



Trench Stories

ANSTEE BRIDGE & BOUNCE THEATRE PRESENT
A NIGHT OF ART & ENTERTAINMENT
REMEMBERING THE SPIRIT OF SURVIVAL

*They cannot imagine the fear I feel,
My son is gone, it doesn't seem real,
It feels like he's at the park,
With his friends 'till after dark,
but sooner or later i'll have to accept,
This war killed him with no regrets.*

(Amber Slamaker, Anstee Student 2010)

TRENCH STORIES



*And turning your face to the light,
Do they matter—those dreams in the pit?
You can drink and forget and be glad,
And people won't say that you're mad,
For they know that you've fought for your
country,
And no one will worry a bit.*

(Siegfried Sasson)



A Resource Pack On The Great War

About Trench Stories



ABOUT *TRENCH STORIES* FROM PROJECT PARTNERS

Trench Stories was a six month heritage project at Anstee Bridge, run by Bounce Theatre and funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund.

The project was funded as part of the First World War programme: Then and Now. The aim of our project was to look at the use of music and culture during the war, as a means of propaganda and of survival.

As we worked with the students at Anstee Bridge this was narrowed down to look specifically at the soldiers stories. Students studied poems & verbatim excerpts of trench life experience which was woven together to create Trench Stories.

The play was a series of short scenes which give a flavour of the role of culture to capture the war experience. Moreover, the changing nature of poetry and song to depict the horrors of Trench life.

Through the project 24 young people who have disengaged with education read poetry, made art and performed for the first time since their primary education.

This resource pack seeks to document our research, process and ideas about the project in the hope it will contribute to other groups work.

For more information about the project please email louise@bouncetheatre.com

Louise Pendry, Artistic Director of Bounce Theatre and Project Director of *Trench Stories*

This project was funded by The Heritage Lottery Fund.

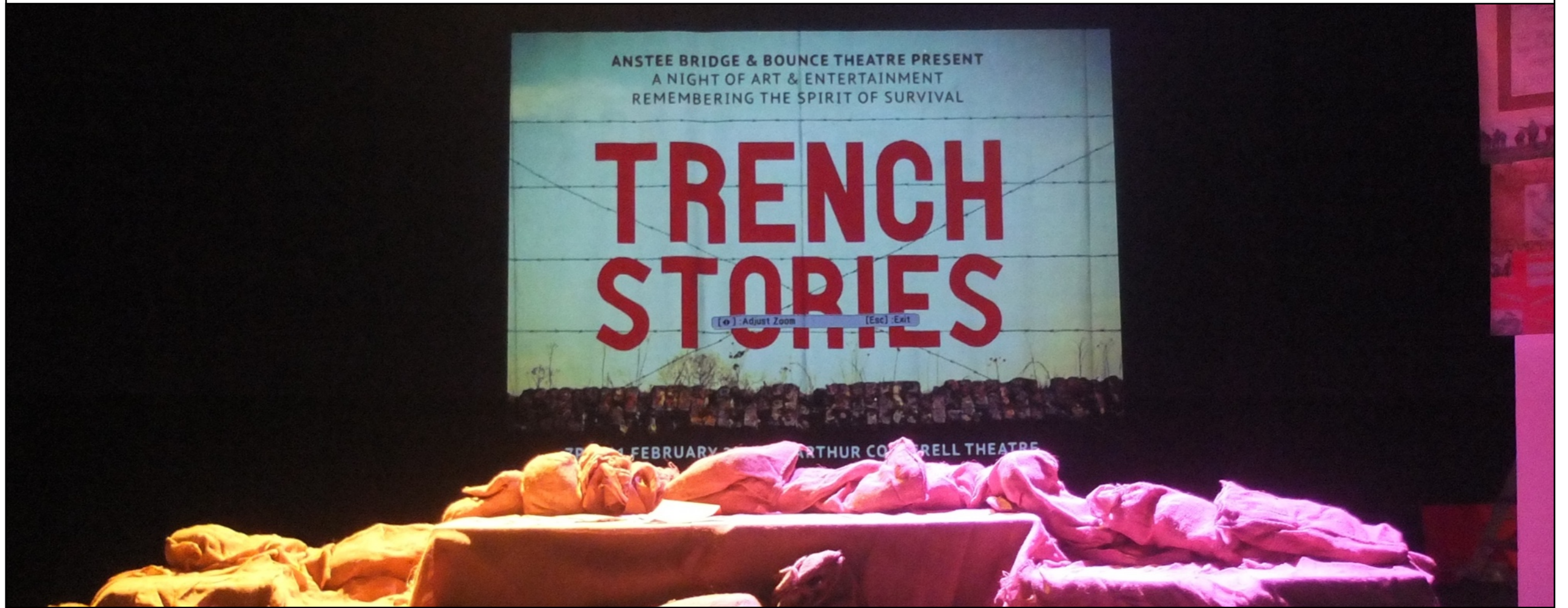


About The Heritage Lottery Fund

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage through innovative investment in projects with a lasting impact on people and places. As the largest dedicated funder of the UK's heritage, with around £255million a year to invest in new projects and a considerable body of knowledge, we are also a leading advocate for the value of heritage to modern life. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our heritage. Since 1994, HLF has supported almost 32,000 projects allocating £4.7billion across the UK. For more information, visit their website www.hlf.org.

CHAPTER 1

Trench Stories Remembers



“We did not cheer... But just stood, stunned and bewildered. ...What was it for? What have we got for it, or anyone else for that matter?” ~From Trench Stories

Brief Review of WWI

Mobilisation

- 24 July 1914, Austria-Hungary delivers an ultimatum to the Serbian government regarding the assassination.
- 25 July 1914, the prime minister of Serbia mobilises their military forces.
- 28 July 1914, Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia. Russia, bound by treaty to Serbia, mobilises its military forces.
- 1 August 1914, Germany, allied with Austria-Hungary, views Russia's mobilisation as an act of war. This results in Germany declaring war on Russia.
- 3 August 1914, Germany declares war on France due to its alliance with Russia.
- 4 August 1914, Germany invades neutral Belgium as the shortest route to Paris. Based on the 75 year old Treaty of London, Britain declares war on Germany.
- 7 August 1914, 100,000 soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force land in France.

Figure 1.1 Recruitment - British Response to Outbreak of War August 1914.



© IWM (Q 42033)

“Archduke Franz Ferdinand (heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) and his wife Sophie are deeded off by the Black Hand Serbian, Gavrilo Princip whilst hitting up Sarajevo.” ~ from Trench Stories

The formal and informal alliances, rising ethnic tensions and loyalties, the clash of old world monarchies and new world technologies set the stage for global conflict. On the 28 June 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie

were assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. The heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire was shot by a Serbian Nationalist and member of The Black Hand, Gavrilo Princip. The events over the next two months would throw the entire world into a long drawn out military conflict to last the next four years.

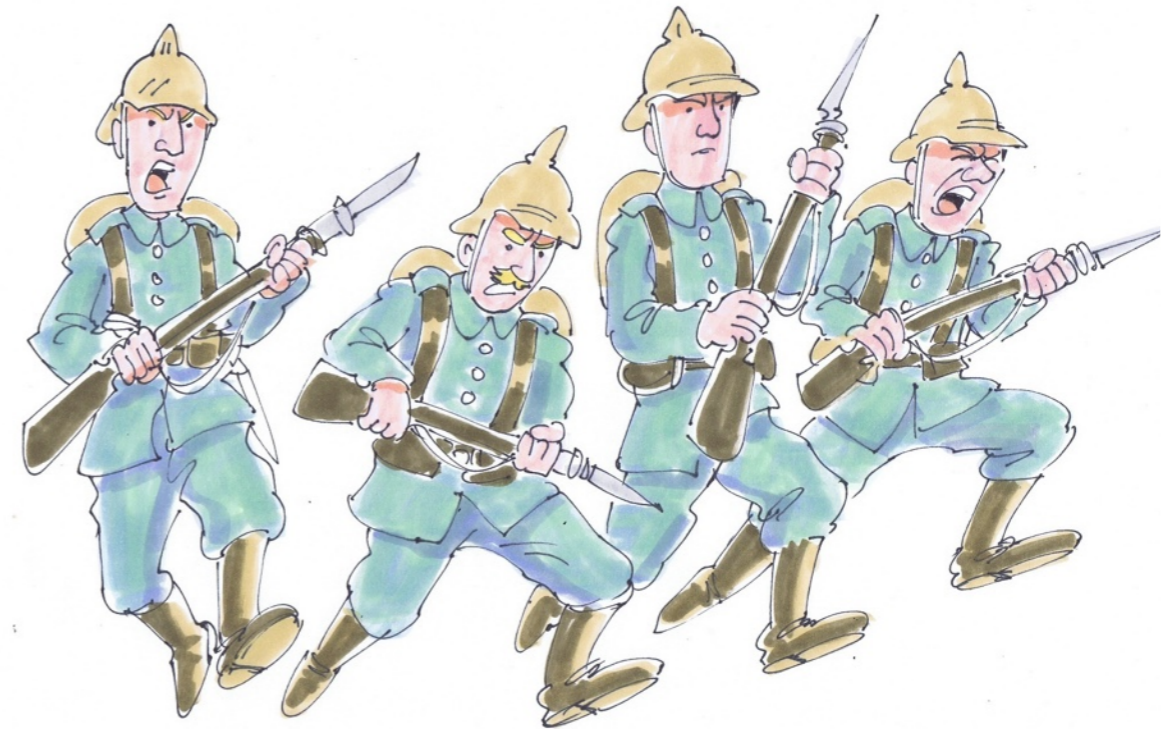
The Great War, as it was known, is considered to be the 6th deadliest military conflict in world history. 65 million men fought from over 30 countries.

