

# Active remembrance

## the value and importance of making remembrance relevant and personal

Concerned that her students' understanding of and engagement with remembrance were superficial, and faced with the requirement to teach SMSC and British values, Claire McKay sought ways to make them meaningful and contextualised. In this article she explores how she and her colleagues have endeavoured to do this, through a battlefields tour, and a cross-curricular SMSC programme. McKay outlines the programme, and shares examples of lessons and outcomes for students. She analyses evidence that students were able to transfer the contextual knowledge they gained to other contexts, including GCSE history lessons, and reflects on the role of history teachers in helping students to place themselves in relation to the past.

### Claire McKay

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A year after the end of the First World War, George V stated:

*I believe that my people in every part of the Empire fervently wish to perpetuate the memory of the Great Deliverance and those who laid down their lives to achieve it.<sup>1</sup>*

From that moment, the idea of large-scale remembrance became part of our cultural tradition. The question facing us today, as we move ever further from conflicts such as the First World War, is how to make the concept of remembrance relevant and valuable to our students.

### Meaningful remembrance

In 2013, before to beginning some work on the centenary of the First World War, I asked a group of my own history students what the evocative word 'remembrance' made them think of. I imagine their responses to be typical of students of a similar age: they began to talk about poppies and a minute's silence, and made the occasional comment on recent conflicts. When I pressed them further I soon discovered that their understanding of the act and value of remembrance itself was at best superficial and at worst viewed remembrance as an obligatory chore. Is this a cause for concern? I believe so, and I believe that as educators, we should encourage students to be learners who remember the past, who value what has gone before and who use this awareness to shape their future.

In their 2004 article 'Placing History', Chapman and Facey put forward the principle that 'as history teachers we have a responsibility to instil in our students a sense of historical consciousness which enables them to locate themselves in relation to the past...to show that concepts of the past are shaped by concepts of the present.'<sup>2</sup> In my experience this is the key to purposeful and valued remembrance. It does not have to be a show-stopping event or even a whole-school occasion; what is crucial, however, is that students make a connection between the object of remembrance and their own lives and place in history. As Chapman and Facey put it, it should provide them with 'a tool that helps them understand themselves in time.'<sup>3</sup> This is not to say that formal remembrance events are not to be valued. The pride and emotional connection that my students felt after laying a wreath at the Menin Gate for example was invaluable; but it was only meaningful because they were able to place this in the context of their own historical consciousness. Even a brief glance at the media recently highlights the social and cultural currency of remembrance. From the national debate over football players not being allowed to wear poppies on their kit, to the shock of war memorials being vandalised and even disappointment at the reduction in the number of veterans being allowed to march by the cenotaph due to security fears, it is clear that remembrance is still very much a pertinent issue.<sup>4</sup> For me, it was important that students understood not only what and why they were remembering but how the wider national mood linked to their own history.

### Cross-curricular SMSC and contextual knowledge

The ability to engage in meaningful remembrance was one of many skills that were discussed as part of my school's recent redesign of its SMSC provision. We wanted our students not only to cover the required SMSC elements but also to understand why they were important and how they linked to their own lives. Remembrance offered a strong conceptual vehicle for structuring this type of curriculum. Students now have a two-hour session each week to focus on SMSC-related topics. As part of this we encourage students to develop their awareness

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Figure 1: Students from Henry Cort Community College and Chailey School prepare to lay a wreath at the Menin Gate alongside representatives of the British Army.



of the world around them and to consider how the world they see today, its processes, values and communities, have been formed, and how they might develop in the future. As history teachers, we were initially concerned that the cross-curricular planning of the SMSC programme would mean that students did not effectively relate these new sessions to individual subjects. In fact quite the opposite appears to be happening. As professionals, we have gained from working with colleagues from different subjects, and with different life experiences, and as a result have developed a broader SMSC curriculum than we had before.

From a history perspective, we have found that students approach topics (especially in the new GCSE) with a better contextual knowledge: a wider understanding of the world around them which they are able to use as a reference point for the topics we are studying. A prime example of this has been the work we have done on the rise of the Nazi party in Germany: teaching the concept of negative cohesion has been taken to a new level because students have gained a greater understanding of the democratic process in SMSC, as well as how this links to recent events in Europe and the USA. In short, our students are becoming active participants in the world around them and this has increased their engagement in their learning.

