

Warmer

1. Look at the list of places below. Where are they? What is their relationship to Britain?

The Bahamas

British Honduras

Barbados

Jamaica

British Guiana

Trinidad and Tobago

The Windward Islands

The Leeward Islands

2. One hundred years ago, what was this group of islands called?

a. The Caribbean Indies

b. The West Indies

c. The British Empire Islands

Task 1 – Discussing old photographs

Look at the pictures below. Answer the questions.



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What can you see?

Where do you think the men are from?

Do you think they fought for the British or German side in the First World War?

What are the men doing?

Do you think this was an easy job?

Do you think it was safe/interesting? Why (not)?



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What can you see?

What were trenches used for?

Who do you think made the trenches?

Task 2 – Reading for gist

Read the text quickly and answer these questions.

- a. Did men from the West Indies want to go to war?
- b. What problems did soldiers in the British West Indies Regiment have?

The British West Indies Regiment (BWIR)

Over 16,000 men from the West Indies fought for Britain in the First World War. They fought mostly on the Western Front (Belgium, France and Germany), but also in Italy, Jordan, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Palestine, East Africa, Cameroon and Togo.

When the war started, many West Indians wanted to fight for Britain. They wanted to fight because they wanted Britain to win, they thought the pay was good and that it would change the politics in the West Indies. In 1915 there were enough West Indian soldiers to start the British West Indies Regiment.

In 1916, a ship carrying new BWIR recruits to Britain had to change direction to stop the enemy attacking. The ship had to go to Canada instead of Europe. The soldiers on the ship did not have the right clothes for cold weather. Many of them got frostbite, had to have a leg or arm cut off and some even died. People in the West Indies heard about this and heard about how many people were dying in Europe – they didn't want to go to war any more. The army had to stop recruiting new soldiers from the West Indies because of this.

BWIR recruits were not treated the same as white soldiers from Britain or France. Many of them did not work as soldiers. They worked as labourers – digging trenches, carrying weapons, building shelters or even cleaning toilets. These jobs were worse than other jobs and the BWIR got paid less than white soldiers. The BWIR thought this was unfair discrimination. In Italy in 1918, after the war ended, many BWIR soldiers decided to stop doing what the army captains told them to do for four days to protest.

When the BWIR went back after the war the politics of the West Indies started to change. Many West Indians wanted independence from Britain. In the 1960s until the 1980s each of the islands of the West Indies got independence. They are still part of the Commonwealth – a group of 54 countries, many of which were once part of the British Empire (e.g. the UK, Australia, Canada, India and Nigeria).

Task 3 – Reading for detail

Read the text again and answer the questions below:

- a. Where did the BWIR fight?
- b. Why did men from the West Indies want to go to war?
- c. What happened on the ship in 1916?
- d. What jobs did the BWIR do?
- e. Why did BWIR soldiers stop working for the army for four days in 1918?
- f. When the BWIR returned home after the war, what political changes did they want?
- g. Did those changes happen?
- h. What is the Commonwealth?



The British West Indies Regiment in camp in France, September 1916. © IWM (Q 1202)

Task 4 – Vocabulary

Match the word to the meaning. Use a dictionary or ask your partner if you need help.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mesopotamia (para. 1) 2. enemy (para. 3) 3. attack (para. 3) 4. frostbite (para. 3) 5. recruiting (para. 3) 6. discrimination (para. 4) 7. protest (para. 4) 8. independence (para. 5) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. a person/country that wants to hurt you or your country b. to go towards people and hurt them c. an area which is now part of Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Syria and Turkey d. freedom to make political decisions for your own country e. say or do something to tell people that you disagree with something unfair f. when your body gets so cold that your hands, fingers, toes or legs can't feel anything and might need to be cut off g. being treated unfairly because of the colour of your skin, religion, nationality or other difference h. finding people to work or fight for you |
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Task 5 – Discussion

Talk in pairs or small groups and answer the questions.

- a. Would you fight for your country in a war? Why (not)?
- b. Would you fight for another country in a war? Why (not)? If yes, which one?
- c. Why do you think soldiers from the West Indies were treated differently?
- d. Have you ever been discriminated against? What happened? What did you do?
- e. Can you think of any countries or regions that are not independent? Do you think the people that live there want to be independent?

Extra activity

Talk to your partner. Write a list of as many ways that you are different/the same. Think about: skin colour, religion, nationality, languages you speak, likes and dislikes, hair and eye colour, hobbies, music, etc. When you finish tell the rest of the class. How different/similar are you?

Ways that we are the same	Ways that we are different