Military technological advances transformed the way battles were fought. The new weaponry brought devastation and destruction on a level never seen before. 9 million soldiers died. 21 million were wounded. New military technology also brought stalemate, trench warfare and battle weary soldiers who suffered from a new condition called, shell shock.

The war irrevocably changed the world. It brought the decline of monarchies. Major European empires collapsed, Tsarist Russia was overthrown and the British Empire was weakened by the war's end. With the Treaty of Versailles, the map of Europe and the Middle East were redrawn, setting the stage for future global

conflicts. A century on, The Great War's legacy still affects us today.

Gallery 1.1 Trench Stories Introduction to The Great War



"Germany realises Russia's got their straps ready so they are going to dead off their team. France is calm with Russia, so they are going to beef it with them aswell and runs up on Belgium. England has to ride for Belgium. British Prime Minister gave Germany a choice to duck out of Belgium by midnight of August 3rd..." Cartoon by David Lewis (2015).

TIME LINE OF WORLD WAR I BATTLES

1914

- 7 August -13 September - Battle of the Frontiers
- 11 August 1914, Lord Kitchener, The British Secretary of State for War, begins a major recruitment campaign for a volunteer army. It becomes known as Kitchener's New Army. Over the next 18 months nearly 2,500,00 men join of whom 250,00 were under 18 years old.
- Late summer through to autumn 1914, 1,500,000 (20% of the Belgian population) refugees flee occupied Belgium. 200,000 relocate to Britain.
- 19 August, President Woodrow Wilson announces U.S. neutrality
- 23 August, Japan declares war on Germany as a result of an alliance with Britain.
- 26-30 August, Battle of Tannenberg is fought. Russia loses to Germany.
- 5-10 September, First Battle of Marne - halts the German advance, results in stalemate and leads to trench warfare.
- 14 September - First Battle of Aisne.

- 14 October - 22 November, First Battle of Ypres. war) on France, Russia and Britain.
- 23 November, as a result of the Ottoman Empire's entrance into the war Britain secures Basra (Iraq) as pre-emptive strike to secure oil supplies for the Royal Navy.
- 8 December, Battle of the Falkland Islands. Royal Navy destroys and sinks three German cruisers.
- 16 December, German First High Sea fleet bombs Hartlepool, Whitby and Scarborough proving Britain is susceptible to attack at home. 122 people are killed on the British mainland.
- 24 & 25 December - Christmas Truce. Spontaneous unofficial truce between Germans and English.
- 29 October, The Ottoman Empire enters the war. Sultan Mohammed V declares a military jihad (holy war).

1915

- 19 January, Germany begins Zeppelin raids on Britain.
- 4 February, Germany declares blockade of Britain and begins to attack both neutral and Allied shipping.
- 22 April, Second Battle of Ypres begins. Germans introduce the use of poison gas. The French were the

first to use tear gas grenades in August 1914. The Germans used chlorine gas. Unlike the xylyl bromide grenades, the chlorine gas destroyed respiratory organs.

- 25 April, British land at Gallipoli. Also known as the Dardanelles Campaign.
- 3 May, Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae writes the poem “In Flanders Field” during the second week of the Second Battle of Ypres. 7 May, Germans sink the Lusitania.
- 23 May, Italians declare war on Austria-Hungary.
- 25 May, “Shell Crisis”, shortage of artillery shells on the front lines causes political crisis. The crisis leads to the creating the Ministry of Munitions to oversee and coordinate production of munitions for the war effort.
- 25 May, Prime Minister Asquith reorganises Liberal government as a coalition government of all parties.
- 5 September, Tsar Nicholas II takes over personal control of Russian armies.
- 25 September, Battle of Loos. First time Britain uses poison gas. Wind blows in the wrong direction killing more than 2600 of their own troops.

- 12 October, British nurse Edith Louise Cavell was executed by the Germans.
- 31 October, Steel helmets are introduced

1916

- 24 January, Conscription introduced. Military Service Act becomes law 25 May.
- 21 February, Battle of Verdun begins. Lasts 10 months with million casualties.
- 31 May, Battle of Jutland begins.
- 4 June, Brusilov Offensive begins. Ends on 10 August.
- 1 July, Battle of the Somme begins
- 2 September, The first Zeppelin is shot down over Britain by the Royal Flying Corps.
- 15 September, first use of tanks during the battle of the Somme.
- 7 December, Lloyd George become British Prime Minister.

1917

- 1 February - Germany begins its unrestricted submarine warfare campaign.
- 15 March - Tsar Nicholas II abdicates. First part of the Russian Revolution.

- 6 April - U.S. declares war on Germany
- 31 July - Third Battle of Ypres. Also known as the Battle of Passchendaele.
- 7 November - The Bolsheviks overthrow the Russian government. Second part of the Russian Revolution.
- December - Armistice agreement is signed between the new Russian government and Germany.

1918

- February - British government introduced rationing.
- 3 March - Treaty of Brest-Litovsk is signed between Germany and Russia.
- 1 April - The Royal Flying Corps (RFC) and The Royal Naval Air Service (RNAS) are merged to create the RAF.
- June - Representation of the People Act gave universal suffrage to adult males and to propertied women over 30.
- 9 November - Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicates and flees to Holland.
- 11 November 1918 - Private George Edwin Ellison the last British soldier to die. He died at 9:30am though armistice was signed at 5am.

- 11 November - Armistice is signed between the Germans and the Allies at 5am and comes into effect at 11am.

1919

- 18 January - Paris Peace Conference begins. Peace talks change the map of Europe. See the end of old world empires and monarchies like Tsarist Russia, Ottoman Empire and the Austria-Hungary Empire. It saw the rise of nationalism and demand for independence from the British and French Empires. The redrawn maps (The Middle East, Central/Eastern Europe) have social/political repercussions today.
- 28 June - Treaty of Versailles signed.

CHAPTER 2

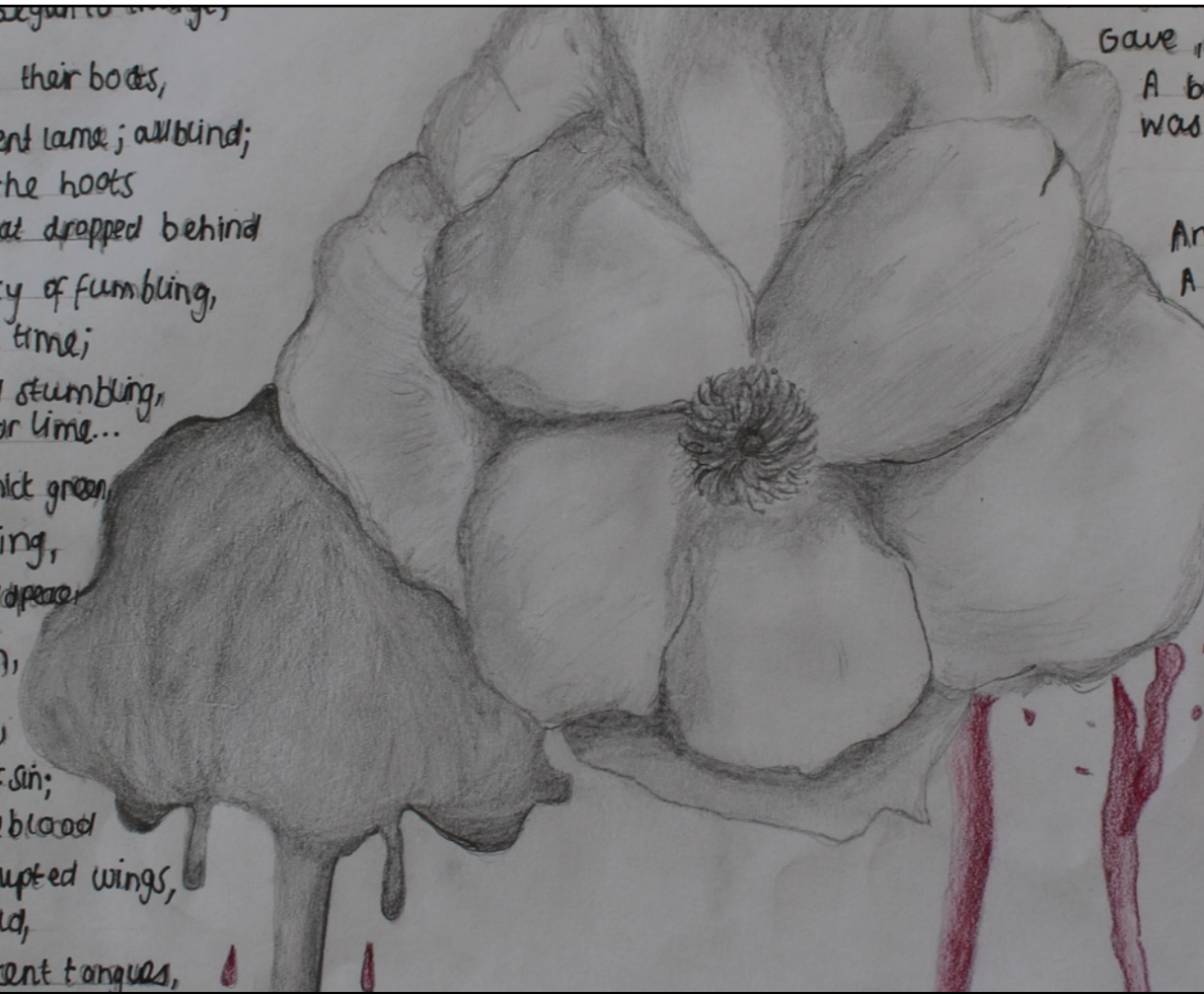
Pop Culture, Poetry & War

And towards our distant ~~rest~~ ~~beginning~~ ~~to~~ ~~images~~,
men marched asleep. Many had lost their bodies,
But limped on, blood-shed. All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of tired, outstripped Five-nines that dropped behind
Gas! Gas! Quick, boys! - an ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes and thick green,
As under the sea, I saw him drowning,
In ~~some~~ ~~thing~~ ~~dreams~~ ~~you~~ ~~too~~ ~~could~~ ~~appear~~
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every salt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted wings,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud,
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,