Although the SMSC programme is still in its infancy, feedback has been positive and students have recognised how these sessions not only support their other curriculum learning but also their place in time. One student commented:

*It's really valuable to understand where the things we have today came from, but it is even better when we can*

*look at these things objectively and decide for ourselves the rights and wrongs.<sup>5</sup>*

There have been some interesting discussions with students about what we as a school and as a nation choose to focus on and remember. Students seem to feel much more confident in expressing their own opinion as they see different curriculum areas joining up through the planning process and within the topics they are being taught. This active participation translates well into whole-school areas such as remembrance which I believe have a greater longevity and a deeper value to students than a 'once a year' event could possibly have.

## **Active remembrance on and after a battlefields tour**

The First World War Centenary Battlefields Tour Programme is one initiative that has taken up the challenge of encouraging students to be active in their remembrance. This government-funded programme is designed to provide the opportunity for a minimum of two students and one teacher from every state-funded secondary school in England to visit battlefields on the Western Front between 2014 and 2019. The battlefield tours are a key part of the government's plans to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. When my school first got involved in the project, I distinctly remember the concerns of the students who were to accompany me on our first tour: 'But Miss, remembrance is hard, you never know if you're going to do the right thing.' This concerned me. Of course, there is a formal side to remembrance, especially in many of the more official sites on the Western Front, but surely remembrance

Figure 2a: SMSC requirements. Students should.....

<b>Spiritual</b>	Show their own beliefs and interest in respecting different values and feelings
	Use imagination and creativity in their learning
<b>Moral</b>	Have an ability to recognise right and wrong and have a readiness to apply this to their lives.
	Have an interest in investigation and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues.
<b>Social</b>	Have a willingness to participate in a variety of social settings, co-operating with others and resolving conflict effectively.
<b>Cultural</b>	Have an understanding and appreciation of the wide range of cultural influences that have shaped their own heritage.

Figure 2b: SMSC overview – 4 x 2-hour sessions per theme

	<b>Democracy</b>	<b>Enterprise and finance</b>	<b>Respect</b>	<b>SRE</b>	<b>Growth mindset</b>	<b>Health and wellbeing</b>
<b>Year 7</b>	What is British? British culture Multicultural Britain Our place in the world	Basic saving Benefits and choices Holiday finance Enterprise	Bullying Cyber safety Smoking Diversity	Conception Domestic violence Relationships Puberty	Intro to growth mindsets Fixed and growth mindsets How does the brain work? Not giving up	Diet Energy drinks Exercise Careers – what is work? Nutrition
<b>Year 8</b>	Crime Punishment Anti social behaviour The police	Savings Simple tax Borrowing and interest Enterprise	Alcohol Bullying Cannabis Media – views of us	Conception Consent Relationships Safer sex (contraception)	Intro to growth mindsets Fixed and growth mindsets How does the brain work?	Eating disorders Balanced diet Practical fitness Careers – careers fair Practical fitness
<b>Year 9</b>	The EU Britain's place in Europe EU bodies and laws Brexit	Consumer rights Insurance and risk Investing and saving Enterprise	Cannabis Cyber safety Prejudice Sexting and media	STIs Clinics, health and hygiene Being a young parent Problem page	Not giving up Intro to growth mindsets Language use Thinking skills Quotes and images	Body image Eating disorders Careers – Fast Tomato Careers – meet employers
<b>Year 10</b>	Types of government Voting Political parties Protest	Interest Tax and allowances National Insurance Enterprise	Diversity Human Rights Legal and illegal drugs The media	Choice Domestic violence Relationships Violence and consequences	Intro to growth mindsets Science behind GM/difference GM makes Developing thinking skills Fear of failure/ taking risks	Careers – Fast Tomato Future Me Emotional wellbeing
<b>Year 11</b>	Political parties Voting Trade unions The media	Education and finance Debt Loans and pensions Enterprise	Cultural diversity Drugs health Human rights The media	Consent Safer sex (contraception) Sex and the media Teenage parenting	Intro to growth mindsets Language use Exam technique Revision	Careers – CVs & what next Future me Managing stress & anxiety Time management

