page).
- ☐ **Take a look at the Imperial War Museum's collection of [Letters to Loved Ones](#) for inspiration. And [Picture Postcards from the Great War](#).**



Sending a letter through time

Daisy writes to Poppy - a young woman living through the First World War...

Ringmer, East Sussex

17 August 2020

Dear Poppy,

It's Daisy here. I'm a 14-year-old schoolgirl. I just wanted to let you know that you're doing great. The war will be won before you know it, and the battles won't be in vain. I know it must be hard for you with so much devastation around every corner, but keep on fighting for yourself, your family and your country. I'm sure you'll be glad to know there are many amazing women that have done incredible things for the world since your time.

Women can now vote thanks to your hard work and in many countries are almost equal to men. There are also many women in positions of power around the world. The United Kingdom has had two female prime ministers so far. Young women are pushing for equality and justice and people of colour have also begun to push harder for their rights and are being supported by many white people, which is so important in our time.

At the moment, we are in the middle of a war against an invisible enemy. A flu-like virus called Covid-19 is sweeping the world and we're all being told to stay home. Millions are ill and dying, so although it's not quite the same as you, I have some idea of what you're facing. Knowing if you will see someone again every time you say goodbye, it's heart-wrenching and it must be so difficult for you too.

My education has changed massively too: lessons on the Internet, although I don't suppose you know what that is, and also trying to stay in touch with my friends, doing quizzes and finally being able to meet in small groups. I guess the main purpose of this letter was to reassure you that things will get better and you will get through the highs and the lows. Keep smiling and enjoy the little things.

Good luck, Daisy.



Sending a letter through time

Poppy replies to Daisy...

London, United Kingdom

16 September 1918

Hello, Daisy,

I hope you're doing well and avoiding your Covid-19 virus. Thank you for your letter and I replied as soon as possible. I'm glad that you say the war is nearly over. I don't want any more lives to be lost. I am not long out of school, I'm only 23 years old and me and my brother Isaac are living in London. He is off fighting in Malta at the moment, I don't know if I will ever see him again.

I'm glad that our efforts have won women the vote. I have joined the suffrage movement two years ago and our group is growing extremely quickly. Having a female Prime Minister is marvellous even in my own country. Hopefully, there are many more to come, everyone should be equal and if they need to, should advocate for it.

As a nurse caring for the most injured soldiers who have been sent home to heal, I know it must be difficult for your hospitals to cope with the in-come of patients. And the Great War has caused many injuries and casualties, as I suppose your virus has. I hope that the future has better ways to cope with injuries than we do now. It would make it much easier for us to cope with overflowing hospitals and never-ending injuries.

Don't let your education be affected by the pandemic it's the most important thing a young person can have once they begin the rest of their life. Friends are also important, although the internet does sound bewildering. It's good that you can see them too. I adore being with my friends and we are all working together in the local hospital. At least we see each other every day and haven't been separated.

Thank you again for your letter. I hope this gets to you; our mail is so unreliable it can take weeks to receive letters. Isaac writes twice a week, but sometimes I get one in the morning and the afternoon delivery, and other times I wait weeks. Those times are the worst could be dead and I wouldn't know. However, let us pass over the miserable part and look towards the light.

Stay well and be safe

Poppy x



Poppy imagined

Our students share their thoughts on who Poppy is. How does your Poppy compare?

I imagine Poppy is like a home front nurse in her early 20s. She lives with her brother in London. But I also imagine she wears one of those long nurses' aprons with the red cross on the front and those little cloth headscarves. And that made me think how difficult it must have been to work in one of those because – where it's so long and so cumbersome – it must have been so difficult compared to modern scrubs.

I feel like she would have enjoyed the sense of community that came with the war and also working as a nurse, I imagine to be quite fulfilling and helping people most of the time. But then also there's obviously the fact that some people would die. So that would also obviously have a devastating effect on her mental health that she couldn't control.

I think that Poppy's helped me to understand the First World War because she's unique to me. And that means that I can have her represent what I am personally interested in. I'm interested in how being a nurse would have been, and so I can make her relatable to what I want to learn about rather than sort of a stock thing that other people are interested in.

By Daisy, 14



Tiana and Amelie. Photograph by Lotti, 19



Poppy imagined

Our students share their thoughts on who Poppy is. How does your Poppy compare?