Gave "once" her flowers to love, her ways to,
A body of England's, breathing English air,
Washed by the rivers, blest by sands of home.

And think, this heart, all evil shed away,
A pulse in the eternal mind, no way
Gives somewhere back the thoughts,
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy,
and laughter, want of friends, and
In hearts at peace, under an English
heaven.

Rupert Brooke.



Run run away

Come loose your eyes and limbs

All for a dollar a day

Remember we are soldiers fam... ~ Anstee Student rap excerpt

The First World War signaled a turning point on many levels, popular culture and art were no exception. At the beginning of the war, entertainers and artists played their part to boost morale and bolster patriotism and support for the war effort.

Gallery 2.1 Popular Songs of World War I



Keep the Home Fires Burning was written in 1914 by Ivor Novello and Lena Gilbert Ford. This song was popular with families on the home front. © IWM (Q 30659)

Music Halls, Popular Songs and Propaganda

Today, the Great War is best understood through its poetry, however, during the war, most people understood it through theatre and songs. At its beginning, popular music reflected the popular attitudes of the time and was an effective way to spread propaganda, impacting public opinion and promoting patriotism. Music hall stars like, Vesta Tilley, were effective recruiters for Kitchner's Army. In fact, Tilly became known as "Britain's best recruiting sergeant". It is said that she could recruit 300 men during one performance. She dressed as a Tommy and sang patriotic songs like; *The Army of Today's All Right* and *Jolly Good Luck to the Girl who Loves a Soldier*.

In 1914, most believed the war would be over by Christmas with an Allied victory. By 1915, attitudes began to change with the list of casualties growing. While they played a major role in recruiting soldiers and supporting the war effort, the music hall stars main purpose was entertainment. As the population grew weary of the war, the music hall acts became a form of escape from the struggles home and abroad. For soldiers in the trenches, popular songs that made it across the channel provided a brief diversion and morale booster from the battlefield.

Trench Culture: Rhymes and Song Parodies

George C. Curnock, a war correspondent for the Daily Mail, reported how *It's a Long way to Tipperary* went viral amongst Allied soldiers. He heard the Connaught Rangers, an Irish Battalion of the Regular Army, singing the song as they marched towards the front in August 1914. Within weeks, the song was sung by troops all over the world. Songs like, [Its a long way to Tipperary and](#)

Pack Up Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag were popular amongst the soldiers. They were good marching songs that built camaraderie and quieted fears of impending battle.

As the war descended into stalemate, soldiers spent half their time in the trench systems. Death was a constant with 60% of casualties coming from shell fire.

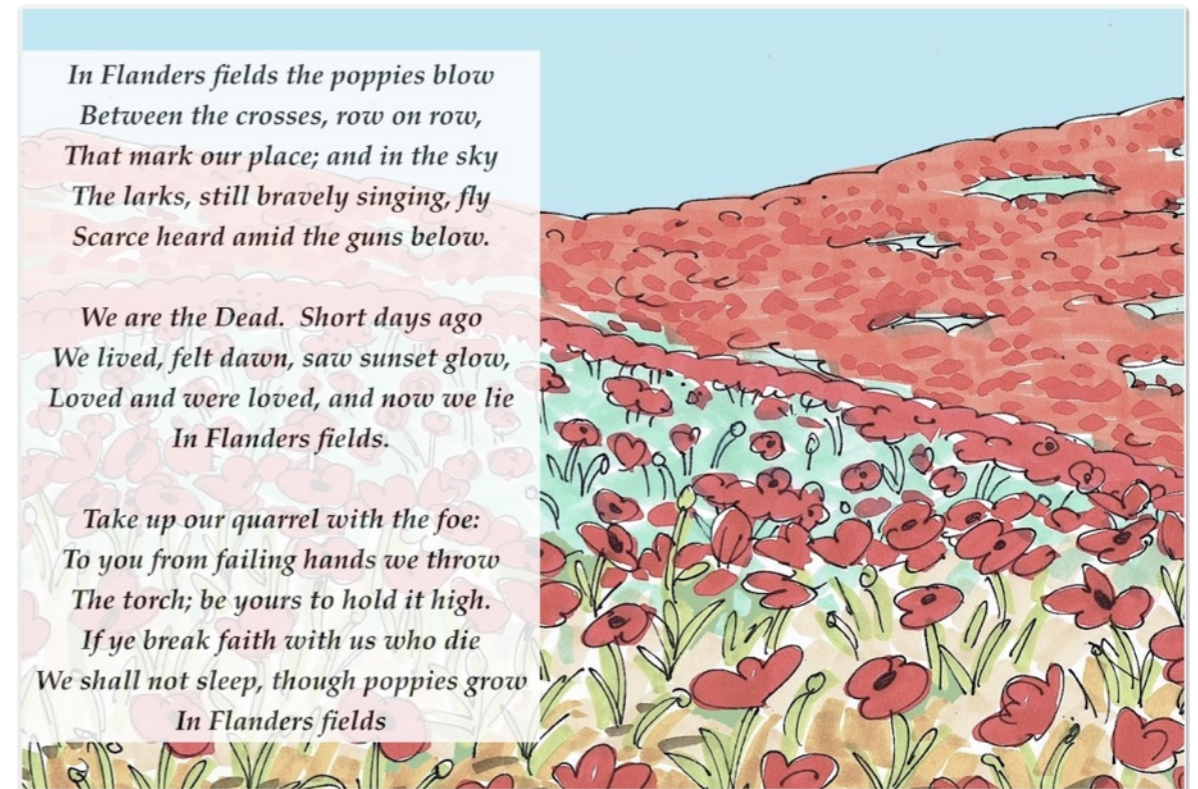
Often soldiers spent most of their time repairing the trenches, waiting and coping with poor weather conditions, producing tension, anxiety and boredom. To make light of a tedious and hopeless situation, they resorted to gallows humour as a way to cope. Through satirical songs and lewd poetry, soldiers built a strong sense of solidarity and minimised fear.

*I don't want to join the army,
I don't want to go to war,
I'd rather stay at home.
Around the streets to roam,
Living on the earnings of a nice young lady.
I don't want a bayonet up my arsehole,
I don't want my bollocks shot away,*

A Literary War

The Great War is best known for its poetry. Early in the conflict, British War Propaganda Bureau, commissioned artists and writers to promote British interests during the war. Writers like Rudyard Kipling wrote propaganda for the government.

Gallery 2.2 *In Flanders Field* by John McCrae (May 1915).



Drawing by cartoonist David Lewis, 2015.

Like popular culture and music, poetry and literature reflected public attitudes and opinions. The most famous poem being *In Flanders Field* by John McCrae.

The poem was written in May 1915 during the Second Battle of Ypres. McCrae wrote it after his friend Lieutenant Alexis Helmer was killed in battle. The poem has become an important part of Remembrance Day.