Figure 3a: Timetable for a First World War cross-curricular day at Henry Cort Community College

Year	Morning	Afternoon
7*	<b>Humanities</b> Talk and artefact-handling session with historian Trevor Booker	<b>DT</b> Metal work, medal design and making workshop  <b>ICT</b> Ciphers and codebreaking
8*	<b>DT</b> Metal work, medal design and making workshop  <b>ICT</b> Ciphers and codebreaking	<b>PE</b> Army-style fitness – indoor and outdoor obstacle course; 1914 army fitness test
9*	<b>PE</b> Army-style fitness – indoor and outdoor obstacle course; 1914 army fitness test	<b>Humanities</b> Talk and artefact-handling session with historian Trevor Booker
10*	<b>Science</b> Chemical warfare and battlefield medicine workshop  <b>Languages</b> Soldiers' guide to France and Belgium – practical language tips for soldiers	<b>Maths</b> Trench-planning and rations ratios  <b>English</b> Poetry and imagery workshop, plus text scavenger hunt
11	<b>Maths</b> Trench-planning and rations ratios.  <b>English</b> Poetry and imagery workshop, plus text scavenger hunt	<b>Science</b> Chemical warfare and battlefield medicine workshop.  <b>Languages</b> Soldiers' guide to France and Belgium – practical language tips for soldiers

\*Plus a selected creative arts group working across the day to document events and produce a music/drama/art piece embodying the work of the day.

Figure 3b: Collage of activities undertaken as part of the First World War cross-curricular day



Figure 4: OFSTED definition of British values

According to Ofsted, 'fundamental British values' are:

- democracy
- the rule of law
- individual liberty
- mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith.

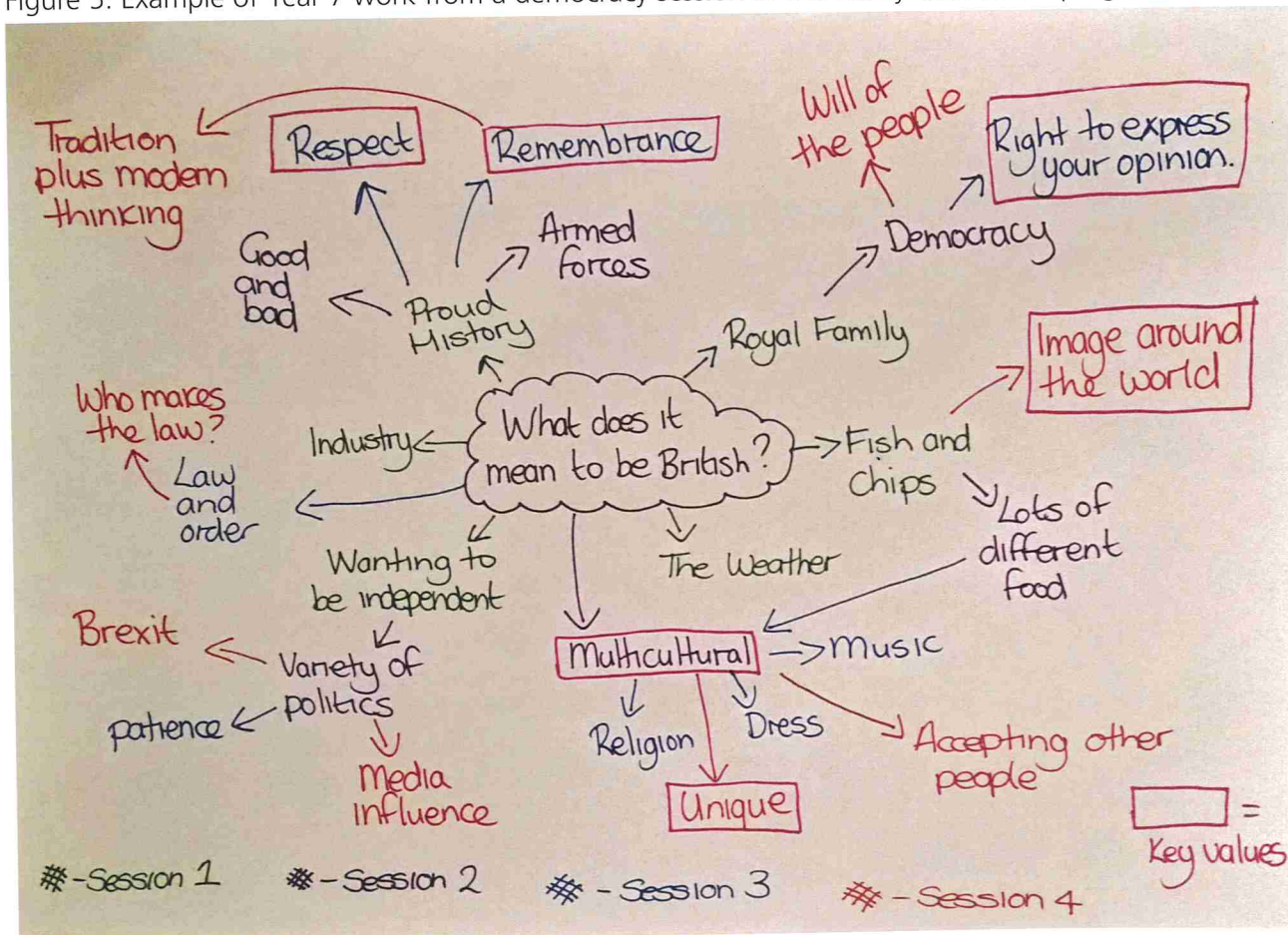
From *School Inspection Handbook from September 2015*

