

Topic: The Christmas Truce during World War I

Level: B2

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' knowledge of lexis associated with war, and give them the opportunity to practise using it.
- To allow students to practise their gist listening skills.
- To develop students' awareness of narrative tenses and to allow them to practise using these in a creative writing activity based on the events of the Christmas Truce.
- To give students an insight into one of WWI's most significant events: The Christmas Truce of 1914.

Introduction

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is widely seen as one of the very few uplifting moments in the futility of the First World War. In this lesson, students will learn about the truce through listening to the stories of soldiers who experienced it at: <http://www.1914.org/podcasts/podcast-9-the-christmas-truce/>. After listening to this podcast, students will focus on the speakers' use of narrative tenses and will go on to write a diary entry from the perspective of a WWI soldier.

Procedure:

Warmer – Class discussion (10 minutes)

Begin this lesson by asking students what the biggest celebration in their year is and how they usually celebrate it. Write the names of any special days your students suggest on the board. Ask your students if they have ever celebrated these special days in an unusual way or in a very different place.

Show the photograph of the British and German soldiers together. You could project the image using the attached PowerPoint file **Christmas Truce photo**, or show them the picture on the worksheets. Elicit suggestions about why the soldiers from opposing sides in the war have been photographed together. Write the word "truce" on the board and elicit its meaning. Find out what your students already know about the Christmas Truce and write down their suggestions on the board.

Task 1 – Vocabulary (15 minutes)

a) Tell your students to turn their worksheets face down on the table. Ask them to give you a word they associate with war. Then give students one minute to work with a partner and collect as many words associated with war as they can. Conduct class feedback and write students' suggestions on the board

b) Focus students' attention on the words in the box. Draw a Venn diagram on the board and ask students to decide which words are associated with war, which with peace and which with both. Conduct feedback, eliciting definitions of the more challenging words and phrases and conducting discussion and debate where possible.

Note: *No man's land* is the term used to land which is not owned. In war, it refers to the area which is not controlled by other side.

Suggested answers:

War: shoot, attack, fire, trenches, no man's land, sentry

Peace: carols, to cease (firing), waving, fraternisation

Both: rude remarks, commotion

c) Give students a couple of minutes to discuss what they think might have happened during the Christmas Truce using the words provided. Ask a few students to report back.

Task 2 – Listening (20 minutes)

- a) Before you play the recording warn students that they will be listening to a number of different voices and hearing a range of different accents. Stress that they are listening for gist and do not need to worry about understanding every word.
Play the recording (**extract 0.00 to 07.58**). Give students a minute to discuss what they heard with their partner.
Conduct class feedback. Were their predictions similar to what actually happened?

Note for Teachers: The Christmas Truce

The Christmas truce was a series of unofficial ceasefires which took place throughout the Western Front over the Christmas period in 1914. During the few days leading up to Christmas, German and British soldiers began exchanging greetings and singing songs together. In some cases, they even exchanged gifts and played football matches in no man's land. When commanding officers became aware of the truce, they very quickly put a stop to it.

b) Give students a minute to read the sentences. Play the recording again while students complete the exercise. Allow students to check their answers with a partner before conducting feedback.

Answers

1. *False. It took part along some parts of the Western Front.*
2. *True*
3. *True*
4. *False. They had been singing carols and shouting, joking and sometimes making rude remarks across to each other.*
5. *True*
6. *False. They ignored the Germans' friendly overtures and were ordered to open rapid fire on them.*
7. *True*
8. *True*
9. *False. The football burst when it landed on the barbed wire, so the game only lasted half an hour.*

Task 3 – Language focus (15 minutes)

a) Ask students to work with a partner. They should read the passage together and discuss what words they might expect to find in the gaps.

Play the passage (**extract 2.43 – 3.45**) and ask students to write down what they hear. Read the passage around the class and ask students if any of their predictions were correct.

Answers to Task 3a

1. started 2. heard 3. finished 4. shouted 5. had 6. weren't 7. were 8. allowed

b) Ask students to underline and identify the tenses in this passage and explain why these particular tenses are used.

Answers to Task 3b

Past simple: heard, were, shouted, had, weren't, were, allowed. The past simple verbs describe completed actions which happened in the past. The past simple often sequences events in the past which happen one after another.

Past perfect: had finished. The past perfect is used to show that this action took place in the past before the main action happened (the German and British soldiers talking to each other).

b) Focus students on the sentences and ask them to choose the correct answer in each case. Conduct class feedback.

Answers

1. ceased
2. we didn't shoot... they didn't shoot
3. 'd been singing...had been doing
4. heard
5. eaten
6. had been

Task 4 – Writing (20 minutes)

- Focus students' attention on the questions and discuss these as a class. Encourage students to really use their imaginations when they consider what life in the trenches must have been like. Elicit as much relevant language as you can and write this on the board.
- Ask your students to write a short diary entry. Ask students to peer correct each other's work, focusing in particular on narrative tenses. Monitor as students complete this activity. Nominate a few students to read their work out to the rest of the class.

Task 5 – Discussion (10 minutes)

Organise students into groups and ask them to discuss the two quotations and the questions about war. Nominate one student from each group to report back and encourage whole-class discussion around the questions.