

ACTIVITY ONE: HISTORY OF MUSIC IN WAR

Learning Objectives

- To learn about the role of music in war;
- To discuss about how the role of music has changed.

Resources

[Historical Context 21. Creative Responses](#)

Introduction

In previous centuries, armies signaled to their troops through music; each country had its own music for approach, attack and retreat, most of which was played by the regiment's drummers. Obviously this did have its own problems as opposing armies occasionally learnt the opponent's call signs and defeated them that way! (One example being in 1708 during the War of the Spanish Succession, allied troops played *The French Retreat* so well that some of the French army actually did withdraw!)

When the First World War broke out, war was still conducted in an old fashioned way. Historically, music was used on the battlefield not only to boost morale, but also as a method of signaling different events. For example, the day started with the '*Reveille*' (taken from the French word *reveiller* – to rise/wake up) and would finish with the *Last Post* to signal that the day was finished.

MAIN TASKS

Music and the Battlefield

- 1) Using the resources, introduce the idea of Music in War and the musical context into which the First World War came.
 - a) Are you surprised that armies always travelled with a drummer and a bugle player?
 - b) Do you think that using music to signal when armies should maneuver was a clever idea?
 - c) What other functions do you think music played? For example, how do you think playing the *Last Post* was helpful? (*Last Post* was played as an all clear, and also had the dual function of letting lost or abandoned soldiers know where they could find safety).
- 2) Discuss how the role of music developed away from a method of communicating movements to a more moral boosting role – how the lyrics kept the troops active and happy, and remembering why they were fighting the war.
 - a) Thinking about keeping the Morale up, in what other ways did music help?
 - i) Concerts
 - ii) Forces Sweetheart
- 3) Music whilst the troops were marching was also very important. Discuss why you think this might be. Why not get up and give it a go?
 - a) Do you think armies still use marching songs?

- i) Yes, they do. Particularly in training where they often take the form of a trainer calling out an initial phrase to which the rest of the unit replies in the form of a response.
- b) What do you think makes a good marching song?

Music at Home

- 4) Discuss what propaganda is.
 - a) Why do you think music was used to help spread messages about it?
 - Think about what most people did for fun. (lots of people had a piano in those days, and most went to the Music Halls).
 - Remember that there were no televisions in those days and that not every family had a radio.
 - b) Do you think that it was effective?
 - c) What genre (type) of music do you think was used?
- 5) You have learnt that music was used for Morale boosting on the front line but was it used at home?
 - a) This links in with propaganda – the same messages were used to keep spirits high.
 - b) Think about the different genres – talk about composers such as Edward Elgar who wrote uplifting pieces such as the Spirit of England.

Music After the War

- 6) Many Composers went to war. A few of these are profiled on the website at the link in the resources above. What roles did they have?
- 7) From reading the text, how do you think that the style of compositions changed? Look specifically at the language used to describe George Butterworth's piece *On the Banks of the Green Willow*, which was composed prior to the outbreak of war, and then the titles given to the other pieces.