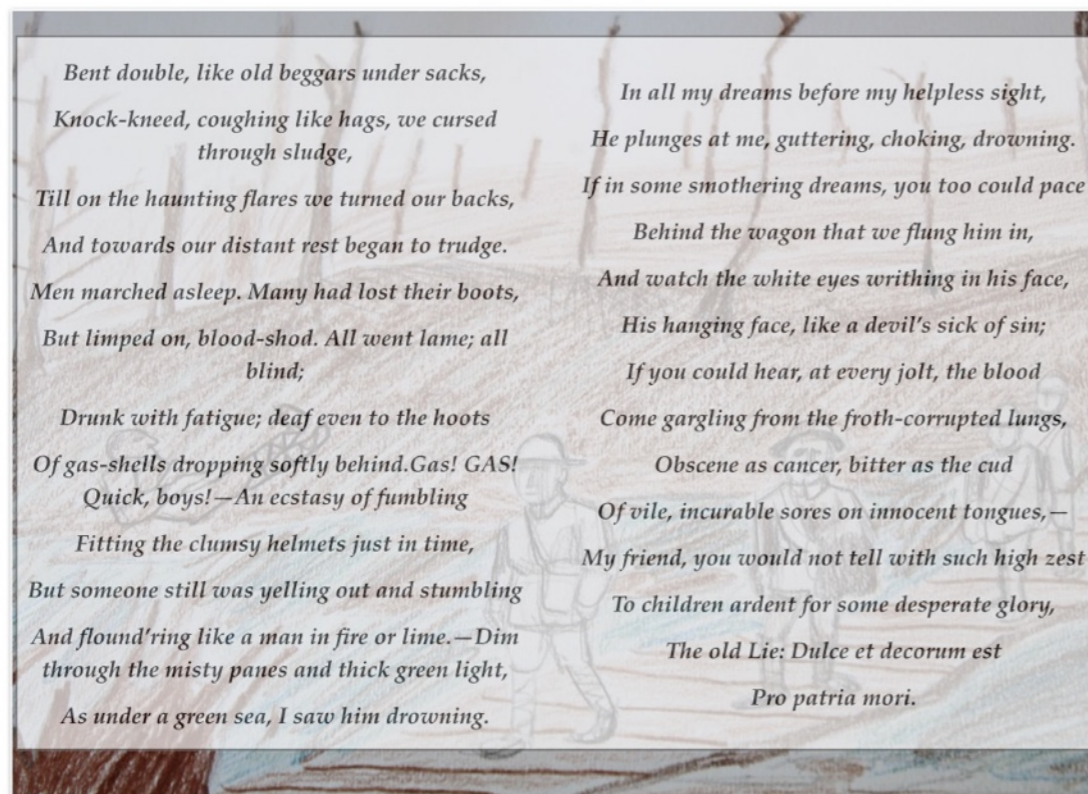
Other prominent World War I poets are Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Both served in the military and were treated for shell

shock at Craiglockhart War Hospital, known for pioneering work in mental health.

Sassoon and Owen wrote about their horrific experiences in battle. Sassoon was a decorated soldier but took a stand against the war in 1917. Instead of being court-martialed, he was deemed unfit for service and sent to Craiglockhart to be treated for shell shock. There, he met fellow poet and soldier Wilfred Owen.

Dulce Et Decorum Est is Owen's most famous poem and studied by

Gallery 2.3 Et Dulce Decorum Est by Wilfed Owen




students to this day. It is about the experience of a gas attack.

Owen wrote this poem at Craiglockhart in October 1917. His doctor encouraged him to write poetry about his experience as part of his treatment. Sassoon mentored him in writing and the two became friends. Both eventually went back to the front but Owen was killed in battle on 4 November only days before the Armistice was signed.

Popular entertainment and the arts played a crucial role in shaping public opinion. The arts became therapeutic tools to treat shell shock. Music, theatre and the literary arts provided a much needed escape from the horrors of war. For soldiers fighting in the front lines, popular songs became a way to boost morale and calm nerves. It bolstered patriotic and national unity. Yet it also articulated the increasing weariness of war through satire. Popular entertainment and the arts voiced a generation's complex feelings about the war and part of how we have come to understand and remember World War I.

CHAPTER 3

The Life of a Tommy



Your
Country Needs
You!

“If any man tells you he went into the front line and he wasn’t scared – he’s a liar. You were scared from the moment you got there. You never knew. I mean, in the trench you were all right. If you kept down, a sniper couldn’t get you. But you never knew if the artillery had a shell that burst above you and you caught the shrapnel. That was it.” ~ Harry Patch, World War I Veteran

Recruitment, Training and Life of WWI Soldiers

At the beginning of the war, the Germans outnumbered The British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) two to one. Unlike other European nations, Britain did not rely on conscription to recruit for its military until 1916.

Though the BEF were a professional, efficient and experienced military force, it was clear that there was a need to expand the armed forces. This led to Lord Kitchener's Call to Arms. On 7 August 1914, he began a campaign to recruit 100,000 men for a volunteer army.

The propaganda campaign was extensive and very persuasive. Recruitment strategies included:

- Pals Battalions Schemes
- Public meetings
- Media propaganda publicising stories of German cruelty.
- Weekly adverts in national and local newspapers

The campaign played into a sense of duty and patriotism. The public rallied to the call. In the first month of the campaign, over 400,000 men signed up. Public buildings were turned into impromptu recruiting offices. Public parks and other large outdoor spaces, like amusement parks, were converted to training facilities for the new volunteer army.

Prospective recruits had to meet minimal requirements. They had to be 18 to join but 19 to fight abroad. They had to meet nationality criteria and pass a series of medical exams. In many cases, these standards fluctuated throughout the war. Recruiting officers were paid 2 shillings and sixpence (about the equivalent of £6 today) per new recruit. With this financial incentive, recruiting officers would sometimes overlook age requirements. 250,000 teenaged boys vol-

Gallery 3.1 Lorem Ipsum dolor amet, consectetur



unteered and were sent to fight in the trenches. This was a particular problem until conscription was signed into law in 1916.

Once new recruits passed the minimum requirements, they had to recite the Oath of Allegiance. This was a ceremony led by the recruiting sergeant.

Training Kitchener's Army

New recruits received a progressive system of training lasting 3 months. It was designed to build physical fitness, confidence, obedience, discipline and fundamental military skills. After a few weeks, the training advanced to include; basic field operations, night operations, weapons handling and trench digging. More extensive specialist training could be added on for positions like machine gunner, signaller or cook.

Once the initial 3-month basic training was completed, inexperienced divisions could be assigned to quieter sectors on the front for "on the job training".

Daily life in the trenches

Though battlefield fighting was rare, life in the trenches was difficult, monotonous and filled with hard manual labour. While the trenches offered some protection from enemy fire, they were still dangerous places and the average life expectancy was 6 weeks. The Tommies were more likely to die or be wounded in the trenches from shell or sniper fire or disease.

Conditions in the trenches were muddy, filthy, damp and filled with foul smells. Soldiers who died were hastily buried in shallow graves right where they fell. Food scraps littered the trenches. This caused rat infestations throughout the system. The rats could scurry over resting soldiers and eat off of corpses.

"Rats as big as cats. Anything they could gnaw, they would - to live. ...As you went to sleep, you would cover your face with a blanket and you could hear the damn things run over you." ~ Harry Patch

Tommies were exposed to harsh weather conditions so there were difficulties in maintaining their own levels of personal hygiene and overflowing latrines. This gave rise to lice infestations. All these things combined with increasing food shortages created various health problems for the Tommies: intestinal infections, frost bite, Trench Fever, Trench Foot and shell shock.

Furthermore, the Tommies suffered from sleep deprivation and boredom. Time in the trenches was mainly a waiting game with occasional moments of pure terror when ordered to "go over the top". Yet the days of waiting did not afford troops the opportunity to get ample sleep, especially in the front trenches. They might get short naps during the day, but mainly they stayed awake and alert in case of an enemy assault.

As the war of attrition carried on, the BEF could curtail some of these problems through troop rotation or the "trench cycle" and regular military routine. The Trench cycle helped to reduce the stress of being on the front lines, and allowed soldiers to bathe, de-louse their uniforms, do further military training and catch up on some sleep. The length of time spent in a various sections could vary depending on sector. Some of the more active areas, soldiers could find themselves spending more time in the front lines and less time resting.

The Trench Cycle

- Time in the front line trenches
- Time in the supporting trenches

The regular military routine kept the Tommies busy and instilled order and discipline.

Daily Routine

- Stand To before dawn: Tommies would be ordered to climb to the firing line to guard against an early morning raid.

Morale, Friendship and Combat

Mutiny and dissent among soldiers was rare despite the horrid conditions. The reasons that kept them in the trenches were varied from Edwardian resolve and patriotic duty to harsh punishment. However the most likely motivation were the strong bonds forged amongst soldiers. Friendships provided both moral and physical support. From these closely-knit relationships emerged a unique culture (see Trench Culture, p.11). In a sense, it was loyalty to each other and camaraderie that kept the Tommies fighting.

“Going over the top” into No Man’s Land was an extremely terrifying experience. Hand to hand combat was brutal. During these rare moments, high ideals of patriotic duty, courage and bravery gave way to survival instinct. And a Tommy’s survival was de-

pendent on his mates and military training. Not being there could mean a death of a friend or oneself.

Harry Patch: The Last Fighting Tommy

Harry Patch (17 June 1898 to 25 July 2009) became known as The Last Fighting Tommy. He was conscripted into the army in October 1916 at the age of 18. Just after his 19th birthday, he arrived in France in 1917 where he served in the Duke of Cornwall’s Light In-

Image 3.1 Harry Patch Summer 2007 photo by Jim Ross (cc)



“The politicians who took us to war should have been given the guns and told to settle their differences themselves.” ~ Harry Patch

fantry as an assistant gunner in the Lewis Gun section. A few months later he fought in the Battle of Passchendaele (The Third Battle of Ypres) where he was severely injured and lost 3 close friends.

"You didn't know you were hit. You never heard the bullet or the shell that hit you. All I can remember was a flash, I went down, blew me down. I suppose I had enough sense, I saw the blood, I had a field dressing on. I must have passed out. How long I lay there I don't know."
~ Harry Patch

By the time Harry recovered from his wounds, the war was over. He returned to his trade as a plumber and remained silent about his war experiences for 80 years. At 100 years old, Harry was encouraged to share his account of World War I by BBC One for a documentary. From that point on, he continued to share his story writing his autobiography at 109, making him the oldest first published author.