should be something that students enter into because they want to and because they see a value in it. It was therefore a very positive feature of the tour that during the pre-tour CPD, the on-tour workshops and indeed at the sites we visited, students were encouraged to relate what they were seeing to their own community, and to think about why sites such as the Menin Gate were still such a focal point for those wishing to remember the events of the First World War. This seemed to support Phillpot and Guiney's view that 'the most effective way of helping pupils make a connection with the war, and to gain an insight into its complexities, is to retrace the footsteps of a soldier, battalion or regiment.'<sup>6</sup> This

individual connection was the key to opening up students' curiosity and connecting them to what had gone before them.

In his 2015 article 'Lessons from the Front', Rhys Griffiths focused particularly on what he believed was missing from the centenary battlefields tours.<sup>7</sup> When commenting upon the involvement of the British Army in the tours, for example, he argued 'the soldiers' involvement makes little sense and is inappropriate given that at no point are students asked to question the war, or any war, in a critical fashion'. Whilst respectful of his opinion, my response to this would be that the British Army is not involved in the programmes in a dominant or overpowering way, but rather to provide another source of information for the students. Good historians value a range of sources of information; the Army is merely one of many in this case. On tour, the soldiers brought to life the differences and similarities between their experiences and those of the soldiers a hundred years ago. They gave an interactive talk where students learnt about food, equipment and uniform both from the First World War and today. Their role was not, however, to question or venture an opinion on the moral issues relating to the causes or conduct of the war. Students were given an opportunity to engage with these controversies via the tour guides, teacher input and peer discussion: to ask specific questions about, for example, deserters, cowardice or bad leadership. The question of why the war started and moral justification for this was, appropriately, handled in discussion between pupils and teachers. In the course of the tour, I noticed the students thinking more critically: asking questions for themselves and considering the complex nature of war and its impact. This was one of the key points of the tour for my students:

Figure 5: Example of Year 7 work from a democracy session of the Henry Cort SMSC programme



they were able to form their own concept of remembrance, one which was connected to their own lives and based on knowledge gained from interaction with those who had themselves experienced armed conflict.

The ripples of learning caused by educational visits such as this need not be limited to one-off acts of remembrance. Following the tour, students undertook a whole school cross-curricular activity enquiry day based upon the First World War, with activities including an army-style assault course set up by the PE department, to code-breaking in computing, and an artefact-handling session in history. As shown in Figure 3b, students were immersed in the theme and were able to see how so many aspects of life were affected by this key historical event.

