

Topic Dorothy Lawrence: the only woman to go to the front line in the First World War
Level: B2/C1
Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' ability to read and summarise text
- To give practice of role playing an interview
- To give practice of writing an article

Introduction

This lesson is about Dorothy Lawrence, a British woman who disguised herself as a man and travelled to the front line during the First World War, where she worked as a soldier before her capture and arrest. It provides students with practice of reading for detail, summarising, discussion, role play and writing a newspaper article.

Preparation

A projector would be an advantage in Task 2, so that you can show the images in the '**Dorothy Lawrence PowerPoint presentation**'.

Before the class, you will need to copy and cut up the following resources:

For **Task 3**, you will need to make one copy of the story for each pair of students and cut it into 4 sections. This can be found in at the end of this lesson plan.

For **Task 9**, you will need to make one copy of the role cards for each pair of students and cut them up. This can be found in at the end of this lesson plan.

Procedure

Warmer – Jobs for women (10 mins)

- The warmer is a short discussion activity to engage learners and introduce the theme of the lesson – women in the war.
- Students can work in pairs to try and put the jobs into the appropriate category and then check their answers with you.
- When students have checked their answers, lead a brief class discussion on whether any of the answers surprised them

Answers:

- Nurse; Teacher; Telephone operator*
- Electrician; Farm worker; Coal miner; Ambulance driver; Code expert; Police officer; Grave digger*
- Politician; Soldier*

Task 1 – Vocabulary: key words (5 mins)

- This activity introduces students to some of the vocabulary that they will need to understand the reading and complete the reading activities.
- Put students in pairs. Tell them to complete the table by matching words / meanings / pronunciation.

Key:

1. c /'sæpə(r)/
2. d /frʌnt 'laɪn/
3. e /wɔː(r) kɒrɪ'spɒndənt/
4. f /drɪl/
5. b /fɔː(r)dʒ/
6. a /'læn(d) maɪn/

Task 2 – Before reading: prediction (5 mins)

- The aim of this activity is to introduce the students to Dorothy Lawrence and to raise their interest in the story by asking them to predict what they think the text will be about.
- You could project the slide in the Powerpoint file '**Dorothy Lawrence Powerpoint presentation**' to focus students' attention at this stage.
- Put students in pairs. Ask them to read the look at the title, pictures and introduction and discuss what they think the article is going to be about. Do brief whole class feedback but don't give them any answers.

Task 3 – Speed-reading: ordering the sections (3 mins)

- Use the resources at the end of this lesson plan, cut into the four different sections: 1-4.
- Divide the students into pairs. Give each pair the cut-up sections. Ask them to **skim** the sections and put them in the correct order.
- Conduct feedback.

Answers: C, D, B, A

Task 4 – Reading and retelling (12 mins)

- This activity enables students to read the articles in more detail.
- In each pair, ask the students to read two sections each.
- Tell students to read their sections carefully and underline the key information.
- When they have finished, ask them to summarise their sections to their partner in order (C,D,B,A) and answer any questions their partner has.

Task 5 – Matching the headings (10 mins)

- This activity gives students the opportunity to read the whole article for gist.
- Put students in pairs. Ask them to quickly read the whole story and to match the 4 sections with the appropriate heading.
- NOTE: there is one extra heading that the students don't need.

Answers: 1-c 2-d 3-b 4-a

Task 6 – Section summaries (10 mins)

- In pairs, ask them to choose the best summary for each section. They need to make sure that the sentence they have chosen most effectively summarises the **whole** section.

Answers: 1-b 2-b 3-b 4-a

Task 7 – Vocabulary in context (5 mins)

- In this activity, students look through the text and find words in the text with the same meanings as the definitions. Section numbers are provided to make it easier for students.
- Ask students to work alone and try to find the words in the text, then check their answers in pairs.
- Check the answers together as a whole class.

Answers: 1 – befriended 2 – interrogated 3 – confided 4 – affidavit
5 – suppressed

Task 8 – Discussion: reactions

- This discussion activity gives students an opportunity to react to the text and to consider and discuss Dorothy's actions. It will provide preparation for the role play activity in **Task 9**.
- Put students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions.
- Conduct whole class feedback of their ideas.

Task 9 – Role play: an interview with Dorothy

- In this activity, students role play an interview between Dorothy and a newspaper journalist. This gives students an opportunity to discuss Dorothy's experiences at some length and builds on what they discussed in task 8.
- Make enough copies of the role cards for each pair of students.
- Set the scene by explaining to students that they are going to role play an interview between Dorothy and a newspaper journalist.
- Put students in pairs – student A and student B. Give student A the journalist role card (A). Give student B the role card for Dorothy (B). Tell them they have 3-4 minutes to read their role cards and to prepare what they are going to say.
- Give them up to 10 minutes to complete the interview – refer them to the prompts on the student worksheets (task 9) to get the conversation going.
- Conduct brief class feedback on how successful the interviews were and what the journalists discovered.

TIP:

If your group are weak or you think they will struggle to prepare ideas of what to say in the interview, you can put them in A-A and B-B pairs and get them to work together to think of ideas. You can then move them into A-B pairs to conduct the interview.