Maybe she wasn't someone from the front, but like, she did work behind the lines. But then something happened – she was maybe a mother, but what's happened is that her sons have been shipped out or that her husband's left her, and she has to take care of the children during the war. And she's also has to help out with the war effort. I feel like it would be a bigger responsibility than what she would have had back then. Then suddenly it's just you have a whole new and different responsibility that you have to take care of.

I feel like it's opened my mind more than what it would have been because we don't learn much about women in our lessons in history. So the project really kind of expanded what women were doing and how women felt in the First World War.

By Arielle, 14

I picture Poppy as a nurse, in her 20s, and I think of her dealing with working properly in that kind of job for the first time. And she's just young and maybe middle-class, not really used to hard work or manual work, you know, when you get dry hands from washing all the time. She would have had lovely hands before; they must have been quite rough.

Up until quite recently, I was working in a pub and I was just washing the dishes. I remember when I first started, because there were in water all the time, and my hands got really dry. So as a nurse imagine constantly, like every day. On one hand, she could have felt a bit more like liberated in the sense that she could go off and be independent.

She didn't have to worry about all these expectations that she would have had, like getting married or being a proper lady. That probably wouldn't have really mattered to her as a nurse. Of course, she probably suffered from loss, maybe her father or her brother or even some friends who may have died in war, that could have affected her quite badly, I imagine. And also, seeing a lot of people on their deathbeds can't be nice. It would be a bit traumatic.

Just imagining her as a real person helps with empathy, putting myself in her shoes because, you just hear about these people from the olden days and you think, oh that's a bit sad, but in anything, in books and movies and even this project, when you imagine them as real people, you can put yourself in their shoes, see how they were feeling and really imagine what they were going through a lot more. It's not really a topic you cover so much in school.

I knew about the men and their shellshock and how mental health wasn't such a well-known thing back then. so how they were all discovering what that was. But it hadn't really even occurred to me that the women would get shellshock or PTSD from working on the front line.

By Amelie, 14



Lesson 5 - Make Your Own Podcast

Developing the structure of your story

When developing a podcast, start with your audience. Who are they and what will motivate them to listen? What kind of stories interest them?

Your story could be told as a fictional drama, a series of interviews, a conversation between your group or a mixture of all these.

You can create a script or storyboard to help you develop the structure of your podcast. Think about the beginning, middle and end of your story.

For example:

In ***Dear Poppy***, we decided to start with a statement that intrigued – “we are living in extraordinary times” – do we mean today, during the pandemic, or over 100 years ago as the country went to war? Our audience will have to keep listening to find out.

Which elements will keep your audience listening through to the end?

- Think about how you might intrigue your listener at the start of your podcast.
- How might you introduce characters like Poppy?
- Will you include interviews in your podcast? Perhaps a relative has a family story they could share? Or a historian can fill in gaps in your research?
- How can you dramatise your research? Will you use actors to bring voices from the past to life?
- In your ending or conclusion, think about what you have learnt, what surprised you, and what might resonate with those listening to your podcast. How will you share that conclusion with your listeners?



Grace. Photograph by Lotti, 19



Creating the podcast

We created our podcast entirely remotely due to Covid-19 restrictions. Students interviewed specialists who told us about the lives of women living with trauma both then and today. We recorded interviews over video calls, and asked participants to record themselves on their mobile phones at the same time to get clean audio for each person. This was then knitted together using audio software.

Students also recorded their thoughts, research and ideas for inclusion. They recorded sound effects that represented the 21st Century and we used available sounds to represent the First World War.

I loved the creativeness of listening to someone speak, imagining the settings that they would be in and then layering lots of SFX (sound effects) to create a world that the person speaking could sit in. This project was especially interesting as it focused around a specific time period. This meant that I was forced to think about what noises you might hear at that time.

I used a lot of old aircraft soaring overhead and air raid sirens screeching but I also liked the SFX that are more generic but still created a soundscape that felt old fashioned, so I used things like church bells ringing in the distance, horses hooves on cobbled streets, dogs barking, wind blowing in the trees.

