

Educational Activities for the *Trenches on the Western Front* video series

Educators: The following activities can be used alongside Valour Canada's trench warfare video. Regarding the videos that have multiple activities, one or both activities can be completed. Also, in most cases Activity 1 is easier than Activity 2 (i.e., Activity 2 targets more senior or advanced students).

Learning outcomes:

Upon completion of the series and the activities below, students will:

- Describe trench warfare within the context of the First World War (FWW).
- Examine trenches in wide detail, including physical characteristics, day-to-day routine, and living conditions.
- Empathize with soldiers (and nurses, doctors, etc.) situated at or near the front lines during the FWW.
- Compare and contrast the greatest risks for an infantry soldier on the Western Front.

Web resources for students:

- Trench Warfare video series playlist
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLc8xffddvlhDx3eG8T7SP4o1A9ybfQ1aa>
- The Road to Vimy Ridge: Tunnels and Trenches (Valour Canada)
<https://vimyridge.valourcanada.ca/the-road-to-vimy-ridge/gearing-up/tunnels-and-trenches/>
- Charles Douglas Richardson Collection (CanadianLetters.ca)
<https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/20541>
- Explore These WW1 Trenches and Tunnels in France and Belgium (Smithsonian Magazine)
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/explore-these-world-war-i-trenches-tunnels-france-belgium-180963867/>

A special thank you to historian and archaeologist Andy Robertshaw who played a large role in this series. Andy's filmography includes *Wonder Woman*, 1917, *They Shall Not Grow Old*, and *War Horse* ([IMDb](#)).



Canadian soldiers in the trenches at Vimy. Courtesy of Ghosts of Time (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/191523441033226>).

Trench Tour (4m:06)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I30adtuPew>

- Activity 1: Sketch and label a cross section of a typical trench that could be found on the Western Front during the First World War. Make sure to include barbed wire, sandbags, parapet, parapets, duck boards, fire-step, posts, and anything else you think should be included.
- Activity 2: Sketch a bird's eye view of a typical trench system that could be found on the Western Front during the First World War. Make sure to include No Man's Land, barbed wire, front trench, support trench, reserve trench, communication trench, up trench, down trench, regimental aid post, latrine, two dugouts, and at least one underground mine that exits into a shell hole near the front trench.

24 Hours in a Trench (4m:44)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V41gqt0i2wg>

- Activity 1: The narrator indicates that there are two times daily where attacks were most likely to occur. Why were attacks most likely at those times (make sure to explain your answer) and what did the soldiers do to defend against those threats?
- Activity 2: The narrator describes two trench routines, daytime and nighttime. Imagine that you have spent months on the Western Front and that today is the 20th day/night you have spent in the front trench during the past 5 weeks. Then for both routines describe which part of the routine you think you would enjoy the most and would bore you the most. Be sure to explain why in your answer.

Trench Construction (1m:25)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NrUONWEKc7E>

- Activity: Browse the photographs and interviews tabs of Library and Archives Canada's online Battle of Passchendaele section:

- Photographs: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/passchendaele/Pages/photographs.aspx> , and
- Interviews: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/passchendaele/Pages/interviews.aspx#a>

As you review the pictures and read or listen to the interviews, make a note if you see or hear information that will help you write a half page paragraph that describes at least 3 problems that soldiers were faced with while trying to dig a trench at Passchendaele. Also include what they did to overcome those difficulties.

Weapons of Trench Warfare (9m:44)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJeH9ruRueA>

- Activity 1: Using a chart and writing or typing in point form, compare and contrast the Lee Enfield Rifle, the Vickers Machine Gun, and the Lewis Gun.
- Activity 2: Using reliable sources accessed via the internet or print media, identify a weapon technology that was significantly improved upon during the First World War. In less than one page, describe how that weapon was significantly improved upon. Also explain the author's argument as to why that technological advancement was important (i.e., describe the logic the author uses to support the point they are trying to make).

Shaving Tommy (2m:47)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DePqnu1hNcg>

- Activity: Acting as though you are an experienced First World War soldier, write a diary entry that references at least 3 things you do to stay as clean as possible in the trenches. Also, if you were to receive one hygiene item from home (as a surprise gift in a care package), what would you hope to receive? Why?

Feeding Tommy (1m:35)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUV9XQGaHKg>

- Activity: Acting as though you are an experienced First World War soldier, write a diary entry that references at least 3 things you eat in the trenches. Also, if you were to receive one edible treat from home (as a surprise gift in a care package), what would you hope to receive? Why?

Welcome to the Front (2m:20) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMg7-u6cmFc>

· Activity: Read the following 3 letters written by Charles Douglas Richardson that describe his experience as he arrives at the Western Front and settles into his new role as a Canadian soldier.

- 1916 May 28: <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-3921?position=36&list=wGx8U7Es2oIHLEPwDwG9AXef-nJMMoRr7KrtcQoURTO>
- Exact date unknown: <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-4625?position=0&list=wGx8U7Es2oIHLEPwDwG9AXef-nJMMoRr7KrtcQoURTO>
- 1916 June 5: <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-7601?position=37&list=wGx8U7Es2oIHLEPwDwG9AXef-nJMMoRr7KrtcQoURTO>

Choose one of the letters and using at least two specific examples from his writing describe how Richardson felt about being at the front as a new soldier. Your answer should be at least a half page in length.

The Attack (2m:30) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2d4LlFRKv-M>

· Activity: Read the following 2 letters; the first letter written by F.W. Crawford and the second is written by Charles Douglas Richardson.

- 1916 June 9: <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-7602?position=38&list=wGx8U7Es2oIHLEPwDwG9AXef-nJMMoRr7KrtcQoURTO>
- 1916 June 15: <https://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-4633?position=40&list=wGx8U7Es2oIHLEPwDwG9AXef-nJMMoRr7KrtcQoURTO>

Choose **one** of the following questions and answer in a half page or less. Make sure to use specific textual evidence from the writing.

- 1- Do you think Crawford's letter was well-received (i.e., appreciated) by Edna? Why or why not?
- 2- What seems to be Richardson's emotional disposition (i.e., mood) when he wrote the letter?

Gas! Gas! Gas! (1m:10) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwuHw6Wj_N8

· Activity 1: Visit "The Second Battle of Ypres" section on The Road to Vimy Ridge website (<https://vimyridge.valourcanada.ca/the-road-to-vimy-ridge/the-great-war-begins/trench-warfare/#Ypres>) and answer: Do you think that the situation at Ypres had a deep impact on McCrae? Why or why not? (Don't forget that McCrae was no stranger to war; he also fought in the [Boer War](#) more than a decade earlier).

· Activity 2: Read the journal article "A Proper Slaughter: The March 1917 Gas Raid at Vimy Ridge" (Tim Cook, Canadian Military History <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1076&context=cmh>). Then in essay format compare and contrast the perceived (prior to the raid) advantages and disadvantages of using gas in comparison to more conventional weaponry (e.g., bayonets, rifles, artillery shells) in an attack.

Regimental Aid Post (6m:46) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fv6sicdHbWg>

· Activity: Assume that you are a soldier who was wounded by a bullet or a piece of shrapnel to the arm (no major damage) in No Man's Land. Write a short diary entry that describes what you found most stressful about the experience as well as what you found most interesting during the medic's examination of you at the aid post.

Casualty Clearing Station (3m:08) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTaoz0YVO2Y>

· Activity: Choose one of: tetanus, x-ray, Thomas splint, or blood transfusion, then quickly research the circumstances of its invention/development during the First World War. Write a paragraph long summary of your findings.