His Edwardian manner and straight to the point language revealed a man of deep conviction on the futility of war. He called it 'organised murder' and 'calculated slaughter'.

"It wasn't worth it. No war is worth it. No war is worth the loss of a couple of lives let alone thousands. T'isn't worth it ... the First World War, if you boil it down, what was it? Nothing but a family row."
~ Harry Patch

In his autobiography, Harry tells how he made a pact with his 5 mates that they wouldn't shoot to kill. They would only shoot to wound. They had realised that the German soldiers were conscripts with families back home, just like them.

"[A German soldier] came to me with a rifle and a fixed bayonet. He had no ammunition, otherwise he could have shot us. He came towards us. I had to bring him down. First of all, I shot him in the right shoulder. He dropped the rifle and the bayonet. He came on. His idea, I suppose, was to kick the gun if he could into the mud, so making it useless. But anyway, he came on and for our own safety, I had to bring him down. I couldn't kill him. He was a man I didn't know. I didn't know his language. I couldn't talk to him. I shot him above the ankle, above the knee. He said something to me in German. God knows what it was. But for him the war was over."

He would be picked up by a stretcher-bearer. He would have his wounds treated. He would be put into a prisoner-of-war camp. At the end of the war, he would go back to his family."
~ Harry Patch

The brutality and horror of The Battle of Passchendaele had a lasting impact on Harry's life. He showed signs of post traumatic stress disorder even well into his centenarian years. A light switch being turned on, while half asleep, brought back intense memories of shellfire and the flash of explosions.

He spent the remaining years of his life talking about World War I, though he preferred to forget it. Equally, he never liked the idea of being The Last Tommy.

CHAPTER 4

Trench Stories: A Case Study

ANSTEE BRIDGE & BOUNCE THEATRE PRESENT
A NIGHT OF ART & ENTERTAINMENT
REMEMBERING THE SPIRIT OF SURVIVAL

A mothers plea

*It's been 6 weeks since he left,
No confirmation of safety in a letter text,
Sent off alone at only 16,
Will he get to live HIS dreams,
All alone fighting someone else's war,
The longer I wait the more tears pour,
Dead or alive I ask all day,
'Nothin' you can do' everyone will say*

*They cannot imagine the fear I feel,
My son is gone, it doesn't seem real,
It feels like he's at the park,
With his friends 'till after dark,
but sooner or later I'll have to accept,
This war killed him with no regrets.*

(Amber Slamaker, Anstee Student 2010)

TRENCH STORIES

"By April 1915 International aggy is sparked after the Germans drop The Lusitania, a luxury British passenger ship. 1,195 mandem are killed. The team attacked the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Gallipoli. The beef lasted over eight months and ends as a victory for the Ottomans and the ducking of the allies."

~ excerpt from Trench Stories

About Anstee Bridge Students

The Anstee Bridge Programme is an alternative education programme that supports Year 11 students who have disengaged from school. Its mission is to increase their students' confidence in their inherent abilities through inspiring creative projects. The programme's objectives are to get the students to believe in, think for themselves and secure their future (i.e. placement in college, apprenticeships or training).

The young people referred to the programme are often not in school full-time or have been completely excluded all together. These young people are living with considerable challenges and difficult life situations like; abuse, poverty, teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation or a lack of parental guidance. As a result, they struggle with low self-esteem and lack confidence. They can also be prone to mood swings and emotional behavioural problems therefore posing challenges for engagement in education. These young people are vulnerable and some are at risk of completely slipping through the cracks.

Anstee Bridge provides a place and activities for these young people. Their staff and guest facilitators are caring and accepts the young people just as they are. Staff possess a set of skills, approaches and personal qualities that provide a compassionate environment. They believe in these young people. They believe in these young people and are committed and driven by this work.

Trench Stories is an excellent example of an Anstee Bridge project. Partnering with Bounce Theatre, the initial intention was to develop the students' appreciation of the heritage and empathy for those affected by World War I through popular entertainment of

the era. As project evolved, it shifted in intention and direction informed by the young people's responses, revealing their concerns and interests.

"When I first heard about Trench Stories, I thought I really don't want to do this because I thought it sounded rubbish & I'm quite shy. Practicing and knowing my lines & the back up and help I get with it, that I've been believed in and pushed has made me think differently. It's pushing me outside of my comfort zone and it's making me think I can achieve stuff that I didn't think I could. I've enjoyed directing the most because I like being a bit bossy. It's coming together, now it feels like a play, not just an idea. It'll be scary when everyone comes together but I'll be happy because it's done. It's bought confidence in myself, knowing that I can do new things and challenge myself. I'm proud of myself."

~Frankie Bryant, Anstee Bridge Student

Trench Stories a conversational approach

In interviews with the Bounce Theatre team and Anstee Bridge staff, it became evident that a bespoke approach was essential to the success of the project. Due to the social, emotional and educational challenges the students face, conventional theatrical methodologies would have alienated the students causing them to disengage from the project.

Devising *Trench Stories* evolved into a fluid process, addressing the needs and interests of the Anstee Bridge students. For many of the students, this was their first experience performing in front of an audience. It was a frightening thought that caused resistance in the beginning so informal conversations became crucial to encouraging their engagement.

Conversation became the gateway for the facilitators to enter their into world and make the content accessible and relevant to their

“In order for any student to perform, they have to feel confident in themselves. By listening to each person and incorporating their ideas, she (Louise Pendry, Bounce Theatre) gave them responsibility. Once the students wanted to be involved in the project, their behaviour was very good. Safety was then much easier to manage. With other facilitators on hand, we were able to diffuse situations and nip them in the bud. We did this by removing disaffected students from the group and working with them on an individual basis.”

~ Felicity Dyer, Anstee Bridge Art Facilitator

lives. It built foundations for trust in the process and created a safe relaxed and fun environment, gently nudging them out of their comfort zone.

It became a way to build relationships with the young people. Through conversation, the facilitators demonstrated respect and acceptance of the young people. The young people felt their voice heard. They found their opinions valued, their ideas recognised

and integrated into the project. In addition to building trust and safety, the informal conversations helped to:

- identify individual interests and assign production responsibilities.
- eased individual fears and concerns about performing.
- contributed to the development of the script.

During these conversations, the students would be introduced to photographs or poems or simply asked general questions about war. In the beginning, these conversations really served to break through the students' resistance to performing. Their resistance stemmed from fear, anxiety and lack of confidence in their abilities.

Finally, the informal conversations broke up the repetitive nature of rehearsing. It allowed the Bounce Theatre team to work with the students in short bursts so as not to place too much strain on the students' concentration.

Once safety and trust were established it was maintained by the Bounce Theatre team. They were able to diffuse potentially confrontational situations by removing the disaffected student from the group and working with them individually. The Anstee Bridge staff and Bounce Theatre provided further discipline, guidance and advice when necessary.

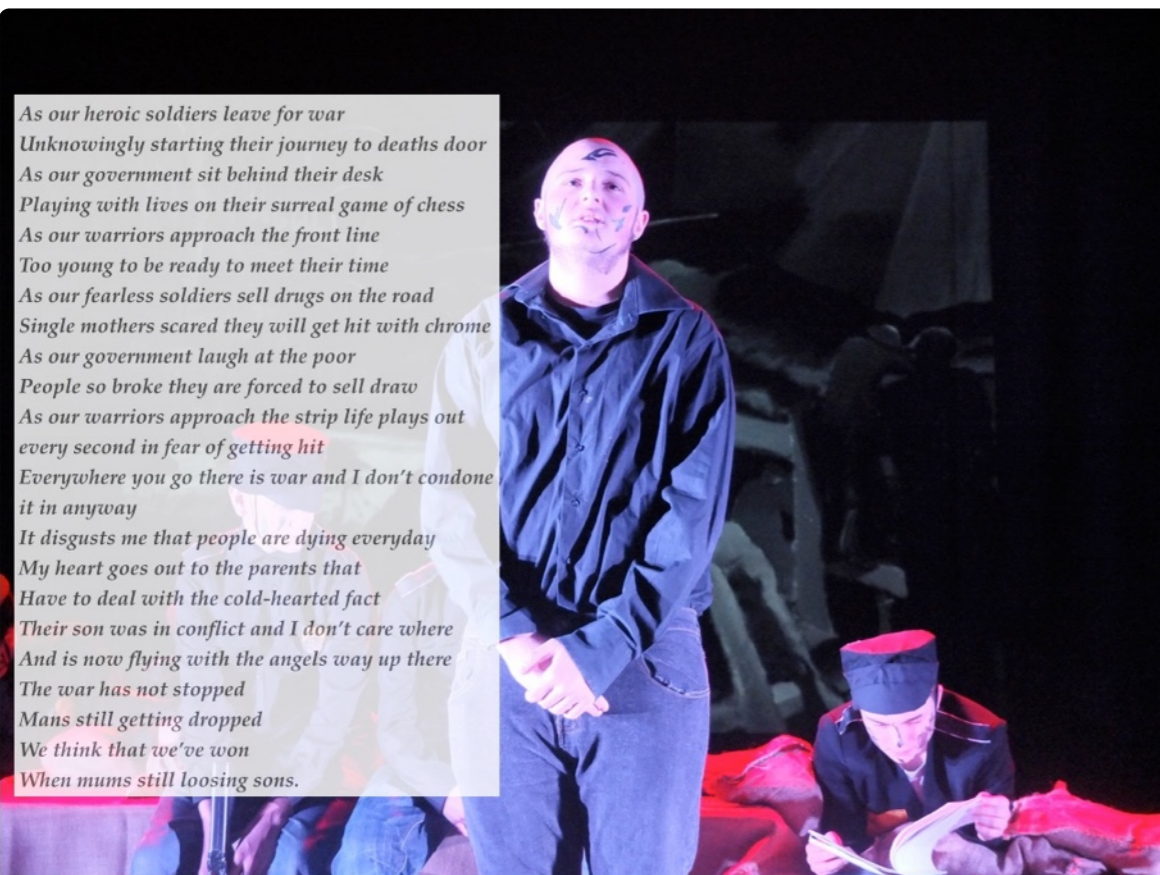
Trench Stories a flexible approach

The informal conversations demonstrates the very bespoke nature of the project. Through informal and adaptable approaches, the facilitators and staff maintained a non-threatening and stimulating

environment that empowered and engaged the students every step of the way.