Sound Editor, Alvy Vincent

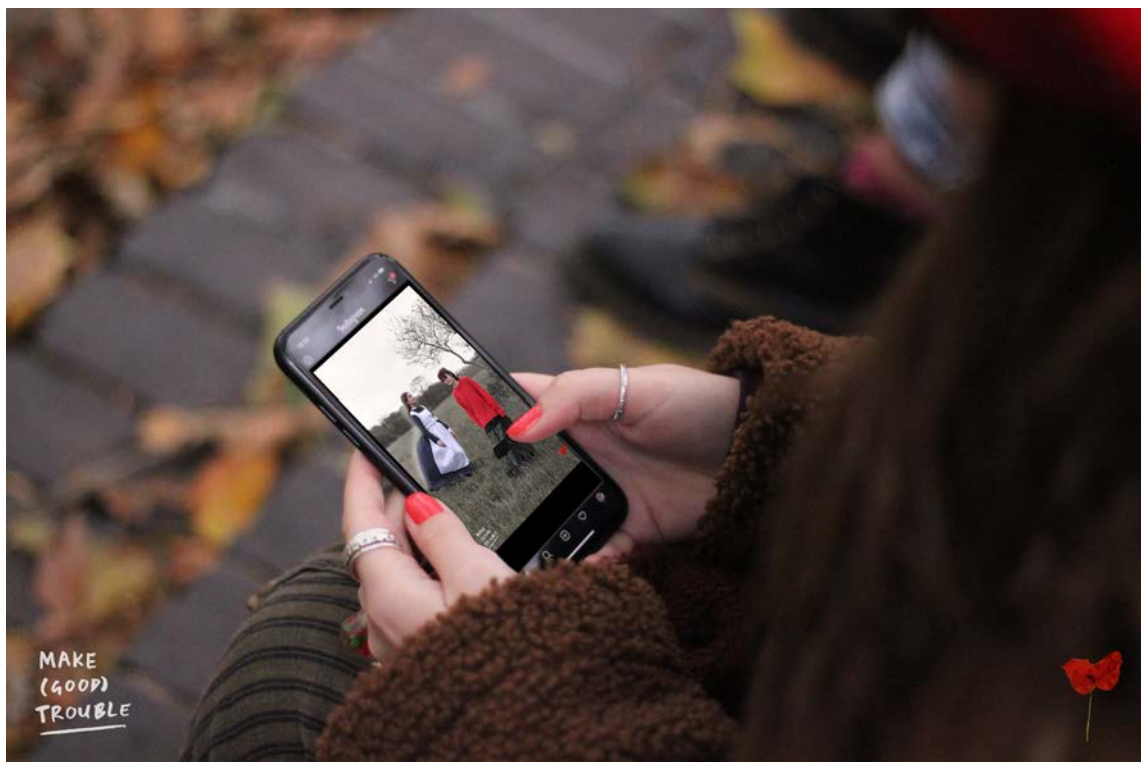
Interviewing tips & tricks

- It may help to give your interviewee a list of questions in advance – that way you'll get the most out of their time
- Put yourself in the shoes of the listener – will someone who doesn't know about the topic in question understand their story? Ask questions that get them to explain further if not. If you don't understand something they say, likely listeners won't either, so ask them to explain
- Try not to speak over them, smile and nod rather than say 'yes', for example, to encourage them and show you're listening. That way you'll get audio that's easier to edit and listen to.
- If you are going to broadcast the interview, get their permission first using a simple consent form.
- Don't forget to introduce them at the start – or better still, get them to tell you who they are and what they do – and thank them for their time at the end.



Tips for creating sound effects and recording

- **Get the sound levels right.** Very loud sound can distort; very quiet sound can have 'hiss'. Check your distance from what you're recording and move closer or further away to get it right.
- **Listen BEFORE you record.** Get everyone to be quiet and wait for a minute before you start recording, so you can hear if there's any distracting background sound.
- **Listen WHILE you record.** Use headphones to monitor the sound while you're recording if you can. If not, record a test bit and play it back to check that it's OK. Always listen to the sound so you know its usable.
- **Use a wind gag.** If possible, if you're recording outside you almost certainly need a furry windshield. Wind noise can make your sound unlistenable.
- **Get Close and Personal.** It seems logical that the closer you get to the source of the sound the louder the sound (i.e. there will be less interference from background noise). This is indeed true but is even more important than you may first think.
- **Halving the distance between mic and the sound source** quadruples the usability of the sound, and the inverse is true. As you move away from the source, the sound becomes exponentially less usable. By usability I mean less unwanted background noise. The closer you get to the sound source the less background noise you get relative to the sound you are recording.
- **Give the editor something to edit with.** Start and finish the recording a second or two before and after the interview or piece, it will make the edits smoother and speed up the editing process.
- **Take a moment before you start** to think about the environment, equipment and the people in the room, it will clear your head so that you can concentrate on the filming and if any problems arise, deal with any issues more easily.
- **Bad sound can't be fixed!**