Task 10 – Writing: a newspaper article

- In this activity, students work independently to write an article based on their interview. In this activity, you will need to make sure that students are looking at the correct writing task.
- Students who were the journalist in task 9 need to read **Writing task A: An article about Dorothy**
- Students who were Dorothy Lawrence in task 9 need to read **Writing task B: telling your story**
- Ask students to read the appropriate task and to write their article. Stress to them that, as it's an article for a newspaper, they need to try and make their articles as interesting as possible, using dramatic language and plenty of descriptive words.
- When students finish, they can read and compare their articles with someone who wrote from the other perspective.

NOTE:

This writing task can be set for homework

TIP:

If you think your students will find it difficult to write an interesting article, you could elicit some suggestions to the board of how to do it:

- Dramatic verbs
- Use of adjectives and adverbs to describe the experience, how she was feeling
- Quotes and direct speech

Extract A

Dorothy wrote about her experiences, in a book titled 'Sapper Dorothy Lawrence: The Only English Woman Soldier'. However, the book was suppressed by the War Office, and wasn't published until 1919, after the war was over. She moved to Islington, in North London in 1919 and not much is known about her life after that. She was institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital in 1925 after accusing her church guardian of rape. She died at the Friern Hospital in London in 1964.

Dorothy's story was not well-known until her story was discovered more than eighty years later by the grandson of one of her accomplices, Richard Samson. He found out about her story while he was doing research about his family at the Royal Engineering Museum. Although she is not famous, her influence can be seen in the motivation she has given to other female war correspondents.

Extract B

The stress of living a double life and doing a very dangerous job was very difficult for Dorothy. She was also constantly worried that she would be caught, and that the men who had helped her would be in danger. As a result of this, and the terrible weather, she became ill with chills and rheumatism. She confided her situation to a sergeant in her regiment, who she thought she could trust. She was wrong – he reported her to the authorities. She was immediately arrested and interrogated as a spy. She was declared a Prisoner of War and taken to Calais for further questioning.

The army were very embarrassed that a woman had managed to work on the front line and were worried that, if Dorothy's story was known, other women would try to copy her. As a result, she was moved to a convent in Saint Omer, and kept there until she signed an affidavit, promising not to write about her experiences until the war had ended. She was very disappointed, as this was why she had travelled to the front – "in making that promise I sacrificed the chance of earning by newspaper articles written on this escapade".

Extract C

Dorothy Lawrence was born in Warwickshire on 4th October 1896. She was abandoned by her mother and became a guardian of the Church of England. When the war began, she was 19 and living in Paris. She was keen to take an active role in the war and wanted to work as a war correspondent, reporting for the newspapers about what was happening on the front line. She had already had some success as a reporter as she had had some articles published in The Times newspaper. She contacted several British newspapers to see if she could write for them but she couldn't get work as it was considered too dangerous even for men. She also tried to find work with the Voluntary Aid Department, who sent women to participate in war work but was unsuccessful.

As a result, she made a plan to travel to the front line and write about her experiences there, saying "I'll see what an ordinary English girl, without credentials or money can accomplish". On her first attempt, she was arrested by French police two miles from the front line and ordered to leave the area.

Extract D

Her second attempt was more successful. She befriended two British soldiers, who became known as her 'khaki accomplices' and taught her how to drill and march like a soldier. Two Scottish soldiers she met at a train station gave her a military haircut and she dyed her skin with furniture polish so that she looked as if she had a sun tan. Her friends also gave her a uniform which they stole from the laundry in their regiment. Using forged papers with the name of Private Denis Smith of the First Battalion Leicestershire Regiment, she travelled to the Somme by bicycle.

When she arrived, she made friends with a miner from Lancashire, Tom Dunn, who found her work as a sapper with the British Expeditionary Force Tunnelling Company. She was responsible for laying mines within 400 metres of the front line, where she was under constant fire. At night, she slept in an abandoned cottage that her friend, Tom Dunn, had found for her.

Student A

You are a journalist for a leading UK newspaper. You have heard about the story of 'Sapper Dorothy' and you are going to interview her for your newspaper. Prepare some questions that you can ask her. Try to ask her searching questions to make your article as interesting as possible.

Suggestions:

- Her early life
- Why she did it
- Her journey to the front line
- Who helped her – why does she think they agreed to help? Where are they now?
- Working as a sapper – what did she have to do? How did she feel?
- The most frightening/ dangerous thing she experienced
- Her experience of arrest and interrogation
- If she would do it again
- What she has learnt from this experience
- What she's going to do next

Student B

You are Dorothy Lawrence. You've recently returned from France and a journalist from a leading UK newspaper would like to interview you. Prepare some ideas of things you can say during the interview. Remember that this is your opportunity to tell your story to the world – make sure that you are interesting and that you give detailed answers to the journalist's questions.

Suggestions:

- Your early life
- Why you did it
- Your journey to the front line
- Who helped you – why do you think they agreed to help? Where are they now?
- Working as a sapper – what did you have to do? How did you feel?
- The most frightening/ dangerous thing you experienced
- Your experience of arrest and interrogation
- If you would do it again
- What you've learnt from this experience
- What you're going to do next