By being flexible, the facilitators were able to meet the students on their terms, addressing their needs and embracing their ideas and contributions. Equally, by being flexible, they were able to cope and adapt to the daily obstacles that arose during the project, for example working with different groups of students daily and student attendance.

Gallery 4.1 A poem by Anstee Bridge student, Frankie Bryant.



Patch Work Process: Working in small groups

Anstee Bridge runs Monday through Thursday, but generally students attend one day a week. The facilitators worked with different groups of 6 to 8 students, daily. Therefore the 22 students involved in *Trench Stories* did not rehearse together as an entire as-semble until the week of the performance.

Working with different groups daily was further complicated by attendance. Student attendance could fluctuate session to session for a variety of reasons (exams at schools, appointments with the local social service, personal reasons). Some sessions might only have 3 or 4 students in attendance therefore rehearsals were re-vised and re-adjusted according to the available cast members.

To address these particular challenges, Ms. Pendry's (Project Director and Artistic Director of Bounce Theatre) strategy was to work with each individual group in creating small sections of the performance piece. At the project's end, the sections of the performance and the cast were woven together to create a seamless body of work.

Redirecting the project's focus

A facilitator's ability to recognise and adapt according to student interests and address student anxiety helped to shape and redefine the project. The project's initial intention was to develop the students' empathy and understanding of World War I's legacy through popular entertainment of the era (i.e. music halls songs and poetry). As the students were introduced to the material through modified drama exercises and dialogue, that intention be-

gan to shift so the students could truly take ownership of the resulting performance piece.

The script was amended on a weekly basis. In the early stages, the changes reflected the discovery of student interests. They were about what excited them, made them curious and felt was relevant to their life experience. The changes also reflected students' fluctuating confidence and fears. As the project progressed, student confidence grew and more of them committed to performing however they continued to express worry about learning lines of script.

"When they were worried about mucking up their lines, I said I would get on stage and distract the audience with a silly dance and I did it in one of the rehearsals."

~ Louise Pendry, Artistic Director of Bounce Theatre

At these moments, Ms. Pendry relied on theatrical devices to ease fears. It was made clear to the students that they would not have to memorise their lines. Sections of script were hidden in old newspapers or letters. In one situation, a teenaged boy recited a poem as if he were in the act of writing it. To reduce vulnerability and feeling completely exposed to an audience, Ms. Pendry rounded out the cast with adults, Anstee Bridge staff and a professional actor. She also depended on her sense of humour to bring light to the situation.

An A-typical drama project for young people

In approach, *Trench Stories* was an unusual drama project for young people. Facilitators worked within the constraints of the student availability and aimed towards total inclusion. Student participation was not restricted due to attendance or occasional emotional difficulties. Facilitators worked with them, demonstrated deep respect for who they are and gently drew them in to the project.

For Ms. Pendry, *Trench Stories* was not about teaching a group of young people how to act or about theatre. It was not about memorising lines of script or creating a character. Her objectives put the

*"The main and most influential way was empowering the students and by increasing their confidence and self esteem with this uplifting and inspiring piece of theatre. The impact on the students when finishing *Trench Stories* was amazing and special. The students felt they had really achieved something for the first time and were proud of themselves as individuals and as a team. The wonderful feedback from professionals, parent/carers, schools added to the feeling of true involvement and success."*

~Katherine Greening, Anstee Bridge Programme Coordinator

students right at the very heart and centre of the performance piece. She wanted to the students to feel full ownership of *Trench Stories* and they were free to contribute to the project on their own terms.

They created art, wrote poetry and contributed to the script. Of the 22 students participating in the programme during the 2014-2015

Image 4.1 Trench Stories performance



Anstee Bridge students feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment in creating and presenting their performance.

school year, 14 committed to performing in the project. It took patience, a non-judgmental attitude and flexibility to achieve such a high level of engagement and commitment.

The students were pushed out of their comfort zone as they learnt to discovered their inherent abilities and value. They discovered a

sense of pride in contributing and completing the project. This was accomplished by a dynamic and skilled team of arts facilitators. They drew on their wealth of experience and knowledge while letting go of personal ideas and agendas about what defines performance and theatrical aesthetic. This coupled with their calm, non-judgmental approach and deep belief in these young people, resulted in a successful production.

The next chapter discusses the practical application and modified exercises use throughout the project.

CHAPTER 5

Devising Trench Stories



“Within a year of the beef beginning, man could not rely on voluntary recruits to fight. In March 1916 the Military Service Act was passed. This imposed conscription on all single men between 18-41 except people who were medically unfit, or had certain jobs such as teachers.” ~ From Trench Stories

Devising Trench Stories really began with informal chats with the students to gauge their knowledge, interests and foster their curiosity. For many of these young people, World War I was remote and irrelevant to their experience. As one Anstee student stated, he thought the project was “rubbish” in the beginning. In their opinion, what was so important about remembering something that happened a 100 years ago.

Project Director, Louise Pendry, was well prepared for this resistant attitude. Instead of giving them a reason why they should “be bothered”, she agreed and introduced them to Harry Patch (See

“Armistice Day, you remember the thousands of others who died. For what? For nothing.” ~ Harry Patch

Harry Patch: The Last Fighting Tommy p.17).

This introductory quote piqued their curiosity, leading to an intensive philosophical enquiry into modern military conflict. They viewed Bryan Adam’s photograph exhibit, *[In Wounded: The Legacy of War](#)*. Their conversation reflected on war, politics and the police. These contemporary look at war

From here, Bounce Theatre practitioners could begin to introduce more World War I material drawing connections between what they understood and cared about, making history relevant to them. The next step was the devising process, creating the performance.

Actor and Bounce Theatre facilitator, Tom Daplyn, effectively used chats to engage young people in character development. He

would methodically go through excerpts of script, asking a student how old might their particular character have been at the beginning of the war. He would get them to really look at a particular poem (see Dulce et Decorum Est, p.13) or piece of text ((See Harry Patch: The Last Fighting Tommy p.17, for verbatim text), encouraging them to imagine a time line of events, giving a them a more comprehensive perspective of the war. It helped them understand that many soldiers were also young people like them.

Furthermore these informal dialogues help develop the script. Ms. Pendry would sit with an Anstee student, chatting about the events that led to the war. The student would then translate historical fact into youth slang (See Gallery 1.1 image p. 10)

Additionally the conversations lead to set and costume design elements that also reflected the Anstee students’ interests. As Ms. Pendry talked with the young people she began to make clear stylistic choices that were simple and influenced by the film/graphic novel Sin City. The colour scheme was black and white with splashes of red.

The costumes, props and set were built based on this stylistic choice. It was gritty and appealed to the Anstee students. They created rows of poppies that became battle lines and fashioned old diaries which hid bits of script. The costumes were a black base, clothing that the students could feel comfortable in and easily supply. These were layered with hats and coats for the soldiers and white tabard-like fabric for the nurses.

From here, the Bounce Theatre practitioners could begin to introduce more World War I material drawing connections between what they understood and cared about, making history relevant to

them. The next step was the devising process, creating the performance.

Drama Exercises and Games

To ease fears, the Anstee students were not required to memorise lines but they were coached in vocal and breath work. The Trench Stories facilitators concentrated more on public speaking. Speaking in front of an audience was seen as a crucial life skill to develop so dramatic exercises focused on language and meaning of WWI poetry and dialogue.

Below are a few conventional drama exercises and games that were modified to engage the Anstee Bridge students to devise Trench Stories and build their confidence and to prepare them for their performance.

Exercises to develop confidence in voice

Reading Text

Aim: To breathe in the correct place to make meaning out of text.

Group: Individual

Resources: Text

Time: 10min +

Directions: Students read their text but on each piece of punctuation they pause and move to another part of the room before continuing. Repeat a couple of times if necessary and then ask students to read on the spot, but remember the moments they moved with a pause.

Image 5.1 A drawing used as projections during the performance



Drawings by cartoonist, David Lewis, 2015.

Development: Create other actions for punctuation e.g. jump on ! to highlight the voice goes up.

Finding Emotion

Aim: To allow students to hear the factors that influence the voice.

Group: Pairs

Resources:

Time: 10 min +

Directions: One student is to recite an ordinary list e.g. days of the week. The other calls out different conditions that affect the voice e.g. you've broken your leg / you are sad / you're jealous / you're tired / you're cold. Discuss what happens to the voice in when different conditions are placed on it.

