



Lesson Plan: The First World War in the Skies

Objectives:

- To know the role of aircraft during the war
- To understand how aircraft were used and their comparative advantages and disadvantages
- To respond to the First World War in the Skies through the creative arts

Resources:

Range of poems, images and factual material in the Never Such Innocence fourth edition resource, available for free – [download in full here](#), or [request two free hardcopies](#).

Possible activities using the Never Such Innocence fourth edition resource:

- Talk about the invention of Airships, Observation Aircraft and Fighter Planes using p.68-69.
 - The German Army thought airships would be a great idea, but it turned out they were too explosive – what does this tell us about new inventions?
 - Anton Fokker’s invention of a synchronised machine gun and propeller is a good example of problem-solving through new technology – did it create new problems?
 - Compare the increased role of aircraft with submarines (p.82-85) and tanks (p.16). How had technology changed the war? Did it make the war more deadly or dangerous?
 - What uses could this technology have after the war?
- The Siege of Kut took place in Mesopotamia in 1916, see p.49. The Turkish Army have surrounded the city, and South Asian soldiers have tried and failed to lift the siege.

29th February: *Food was short, and on top of that, because of the shortage of clothing, we had to wear just one set of clothes. We couldn't change; nor could we bathe. Everybody was covered with lice. They would swarm all over us, under our clothes.*

...

March went by too. For food all we had was a little horsemeat and some flour mixed with dust. Even now many sepoy's cannot bring themselves to eat horsemeat. Their condition is beyond description...

28th April: *There's not a grain left of our rations.*

On 29th April 1916, the British commander surrendered to the Turks.

- Get students to mind map in groups: how would they get food into the city? Show the painting of bags of grain being dropped into Kut by British airplanes (p. 70) and have students guess what is happening.
- Discuss how it might have felt to see the planes approaching, and what it was like for the pilots who flew over the city to drop food and medicine
- As a starter, show a picture of some balloons to your class. Have students talk in pairs for two minutes: what could this have to do with the First World War?
- Show your class a painting of aerial combat during the First World War (examples on page 68-69). Mind map words that come to mind when they see the paintings. How might the pilots feel? What would they be experiencing?
- Give the students a list of problems that need to be solved as generals in the First World War, such as: lack of knowledge of enemy positions, difficulty of attacking behind enemy lines, enemies having a strong industry etc. How could aircraft help solve these problems?
- In pairs, small groups, or individually, craft a poem or a piece of artwork about the War in the Skies
 - For poetry: try writing some words you think of when you think about the War in the Skies, and put these into sentences.
Then find a rhythm that these can fit into – maybe pick out words that rhyme, or make each line the same number of syllables.
Think about how you can help the readers understand the mood or feelings – could you use metaphors? Similes? Imagery?
 - For art: think about what the War in the Skies might have been like, and how you could express that with the materials in the classroom. How can you tell a story through your art? What tools could you use to show the viewer what the War in the Skies might have been? Colour? Objects? Imagery? Texture?
 - For both – use the [tips for creating poetry and art](#) from Dr Martin Stephen and Caroline de Peyrecave, and the previous Never Such Innocence winners (download using the following links: [2014 Winners Booklet](#); [2015/16 Winners Booklet](#); [2016/17 Winners Booklet](#))!

Plenaries

- Peer review, share good work.
- How has air combat changed/stayed the same? Use pictures of modern fighter planes to compare and contrast with aircraft used during the First World War
- Ask students to think about what they have learnt about life in the trenches. Get them to write a short answer justifying whether they would rather fight in the trenches or the skies.

Poetry and artwork can be entered into the Never Such Innocence competition – details of how to enter are [on our website](#). **The closing date is Friday 16th March 2018.**

We want everyone to feel proud of the role they are playing in the centenary and so every entrant receives a personalised Certificate of Commendation signed by our Founder, Lady Lucy French, and President, Vice Admiral Sir Tim Laurence. There is also the opportunity to win cash prizes (up to £400 divided between the winner and the school), and prizes will be awarded at a special Awards Ceremony!

To mark the formation of the Royal Air Force in 1918, early entries inspired by the 'War in the Skies' will be eligible for special bonus prizes, courtesy of the RAF!

If entering one poem written collaboratively by multiple students, please include everyone's names on the entry form so that nobody misses out on a certificate!

In 2018 we will publish a book – The Children's Centenary Legacy – this will include the winning entries from all four competitions and the final edition resource. This will be sent to every school that has participated in our competition between 2014 and 2018.



Royal Air Force Fact Sheet

Before 1918, the Royal Air Force did not exist. Instead Britain had two different forces fighting the war in the skies: the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and the Royal Navy Air Service (RNAS).

In the early days of the war, the most important role of British aviation was reconnaissance. Reconnaissance flights kept watch on troop movements which helped in discovering weak points and exposed flanks as they advanced. For example, on 22nd August 1914 British recon flights were able to warn the British Expeditionary Force that they were under threat of being surrounded so they were able to pull back in time.

As the war became static and trench-based, recon flights worked with balloon spotters to map out enemy trenches and artillery positions to help call in more accurate artillery strikes. Fighter aircraft were responsible for protecting recon flights, as well as providing ground support and shooting down enemy recon planes.

The RFC and RNAS took on different roles in the war. The RFC acted mainly on the Western Front and apart from defending and attacking reconnaissance flights included dropping spies behind enemy lines, protecting reconnaissance flights and ground attacks on enemy forces at the front. The RNAS was tasked with defending Britain from Zeppelin and Gotha bombing raids from Germany, which included strategic bombing raids on German docks and aircraft sheds.

In 1917 German air raids on London intensified, leading to over 150 deaths and nearly 500 more injured. RNAS and RFC fighters were unable to compete with the German fighters. In response to the outcry over Britain's perceived failure in aviation, Lloyd George turned to General Jan Christian Smuts. Smuts recommended that instead of two air forces under the Army and Navy who often had to compete for resources like planes and fuel, the two should be combined into a single independent air force. General Smuts understood the power and importance of aviation in war, predicting that in the future it would only grow in importance and might even become more vital to winning a war than the navy or infantry. Smut's recommendations led to the foundation of the world's first air force independent of the army or the navy: the RAF.

Even though it only came into existence in the war's last year, the RAF played a vital role in blunting the German forces' last-gasp offensive as well as the counter-attack into Germany that finally led to the end of the war. The RAF vastly expanded their strategic bombing capacities in the final months of the war, leading raids on major German cities like Frankfurt and Cologne which specifically targeted industrial targets like chemical factories and railways.

By the war's end, the RAF was the most powerful air force in the world with over 22,000 airplanes and nearly 300,000 men.