## Exploring British values in the curriculum

Even after two years, this is something that we can still feel in our curriculum. Our new SMSC sessions, which are now a key part of the curriculum, are firmly rooted in the same values with which the students engaged during their battlefields tour.<sup>8</sup> British values, as outlined in Figure 4, are a relatively new addition to the educational requirements, and are guaranteed to provoke a reaction from teachers and students. It was important for us to engage students with these in a productive and meaningful way.

Our new SMSC programme has done this and as mentioned before has benefited individual subjects through student engagement and cultural awareness. This was seen specifically in the Democracy element of the new programme. Students produced work which showed a clear thought process leading to a growing awareness of their place in Britain and, crucially, Britain's place in the world. This is shown in Figure 5. In the Year 7 lessons students then discussed and defined the qualities of being British using images and key words. Their four sessions started with students defining culture and discussing how culture shapes communities and people. We then explored British culture from food and clothing to traditions, and even an insightful discussion on the place and importance of manners and values. In subsequent lessons students designed a piece of pottery that summarised what they felt it meant to be British. This allowed students to explore their own beliefs as well as forming a collective definition of culture. We built on this by exploring the idea of diversity through topics such as sport, food and festivals. With the Year 7 sessions our aim was very

Figure 6: Year 10 history starter linked to work on democracy

### Starter

#### 1. Quick think

What are the links between these key events?

- Brexit
- Trump winning the US election
- Southern Rail strikes

- Big media stories
- Shock to some people
- people wanting change
- people expressing their unhappiness with someone or something

#### 2. Deep think

Now, how does this link to our learning on the rise of the Nazi party?

People in Germany were unhappy with how the Weimar government treated them. They wanted change which the Nazis offered. The Nazis used the media to promote their ideas but also used the voting system to change things. Strength of public opinion shocked some

much a soft approach to British values, giving students the opportunity to explore their own attitudes while steering them towards exploring them in the context of the Britain that they live in. This has worked very well; we found that the less formal nature of these lessons allowed students time to think and to discuss in a more detailed way than they had before. In addition, by linking the learning to students' own experiences, it became personal and consequently more relevant to them.

These ideas were developed considerably in the Year 10 lessons, where students tracked and developed their own views of what it means to be British. Their four sessions focused on exploring different types of government and finding real-world examples of these, and defining the term democracy and what it means within Britain today. They went on to explore voting systems, the pros and cons of these and how the system works within Britain. This knowledge was used to research existing political parties and to create their own. The final session saw students examining a range of protests from the Chartists to the Poll Tax Riots. They were encouraged to analyse the effectiveness of each protest and also to examine how they related to the idea of democracy within Britain. While the quality of discussion varied between groups, what was clear was how students became more aware of the big issues and processes that surround their lives. Regardless of prior attainment, students

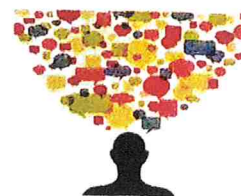
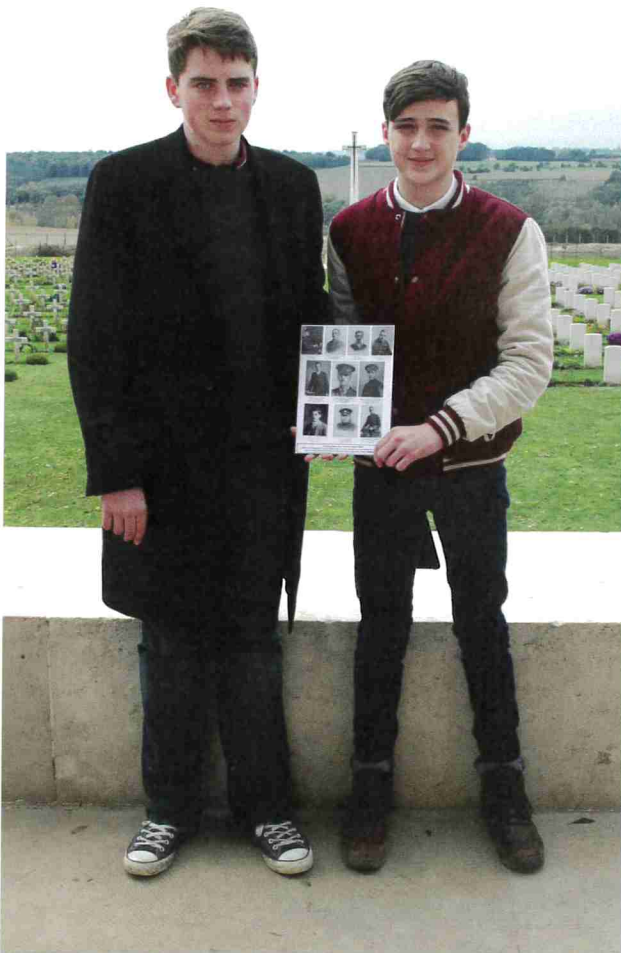


