

Refusing to Kill: Bristol Conscientious Objectors – sample lesson

Laura Tilley, Associate Leader for Teaching and Learning, Head of Politics and Second in History at St Peter's High School, Gloucester

Starter: I had previously taught my Year 9 class about Conscientious Objectors in our scheme of work about World War One, so I began by asking the students what they could remember about this. I used the image from the front page of *Refusing to Kill* as a prompt for students.

Enquiry question: I did not simply want students to know the knowledge of the different case studies; whilst knowledge is important, it is more beneficial for long-term memory and knowledge retention for students to do something with the knowledge. Having read *Refusing to Kill*, I decided that it would be good for students to consider the reasons for being a Conscientious Objector, and how valid these reasons would have been viewed.

Task One: I began with a section from the book about Conscientious Objectors and tribunals. Students read the extract and highlighted key information about Conscientious Objectors and the difficulties that they faced.

Task Two: Students were split into groups and allocated a case study. In each group there was one student who represented the person, one argued for exemption to be refused and one for exemption to be granted. The task was to hold hearings (the trials) for each of the COs. The student representing the person had to know their story. The person arguing against exemption had to find reasons why the person should be forced to fight (we called them the prosecution for ease). The person arguing for exemption had to find reasons why the person's reasons for not fighting should be viewed as valid and accepted (the defence). The hearings were to be set in 1914-18, not 2020. Students were given time to go through the information and plan their points/speeches. We then re-enacted hearings.

Plenary: The lesson finished with a few questions reflecting on contemporary attitudes to Conscientious Objectors.

Reflections of the lesson:

- The use of case studies helped the students learn more about Conscientious Objectors, more than generic study. Students liked that the people actually had names, and students commented that it seemed more real.
- Students liked that it was case studies of local people. One of the case studies was of a person with the same surname as one of my students. The student was very excited and wanted to find out more about their potential relative. The historical curiosity this sparked was immeasurable, especially since this student would not normally consider history to be one of their favourite lessons.
- The use of group work was beneficial, due to the large amount of case studies within the *Refusing to Kill* book. It would have been desirable to spend a whole lesson on each case study, and a whole scheme of work on the entire book. Of course, timetable restraints at school means this is not possible. Therefore, by giving different groups different case studies, each student was able to be an 'expert' in one case study, but were able to hear about all of them from their classmates.