Evie. Photograph by Lotti, 19

Activities

- ☐ **In pairs, interview each other**, recording your conversation about women and their experiences in the First World War.
- ☐ **Record your letters** to and from Poppy.
- ☐ **Research the sound effects** that you might use as a background to your letters.
- ☐ **Create your own** - Use your phone to record sounds when you're out and about – birdsong, traffic noise, horses, church bells – or indoors – texting, typing, running a tap! – everyday actions can create great backgrounds to your audio.
- ☐ **Find your own** – try the [BBC Sound Effects library](https://www.bbc.com/sound-effects/library) which has 16,000 sounds including audio relating to World War One. Another good resource is freesound.org which includes sound effects that are released under Creative Commons licenses that allow their reuse for non-commercial projects.



Resources and Further Reading

Resources

Imperial War Museum includes an online search tool, the [Women at Work Collection](#). They also have photography, sound and film archives all with material relating to the First World War.

www.iwm.org.uk/

Read their article: [12 Things You Didn't Know About Women in the First World War](#)

The British Newspaper Archive (free from your local library) gives access to news, articles, family notices (like weddings, birthdays, funerals, memorials), letters, adverts and obituaries.

www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk

The National Archives has great [research guides](#) to help you access millions of historical records they hold. Take a look at their [First World War Collections](#). These include medical and pension records for army nurses and war diaries, for example. Some documents are available online and some can only be accessed via a visit to their Archives in Kew, London.

www.nationalarchives.gov.uk

Local archives are really useful if you're interested in finding out about how the War affected your local area. You should be able to find local archives through your library or searching online.

Ancestry.co.uk Library Edition is free from your local library and gives you access to thousands of historical records about people's activities and whereabouts including census returns, war records, birth, death and marriage records.

Scarlet Finders, records and diaries relating to British military nurses

www.scarletfinders.co.uk

The Fairest Force, information, records and diaries from nurses in France and Flanders during World War One

www.fairestforce.co.uk

Further reading

Bishop, Alan and Bostridge, Mark, editors (1998) *Letters from a Lost Generation: First World War Letters of Vera Brittain and Four Friends*

Borden, Mary (1929) *The Forbidden Zone*

Brittain, Vera (1933) *Testament of Youth*

Criado Perez, Caroline (2019) *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*

Noakes, Lucy (2006) *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948*

O'Prey, Paul editor (2014) *First World War: Poems from the Front* (includes poems by Mary Borden, Vera Brittain and May Cannan)

Reid, Fiona (2017) *Medicine in First World War Europe: Soldiers, Medics, Pacifists*

Shipton, Elizabeth (2014) *Female Tommies: The Frontline Women of the First World War*

Storey, Neil R and Housego (2010) *Molly, Women in the First World War*



Credits

We Are Poppy is the creation of Make (Good) Trouble, a community interest company that exists to help adolescents and families improve their mental health and emotional wellbeing, using technology for good purpose and mainstream media to distribute content.

We are a needs-led organisation, backed by social scientific data. We make ground-breaking content for TV, radio, podcasts, digital and social media, designed to challenge thinking and drive positive social change. Our growing cohort of young collaborators is instrumental in shaping our business. We aim to become a national employer of young people, training them in best practice media production, deepening their understanding of positive emotional health.

This project has been created by students Daisy and Amelie from the East Sussex Youth Cabinet; Arielle, Bea, Eloise, Lily and Millie from Hove Park School; and Liv, Lola Ray, Lotti Terry, Kaia Allen-Bevan, Mose Hirst, Emma Garood, Samuel Zottola, Evie, Grace. Bagwell, and Tiana from the Make (Good) Trouble team. Photographs by Lotti, 19.

And with the help and support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Rose Scott from Hove Park School, Jane Griffin, Saba Ali, Yan Edwards, Alvy Vincent, Aidan Hobbs, Sam Carroll from Gateways to the First World War, Professor Lucy Noakes, trauma therapist Darren Abrahams, historian and therapist Denise Poynter, Professor Tracey Loughran, and Sarah Patterson and Charlotte Pearce at the Imperial War Museum.

The podcast was created remotely during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Executive producers were Tayler Cresswell and Jane Keating. It was broadcast on BBC Radio Sussex and BBC Radio Surrey on Remembrance Sunday 08.11.20.

We'd love to see your work and add a link to it on our website.
Get in touch: tayler@makegoodtrouble.co.uk.