Figure 7a: Students on tour finding the name of their local soldier at Thiepval Memorial



Figure 7b: Old Boys: tribute from students at Queen Mary's Grammar School, Walsall



were able to voice their own opinions and support them, and were more than willing to discuss which of the protests they would have got involved with.

### Knowledge transfer

Each session linked the theory with examples from Britain and students were able to develop their own definitions of what it meant to be British, as seen in Figure 5. It was not solely in the SMSC sessions that this developing awareness of links between Britain, the wider world and their place within it was seen. As we had hoped, this growing awareness transferred into other faculty lessons. In history, after analysing the process by which the Nazis came to power in Germany, students were able to identify common features in recent news events and then relate this to their historical learning about Nazi Germany, as seen in Figure 6.

### Conclusions

It is through the work of our new SMSC programme combined with collaborative planning and cross-curricular lessons that we are creating students who are equipped both emotionally and in terms of their knowledge to engage meaningfully with big concepts such as remembrance. While the topics covered within SMSC are much wider than just remembrance, the programme is designed to instil in students an interest in exploring their place in the world. In order for our students to make decisions about where they are going in the world today, they need to be able to ground this in where they have come from. In exploring this through the multifaceted idea of remembrance, they have become better placed to value what has gone before them and to understand how it has shaped the world around them.

Figure 8: Part of Milthorpe School's contribution to the York schools display at the Castle Museum



## Legacy 110 – deepening the learning

Following on from their battlefield tours of the Western Front, participating students are encouraged to take part in Legacy 110. This element of the First World War Centenary Battlefield Tours Programme involves students setting up their own community-based projects commemorating some aspect of the centenary of the Great War, and in doing so ensuring that its historical significance and enduring impact is more widely appreciated. Figures 7a, 7b and 8 show examples of students from other schools participating in the Centenary Battlefields Tour programme and Legacy 110 projects. If every student reaches out to at least 110 people in their communities then the total number of people reached across the country by 2019 will equal 888,246, equivalent to the number of British and Commonwealth soldiers who fell during the First World War.

Legacy 110 provides students with opportunities to share their knowledge, understanding and perceptions of the First World War in creative and innovative ways, and to work collaboratively with others in their local communities. For example, at Ormiston Rivers Academy in Essex teachers and students came up with the idea to stage a drama, music and dance production based on the social changes and effects of the First World War on their community. The story followed four local soldiers and their families from signing up to fight for their country in 1914, life for women and children at home, trench life and the aftermath of those who survived, and a tribute to ones that never returned. In contrast, teachers and students from the York Independent State School Partnership organised a memorial service in York Minster followed by a public exhibition entitled '1916: It's more than just the Somme' at the city's Castle Museum. Many more projects up and down the country are under way with a distinct focus on local links to the war and the impact of the conflict and its aftermath on local communities.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me therefore that the key to good education-based remembrance is making it student-led and personal. While whole-school and whole-community acts of remembrance have an important role in creating historical consciousness, it is the smaller, more personal acts that tie us to our roots and create an invisible link with what has gone before. The overriding focus for me is making remembrance personal, by finding the internally relevant aspects that link us to our past. This might be embedded in a wider national or global event, but in order for it to be valued there has to be that invisible historical thread that ties those who are remembering to the event they are recalling. As educators it is our role to guide, though not to dictate, how students achieve this. We need to consider how we can encourage our students to place a value on what has happened before, to use it to shape the future and, perhaps more pertinently, to realise that participating in acts of remembrance of any kind will ensure that they are shaped by what has gone before.

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