This can then be taken to text work - what are the conditions in the text that will affect the voice e.g. they are in a trench, they are cold, they are tired.

Sustaining Lines

Aim: To allow students to focus on sustaining the projection/volume in their voice.

Groups: Individual or group

Resources:

Time: 10 min

Directions: Students call out 1,2 then add 3 and 4. Each number has to have the same inflection and level of projections than the one before it so they become measured in their delivery of text. Replace numbers with a line, concentrating on sustained delivery of the whole line .

Swapping Lines

Aim: To allow students to hear the need for emphasis in their own text.

Groups: Pairs or groups

Resources: Selected World War I poetry

Time: 15 min+

Directions: Students swap poems. One reads out the other. The others highlight words on their text that they think should have a stress on them - or they call back to the reader out as the text is spoken. The person who owns the poem can then reread it back to the others with the emphasis chosen.

For poems by [*Siegfried Sassoon*](#).

For poems by [*Wilfred Owen*](#).

Drawing Upon Resources

WW1 is such a massive topic to bring to the stage, it is important to identify your areas of interest before beginning to avoid drowning in material.

In Trench Stories, we started out by reading poetry - looking in particular at Sassoon and Owen quite a bit.

This led us to consider telling the stories of the soldiers in the Trenches and thinking about how art/culture was part of surviving the war.

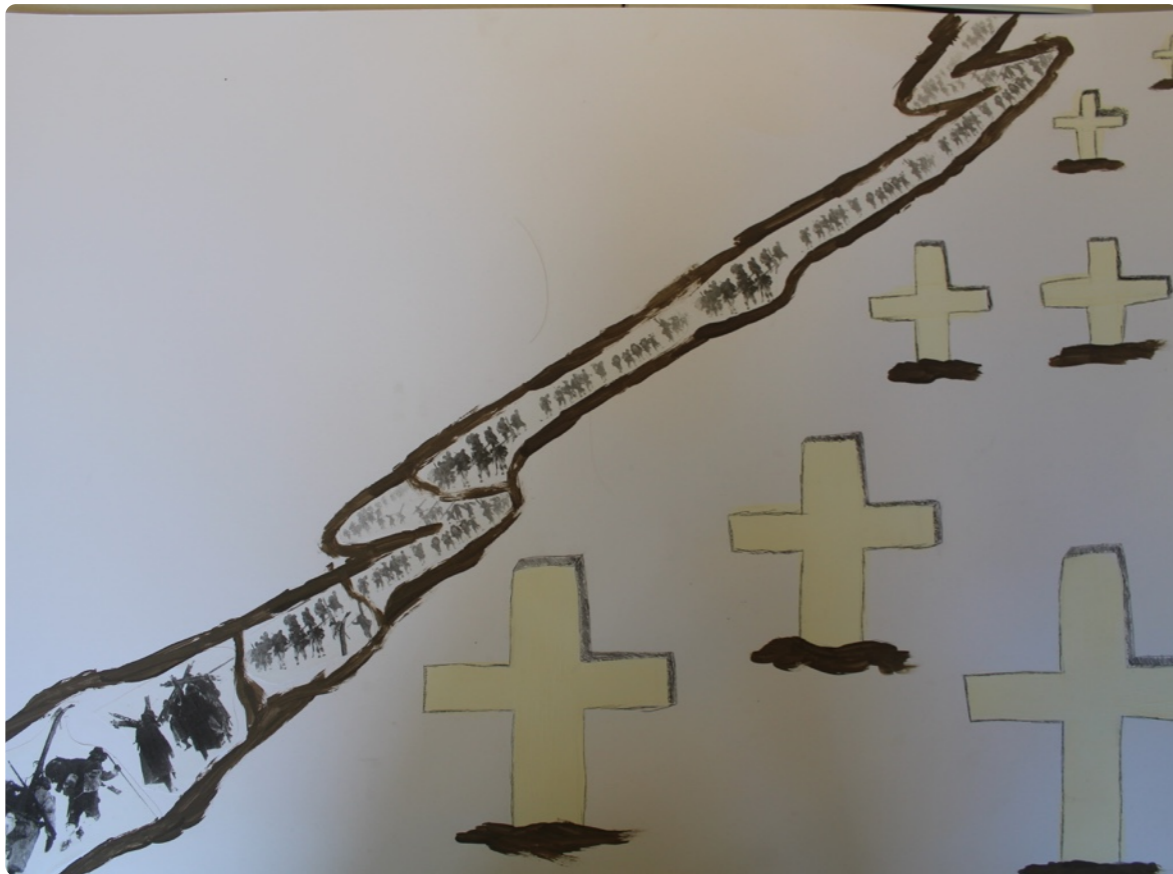
From this point it was easier to start to identify and select resources we could use in performance (Maybe link to other chapters?)

Possible themes you could consider:

- Life in the Trenches
- Politics - Lions led by Donkeys

- Homelife
- Food
- Injury and Medical Advances
- Battles
- The Role of Women
- Music

Gallery 5.1 A drawing by an Anstee student.



Developing your theme: Once you have read around your area of interest, one fun way to expand on your theme or start to organize material is with the following game.

Relay Race

Aim: To encourage a collaborative and relaxed environment to develop ideas around themes for the project.

Groups: 5+

Resources: Paper and pens for each group.

Space: Space long enough to create a sense of a relay race.

Time: 10 min +

Directions: Give your groups a word, theme or question. Ours was 'What is War'. Give each group a minute to have a huddle and debate the answer. On the opposite side of the room, place a paper and pen opposite each group. Groups must then line up. On your mark, the first person must run to the paper and write an answer. Run back to their name, high 5 the second person who does the same thing. This continues until the time is up. The team with the most words or phrases wins. However these sheets could be the stimulus for organising scenes / characters / improvisation ideas.

Devising - Using Space

Once we had decided to develop our production around trench life, we had a rehearsal where we built a Trench out of tables. This was a light hearted activity, but useful to think about the space in a number of ways

- What will be a realistic reflection of the soldiers' life on stage?
- How can we reflect trench life in our design?
- How do you develop a character who can live in that sort of space? How will it affect your physicality?

Devising - Using old photos

Through the production, we used old photos as a stimulus to devise. They were particularly good in helping the actors develop their role e.g. thinking about how the soldiers would have sat whilst writing letters/poetry, what they were sitting on, who was around them, what the weather conditions were like.

Verbatim Text

An ideas to turn verbatim recounts into theatre.

Devising from Quotes

Aim: To explore different themes within war.

Groups: 4+

Resources: A selection of quotes from *World War I* (Harry Patch: The Last Fighting Tommy, p.17).

Time: 15 min +

Directions: Provide your group with a selection of quotes from WW1. Ask them to use the quotes as stimulus to devise a series of images. Share the images. Then ask groups to select one and bring it to life in a one-minute piece of drama.

Our reason for doing this was because the group was interested in comparing the political and the personal. We asked them after the initial activity suggested here to think about how the quote might compare with the reality of someone's life on the home front.

Moving Images

Aim: To respond to verbatim recounts of experiences, through a multi-sensory manner.

Groups: Small groups

Resources: Historical sources of verbatim text.

Time: 20 minutes +

Space: Large enough for group to move around in.

Directions: Provide students with excerpts of text. Ask them to create images to match the text. Now ask them to think about ways to use the text - it could become speech with a narrator remembering an event, it could be adapted to be happening in the moment. Fragments could be broken up into dialogue and a script created.

Or with a number of text samples, students could break up accounts and create a group of characters - this was one of the ways we made up a trench stories scene.

For images visit the [Imperial War Museum's First World War Galleries](#).

Appendix



Interviews with Anstee Bridge Staff and Trench Stories Team of arts facilitators. Scroll down to read them completely.

Katherine Greening, Anstee Bridge Programme Co-ordinator

What is Anstee Bridge?

Anstee Bridge is an alternative educational programme for Year 11 students who are struggling emotionally, socially and educationally at school. They attend one day a week to gain confidence through creativity doing artistic projects.

What is your mission, and objectives as a programme?

Our mission is to increase the confidence of our students through inspirational projects. Our objectives are that the young people start believing in themselves and their abilities, that they have a secure destination when they leave [of college, apprenticeships, training]. That they will be inspired to think for themselves and venture further afield.

How are these achieved?

Through a combination of interesting and thought-provoking projects. We also encourage members of the local community to come and help guide our youngsters, often out of the goodness of their hearts.

Can you give examples of the unique challenges AB students face?

Challenges include physical, emotional and sexual abuse, domestic violence, poverty, neglect, over-crowding, teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, lack of parental/role model guidance, bereavement, parent/carer substance abuse, unemployment, parent illness, being a young carer.

Can you explain the approach taken by Bounce Theatre?

Louise is a dedicated and skilled professional who has a natural ability to engage the disengaged. She has a friendly patient approach, and is well organised and self-motivated. With Trench Stories, Louise worked with the students for them to come up with the story so they could feel empowered and truly involved with the creative process. She had a very good knowledge of WW1 which she shared with enthusiasm, using particularly her drama teaching which brought out the best in the students.

How did she engage the young people?

