

Topic How people tried to be excused from military service in World War I

Level: B2 /C1

Time: 90 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' speaking and reading skills.
- To give students exposure to phrasal verbs.

Introduction

This lesson is about the process men had to go through in order to be excused from military service during World War I. The role play personalises the events to make them more accessible and to bring the period alive, giving the historical events more meaning. Students will practise their reading and speaking skills; the lesson culminates in a role play in which students must argue the case for and against military conscription for individual people.

Preparation

Copy and cut out the six role cards from **Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!”** before the class starts so that each student has their own card, ready for the role play task. The role play cards can be found at the end of the lesson plan.

Procedure

Warmer – Discussion of military service in different countries (10 mins)

- Ask students if military service is compulsory in their countries. At what age do they have to do military service and for how long? Are some people excused from joining the army? If yes, in what circumstances?
- Write the phrase *conscientious objector* on the board. Ask students if they can explain what this means, (*a person who refuses to fight due to their personal morals, or beliefs, which may be religious, but not necessarily*). Do they know anyone who is a conscientious objector?

Task 1 – Quiz about military conscription (10 mins)

This is to introduce students to the concept of military conscription in WWI. It involves reading and pair work.

- Tell students that at the start of the war a lot of men volunteered to fight. Then, as the war progressed, fewer men volunteered, and in 1916 military conscription (*compulsory military service*) for men aged between 18 and 41 was introduced. Men could appeal against conscription at their local Military Service Tribunal. This was like a court with a judge or judges who could ask questions and decide on each case.
- Ask the students to guess what six reasons for not fighting might be accepted by a tribunal. Give them a couple of minutes to work in small groups to come up with answers.

Answers: Family conditions at home, business or domestic hardship, doing an important job, conscientious objection, physical health, mental health.

- Hand out **Task 1 – Quiz about military conscription**
- Set up students in pairs to discuss the questions and complete the quiz.
- When students have finished, go through the answers.
- Elicit feedback about the quiz. Were students surprised about any of the answers?

Answers for Task 1: Quiz about military conscription 1.a 2.b 3.c 4.a 5.c 6.c

Task 2 – Reading: Military Service Tribunal (20 mins)

This exercise introduces students to the concept of military exemption that students will need for **Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!”** and gives students exposure to phrasal phrases.

- Give out **Task 2 – Reading: Military Service Tribunal**
- Explain to the students that this is a formal meeting between a military tribunal judge and a conscientious objector, to decide whether or not the man should be sent off to fight in the war, even though he does not want to. Before reading, ask the students if they can predict what questions the judge might ask.
- Then get them to read the text.
- Elicit answers.

Answers for questions: The judge asks: Name? Age? Address? His reason for not fighting? His reason for being a conscientious objector? Why should he be let off? Was the reason religious, political, or because he was lazy or a coward?

- Now ask students to see if they can match the 5 phrasal verbs in the text in italics with one of the definitions in the box at the bottom of the page.

Answers: 1. to suffer/endure – put up with, 2. to reject/refuse – turn down, 3. to recover (from) – get over 4. to lose control emotionally – break down, 5. to excuse – let off, 6. to avoid – get out of, 7. to compensate (for) – to make up for

Task 3 – Discussion about the text (10 mins)

This exercise gives students the opportunity to consolidate and to practise the phrasal verbs from **Task 2 – Reading: Military Service Tribunal**, before using them in the freer role play exercise in **Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!”**

- Give out **Task 3 – Discussion about the text**
- Put students in pairs and ask them to take turns to ask each other the questions.
- Monitor and provide help if students require it.
- Elicit feed-back. There are no suggested answers for this activity; it all depends on the students’ own points of view.

Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!” (30 mins)

- Divide the students up into groups. The seven role play cards are flexible and adapt to different group sizes. If you have a group of six, include both judges but remove the “Sister” card. If you have five students in a group, you could remove the “Sister” and “Young Farmer” card but keep both judges. For four students you could use “Judge 1” only and the three male characters.
- Give each student in the group a role play card from **Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!”** These can be found at the end of the lesson plan.
- Tell the students they have to convince the judge/s to excuse them from military service, while the judge/s decide which case to favour. The different characters must take turns to put their case forward and answer questions. At the end the judge/s must reach a decision. Only one person can be let off.
- Ask the students to try and use some of the phrasal verbs from **Task 2 – Reading comprehension: Military Service Tribunal**.

Extension activities – Whole class discussion (10 mins)

- Ask the class which character they felt most sympathy for and why?
- Would they agree to fight for their country in a war? Why/why not?

Homework

- Ask the students to imagine that, following his interview with Jack Smith, the judge in **Task 2 – Reading: Military Service Tribunal** decided to write him a letter.
- Tell them to decide what the judge would have written to Jack and then write the letter.

Task 4 – Role play: “Please let me off!”

Young farmer: You are 19 and the only son of a local farmer. Your father is not able to look after the farm without your help, as your three brothers have joined the army already and are away in France. Explain to the judge that you must stay to help with the harvest instead of going away to fight.

Wife: You are the wife of Harold, a 35 year old factory worker. Last month Harold fell off a ladder at work and is suffering from severe back pain. He cannot get out of bed and so you are here to represent him. Ask the judge if your husband can get exemption from fighting in France. He needs to rest and to get better so he can look after his family.

Conscientious objector: You are 21 years old and studying law at university. You do not believe in violence or fighting in any circumstances. You do not want to fight for your country. You must persuade the judge that you are acting from strong beliefs and not because you are a coward.

Young father: You are a 26 year old street cleaner and a father of three young children. Your wife is pregnant again and she is due to give birth to twins next month. You are very worried about how she will cope without your help. You have no relations living nearby so she will be on her own if you have to fight in France. Ask the judge if you can get military exemption until your wife has had her twins and recovered from the birth.

Sister: You are the sister of a man called David, who is 35 years old. He has been suffering from depression and anxiety ever since he was a young man and he doesn't work. You are very worried that going to fight in France will affect him very badly. His depression has also led to some memory loss and sometimes he loses concentration. Persuade the judge to let David stay at home so he doesn't put his own life or anyone else's life in danger.

Judge 1: You are the one who has to listen to all the people who want military exemption. You must decide who can stay at home. Soldiers are dying in France in great numbers and so you are only able to excuse one man from fighting. Who will it be? Listen to the stories carefully and make a decision. You have no personal experience of the war so you have to use your common sense. Take into account how much each person is needed at home and also how much they deserve to be excused from fighting when you make a decision.

Judge 2: You volunteered to fight at the start of the war and got shot in the leg. You can no longer walk properly so you can't return to France. However you believe in the war and you are keen to make sure that other men do their duty and fight for their country. You and Judge 1 can only excuse one man from fighting. You must listen to the stories carefully and then agree with Judge 1 in order to make a decision.