

Topic: Daily life in the trenches

Level: B2

Time: 70 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' ability to listen for detail
- To develop students' ability to read for gist and detail
- To give practice of verb patterns

Introduction

This lesson is about daily life in the trenches during the First World War. It provides students with the opportunity to listen to authentic recordings of two First World War soldiers describing life in the trenches, and to read a diary extract describing a typical day in the trenches.

The podcast can be accessed from <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-trench-life> the extract used is from 09:17 to 10:29.

Preparation

- Make one copy of the **student worksheets** for each student.
- Print one copy of the **PowerPoint presentation** (4 slides) for every 12 students in the class, ideally making full page printouts of each slide. For example, for a class of 24 students, you could make 2 copies of the ppt file. Each copy would consist of 4 pages.
- Be ready to project the **PowerPoint presentation** while conducting feedback on the Warmer.
- Find the right place of the **podcast** <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/voices-of-the-first-world-war-trench-life> from 09:17 to 10:29.

Note – the trenches of the First World War

The trenches are one of the most enduring and shocking symbols of the First World War. They were long ditches dug into the ground and built by soldiers to provide shelter and protection from enemy guns. Soldiers lived and fought for several weeks at a time in these. They lived in terrible and dangerous conditions and many soldiers died, either from injuries or from disease. Most of the trenches were on the Western Front, in northern France and southern Belgium.

Procedure

Warmer – picture discussion (10 minutes)

- Tell the students that they are going to learn about the experiences of soldiers during the First World War. You could find out from the class what they already know about the war in general, and the trenches in particular.

- Tell the students that, in groups, they are going to look at a photograph showing an *aspect* of life in the trenches, and that they must decide together what they feel this aspect is. For example, one group may feel that their particular picture conveys how frightening it was to be a soldier fighting in the trenches; another may feel that their picture conveys the friendships that must have developed between the soldiers who spent so much time together in the trenches (these are just suggestions, and not necessarily two of the answers).
- Distribute one picture to each group, and encourage discussion as to what aspect of trench life the picture shows.
- After a couple of minutes, get the students to regroup, with one representative from each old group now in each new group.
- Ask the students to tell each other about their picture, and the particular aspect of trench life that they feel this illustrates.
- Showing the pictures on a projector, encourage students to comment on what aspect of life in the trenches each conveys. Try to encourage the students to put themselves in the place of the soldiers shown in the pictures, and imagine what life must have been like. Ask questions such as:
 - *How difficult do you think (doing X) was?*
 - *How do you think the soldiers felt about having to (do X)?*

Suggested answers

- *(picture 1: taking timber) – building and repairing the trenches; time-consuming and tiring physical work; perhaps cold and wet in winter*
- *(picture 2: preparing mortar) – preparing to fight; frightening, but it was what the soldiers had come to do*
- *(picture 3: reading newspaper and using periscope) – waiting for something to happen; maybe boring; the soldier on the left appears quite relaxed, and the picture suggests that the soldiers did at least have some leisure time*
- *(picture 4: cooking) – all sorts of activities, including cooking and eating, were done in the trenches; quality and availability of food, as well as quantity; logistics of getting food out to the front line, etc.*
- Use the pictures in the PowerPoint presentation to introduce the following vocabulary:
keep guard (slides 2 & 3), sandbags (slides 2, 3 & 4), maintenance (slide 1)

Task 1 – discussion: daily life in the trenches (5 minutes)

- Put students in pairs or small groups. Tell them to look at the verbs and pictures on the student worksheet to describe what they think daily life was like in the trenches.
- Do brief whole class feedback to share ideas.

Task 2 – listening (10 minutes)

- Tell students they are going to listen to the audio of two soldiers who fought in the First World War speaking about their experiences in the trenches. Ensure they understand that they are listening to genuine interview extracts from two soldiers who fought in the trenches.
- Before they listen, tell students to work alone to try and complete the sentences with their own ideas.
- Put students in pairs and tell them to compare their ideas.
- Tell them to listen and check their answers to Task 2.
- Play the audio extract.
- Check the answers.

Answer key:

1. *The average day in the ordinary bit of the trenches was just by the way doing nothing.*
2. *Our life was this: from the beginning of the day until the night, we were eating.*
3. *Sometimes we received a few bombs.*

Task 3 – discussion (5 minutes)

- Tell students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the questions.
- Monitor and support as necessary. Make a note of interesting ideas and comments.
- Conduct whole class feedback of ideas.

Task 4 – reading a soldier's diary (10 minutes)

- Tell students they are going to read a diary extract written by a soldier who fought in the trenches in the Somme in 1918. (For the record, the diary extract is not authentic.)
- Put them in pairs and tell them to discuss what they think the soldier might have written about his daily life in the trenches. Refer them to the pictures from the PowerPoint and from Task 1 for ideas.
- a. Ask the students to skim read the extract, and find whether this account seems similar to the description of the two soldiers from Task 2. (*Suggested answer: Yes, as both descriptions focus on the dullness of the soldiers' daily routine.*)
- b. Tell them to work alone to read the text and put the activities in the correct order.
- Put them in pairs to check answers, and then correct answers as a whole class.

Answer key:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>stand to</i> | 5. <i>breakfast</i> | 9. <i>stand to</i> |
| 2. <i>morning hate</i> | 6. <i>feet inspection</i> | 10. <i>evening chores</i> |
| 3. <i>rum ration</i> | 7. <i>daily chores</i> | |
| 4. <i>rifle inspection</i> | 8. <i>free time</i> | |

Task 5 – reactions to the text (5 minutes)

- Tell students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the questions.
- Monitor and support as necessary. Make a note of interesting ideas and comments.
- Conduct whole class feedback of ideas.

Task 6 – gerund and infinitive (10 minutes)

- Explain that students are going to look at when to use gerunds and infinitives.
- Put the following sentences from the diary on the board:
We have to defend the trench.
After we've finished doing chores, we have free time.
- Elicit from students what is used after *have to* (infinitive) and after *finish* (gerund).
- Tell students to work alone and match the diary extracts with the correct verb pattern.
- Tell them to check their answers in pairs.
- Check answers as a whole class and answer questions students may have.

Answers:

1. f 2. d 3. e 4. b 5. c 6. a

Task 7 – complete the diary extracts (5 minutes)

- Tell students to work alone and complete the diary extracts with the gerund or infinitive. Make it clear that these sentences are not from the diary extract in Task 4, but are other extracts from the soldier's diary.
- Monitor and support and point out errors if required.
- Tell them to check their answers in pairs.
- Check answers as a whole class and answer questions students may have.

Answers:

1. to sleep 3. being 5. getting
2. to leave 4. to work 6. to rest

Task 8 – discussion (10 minutes)

- Tell students to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the questions.
- Monitor and support as necessary. Make a note of interesting ideas and comments.
- Conduct whole class feedback of ideas.

Acknowledgement

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