

ACTIVITY ONE: COMMEMORATIVE ART

Learning Objectives

- To know about great artists and understand the historical and cultural development of their art forms;
- To practice looking carefully at and describing art.

Introduction

Artists were given an official role in war in the 20th Century and were commissioned to record the First World War for information and propaganda.

The Ministry of Information's Official War Artists Scheme was set up in 1916. In 1917, the Imperial War Museum was set up to commemorate the conflict. Part of its remit was to collect and commission art.

MAIN TASKS

1. Discuss:

- Why would a government want official war artists?
- What topics would an artist want to cover? e.g. life of a soldier, the Home Front, the impact of war
- What can art tell us?
- How might a painting differ from a photo?
- What might be different about a painting commissioned as a historical source and a painting created by an artist to express their response to the subject matter?

2. Compare two of the paintings in [Historical Context Chapter 22 Creative Response to the War](#). Look at the paintings and the information about them, including whether they were commissioned and if so, who by.

Good pairs to compare might include: Mule Track and Paths of Glory, Brighton Dome and an Advanced Dressing Station

Either as a group discussion, a discussion in small groups or as a written exercise, ask students to compare them using the following questions:

- What is the artist trying to say about war?
- What details help put the message across?
- Why did the artist choose the title? Is it a good title?
- What impact/effect has war had on the soldiers/people depicted (if appropriate)?
- What do you learn about war from the painting?
- Does the painting provide accurate information which might be useful as a means of recording history or has the artist been less descriptive and more expressive?