Louise enabled the students to get a sense of control and direction in the project, this mature attitude appreciated by the students, as well as her calm sense of fun which is essential when dealing with students such as ours, facing such a topic. Visits to the Imperial War Museum as well as resources purchased definitely helped, and Louise felt these would add to the overall Trench Stories experience.

What was effective about her approach?

Louise's approach was effective because the sessions were expertly paced and diverse enough. She was very supportive of their ideas, a good sense of humour and always a respect for the students, which became mutual. Louise created a safe environment for the students by keeping the atmosphere calm, non-judgemental and based on respect. The students felt safe and unthreatened when proposing and discussing ideas which enabled a smooth-flowing creative experience.

How did Anstee Bridge support Louise?

We supported Louise by offering guidance, disciplining of students when required, providing advice when needed. All the Trench Stories facilita-

tors worked as a strong powerful team all with the same aims to empower and engage our teenagers.

How did Trench Stories serve Anstee Bridge?

The main and most influential way was empowering the students and by increasing their confidence and self esteem with this uplifting and inspiring piece of theatre. The impact on the students when finishing Trench Stories was amazing and special. The students felt they had really achieved something for the first time and were proud of themselves as individuals and as a team. The wonderful feedback from professionals, parent/carers, schools added to the feeling of true involvement and success.

Louise Pendry, Bounce Theatre Artistic Director and Trench Stories Project Director

What was your role in facilitating the development of Trench Stories?

I was the project director, leading and shaping the overall development of the work created with and by the students. To a large extent, I became director, writer, collaborator, confidante, enemy, stage manager and ultimately someone I think they trusted.

What were your objectives and expectations of the project?

The aim of the project was to develop young people's appreciation of World War I and the centenary by looking at the way culture informed people's capacity to cope with the war. Initially, we were driven by the idea of the music halls and popular entertainment. We wanted to get them to think about the purposes of song and poetry and develop empathy for heritage and the nature of conflict.

Mostly though, I wanted it to be the students' work. I think there is an assumption that students arrive at Anstee and they aren't very clever. I think life brought them to Anstee because of a set challenging circumstance before they are old enough to really engage with their own learning processes.

Can you describe, your approach to facilitating the development of the performance?

Bespoke. Completely bespoke. The students didn't sign up to the project which makes it different from a lot of our work. For most, their last experience of performing was at primary school and some not at all.

They are at Anstee because they lack confidence. The main concern for me was not to make the stage an unsafe place. I concentrated more on the idea of speaking in front of people as a life skill, thus I did not ask the young people to learn lines or to create 'character'. We simply focused on the language and the meaning in the poems, verbatim text and dialogue.

Lots of traditional drama exercises were used in unconventional ways. I didn't feel like I had a 'rehearsal' until the day before the performance where the whole group ran through together. Other activities were done one to one, banging on tables to find a beat or moving around a classroom to find breaks in breath. Often we would rehearse once and then talking about something completely different for 40 minutes. The conversations were casual discussions about war. I might show an odd picture to a student and talk about what the trenches were like, discovering what the students found interesting then related it to an aspect of the war. Sometimes, I would pull up Cliff Notes on my laptop, reading up on the poem in front of them. We would get tables out and build a trench, mixing up art work with drama work. I would have them perform in front of one person to

build confidence to perform in front of more. And finally we would return to rehearse at the end for the last 10 minutes of our session.

Can you describe the project's unique challenges?

The students are disengaged from education and the reasons why are diverse and so is the way they will engage in learning. For example, some have reading and learning difficulties. Others can't cope in large school-room classes. Some are dealing with violent situations and some are missing a parent in their lives. Therefore the conventional rehearsal process felt like a rigid format and that made creating the script more challenging.

How did you work with the young people and staff to address and overcome these challenges?

We made the project completely about what the students produced in the workshops. The script emerged slowly as students became more confident to take on more than just a poem. Eventually, the students translated the traditional dialogue into street slang, blurring the lines, prompting their enjoyment of the project as well as making it relevant to their life experience.

This was linked by staff so it would all jigsaw together by the end of the project. We strived to make the stage a 'safe' place by not forcing anyone to learn their lines. Staff and older people became cast members to ensure it wasn't just the young people being vulnerable to an audience. A professional actor was involved as a narrator, relaying the events of WWI as told through contemporary street slang.

What resources did you draw from to devise Trench Stories? How were they used to engage the young people? What seemed to engage them?

Poetry books, photocopied versions of the poems, images of soldiers in the trenches, prop making.

As Trench Stories developed what themes and issues? What became important for the young people to discuss?

We had discussions about police, authority, immigration, racism, politics and whether we'd all go to war today. It led us to discuss what it meant to be British, why remembrance was important and the value of not forgetting.

What did you find exciting about the project? What did you enjoy?

The students transformed throughout the project and the moment I stood backstage and watched them something clicked inside them and me. They achieved something quite beautiful and beyond their own expectations.

Felicity Dyer, Anstee Bridge Arts Facilitator

Getting more specific and looking at Trench Stories. Can you explain the approach taken by Bounce Theatre Artistic Director, Louise? How did she engage the young people?

Most of our students are no longer in full time school and some have been excluded completely. As sixteen year olds they are prone to mood swings and emotional behaviour. The task of engaging them in a project where they have to all work as a team is very difficult. Louise showed a very flexible approach when dealing with the students. Her initial script was modified on a weekly basis as the students did not feel confident in performing or speaking in front of an audience. Louise encouraged each student, carefully drawing out their strengths by giving them confidence.

What was effective about her approach?

Louise was relaxed, funny and willing to change her script to accommodate the students.

Louise has talked about the importance of creating a safe environment for Anstee student, How did she do this? How did you support her? Other Trench Stories facilitators?

In order for any student to perform, they have to feel confident in themselves. By listening to each person and incorporating their ideas, she gave them responsibility. Once the students wanted to be involved in the project, their behaviour was very good. Safety was then much easier to manage. With other facilitators on hand, we were able to diffuse situations and nip them in the bud. We did this by removing disaffected students from the group and working with them on an individual basis.

How did Trench Stories serve Anstee's objectives and goals? What was its impact on Anstee students?

One of Anstee's goals is to create a sense of self esteem in each student. This is something that you cannot give a student: they have to feel it inside. By producing a successful play and performing it in front of an audience, this objective was met. All the young people who were involved in the production felt a sense of pride and their work. They enjoyed the sense of being good at something and being praised for it.

Anna Mason, Trench Stories Drama Facilitator

What was your role in facilitating the development of Trench Stories?

I became involved in the Trench Stories performance a month or so before the final performance, which meant most of the scenes were already blocked. My role was mostly assisting the performance, such as running through lines and scenes and working on character building.

What were your objectives and expectations of the project?

I was unsure what to expect, but my personal objective was to see how well I could work with the students and if I could use my knowledge in the theatre to make a positive impact on the piece.

Can you describe your approach to facilitating the development of the performance?

I used various drama techniques, such as breathing and vocal exercises, to help the students perform their poems more clearly and also varying their tone, pace and emotions.

Can you describe the project's unique challenges? How did you work with the young people and staff to address and overcome these challenges?

The main challenge was that for most of the students this was their first piece of theatre and they had no experience in performing. Many of the students were incredibly shy and felt out of their comfort zone. I used encouragement and patience to repeatedly go over the scenes to build up their confidence.

Tom Daplyn, Actor/Narrator for Trench Stories

What was your role in facilitating the development of Trench Stories?

I played a narrator character in the performance. My role was to chart the 'progress' of the war for the audience, giving them a context for the scenes, songs, and monologues played out by the rest of the cast.

In addition to my role in the performance, I worked with the cast on their pieces of text in rehearsals.

What were your objectives and expectations of the project?

My objective on stage was to provide something of a lynchpin in the performance to keep the story moving forward. In rehearsal/development, my aim was to engage with the young people, share my skills and knowledge, build their confidence, and get the best performance possible out of a very inexperienced cast.

Can you describe, your approach to facilitating the development of the performance?

Turn up on time, discover how many of the cast were coming to that session, try to keep them focussed on the work long enough to build upon the work done in the previous rehearsal!

Can you describe the project's unique challenges? How did you work with the young people and staff to address and overcome these challenges?

Working with a young and inexperienced cast, all with a whole host of real life struggles that were (often very actually) more important to them than rehearsing a play about the First World War, led to many unique

challenges. The two main issues I encountered were attendance and focus. We coped with attendance issues by remaining flexible in our approach to rehearsal, we would tailor each session to the available cast and work the scenes that they were in. Maintaining the focus of the young people in rehearsal basically just required a lot of patience! I personally found that working in short bursts of engaging exercises, leading with clear examples/demonstration by myself, followed by a short break, helped the cast maintain focus and produced the best results.

Resources



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ABOUT PROJECT PARTNERS

The Anstee Bridge Programme supporting Year 11 students who, for one day a week, require an alternative to school to ensure better engagement with education. They continue with exam-related work in school as well as spending time at Anstee Bridge. Two dozen students are taught in groups of up to eight, guiding them into further education, employment and/or training at the end of Year 11 KS4.

Bounce Theatre produces innovative opportunities for people to make thought provoking theatre and art. This is achieved through bespoke programming that combines production and project work. Through social arts practices Bounce Theatre provides a platform for participants to explore creatively and confidently as artists or creative practitioners. Collaboratively, Bounce Theatre creates work that constantly push boundaries and challenges preconceptions and expectations, both of the audiences and the participants.