

The Character of our Canadian Military History Program

The Battle of Vimy Ridge and Battlefield Reconnaissance

- First World War -

Learning Objectives:

- ✚ Specify the preparation, the event, and the aftermath of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
- ✚ Give examples of honourable conduct during the FWW and/or during the Battle of Vimy.
- ✚ Compare and contrast different technological advancements made during the FWW and their impact.
- ✚ Create a solution(s) that would facilitate productive and accurate aerial reconnaissance practices.
- ✚ Demonstrate the traits: communication; cooperation; courage; resilience; responsibility; thoughtfulness.

Character Traits Explored:

Communication, Cooperation, Courage, Resilience, Responsibility, Thoughtfulness, (+ Patience)

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Vimy Ridge and Battlefield Reconnaissance

Overview: The Battle of Vimy Ridge will be described (video). Then the participants, already divided into groups, will compete against one another in a race to accurately map the Vimy battlefield by placing items on a Vimy air photo as directed by student ‘pilots’.

History Learning Objectives

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Character Trait Development:

Communication, Cooperation, Courage, Resilience, Responsibility, Thoughtfulness, (+ Patience)

Total Time: 45-60 minutes

Group Size: 4-6

Age: 10 +

Space: small, indoors (see layout, below right)

Materials (per group):

Part A: Presentation using laptop with internet and projector

- Video: “Battle of Vimy Ridge Presentation” (41m:52) [LINK](#)

Part B: Activity using laptop with internet and projector

- Video: “Battle of Vimy Ridge Activity” (15m:30) [LINK](#)
- 1 copy of “Vimy - Blank Map” (11”x17”) **for each group**
- 1 copy of “Vimy - Map Tokens” **for each group**

Note: this document has four sets of tokens, and each group needs only 1 set of 11 pieces. The token pieces will require being cut out with scissors.

- 1 copy of “Solution Map” (11”x17”, see p.7) **for the facilitator**

Note: The facilitator will also require a set of 11 tokens to set up on their map.

To see how the tokens should be arranged, see p.6 “Setup Cheat Sheet” below or view the labels on the Solution Map.



Key Vocabulary

Platoon: a 40-ish person group subdivided into 3 or 4 ‘sections’ of 10 or so soldiers

Creeping barrage: artillery fire that moves ahead in stages in front of advancing infantry

Entente: allied France, Britain, and Italy (Russian Empire not included due to Revolution in Feb 1917)

Casualty: a soldier who is removed from the fight due to injury or death

Reconnaissance: scouting an area

Zero hour: the time at which the attack begins

Preparation (for the presentation and activity):

- For POWERPOINT presentation:

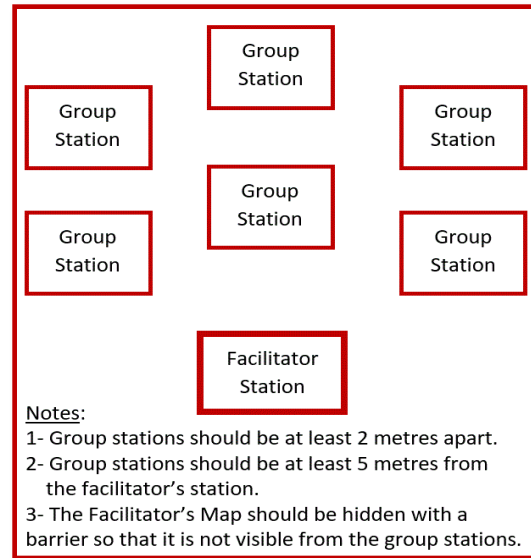
Setup laptop and projector and present the video “Battle of Vimy Ridge Presentation”.

- For the ACTIVITY:

1. First, setup the space. Find a working space where a station (table and chairs) can be setup for each group. Group Stations should be separated by at least 2 or 3 metres (to reduce the chance of conflict with their competitors). The arrangement on the next page is one option. Each station should have a “Vimy - Blank Map” and a set of the “Vimy - Map Tokens” already cut out.

Note: it's best to provide each group with their set of objects just before starting the Battlefield Recon activity. Otherwise, they will be fiddling and distracted when you're giving direction. In contrast, having the battlefield map at their station the entire time will pique their interest.

2. Refer to “**Setup Cheat Sheet**” (on pg. 6 below) and follow the directions to set up the facilitator’s station at least 5 metres from the Group Stations. A barrier should be erected so that the participants cannot see the facilitator’s complete map from their workstations.



Directions for Presenting the Module

A- PowerPoint Instructions:

(42-45 min)

1. Present the YouTube video “[Battle of Vimy Ridge Presentation](https://youtu.be/zFW9MEvQEsc)” (<https://youtu.be/zFW9MEvQEsc>). Pause and add explanation where necessary.

B- Activity Instructions, Rules, and Roles (slide 15):

(15-20 min)

1. Present the YouTube video “[Battle of Vimy Ridge Activity](https://youtu.be/Q6iZmy-FyU)” ([https://youtu.be/Q6iZmy -FyU](https://youtu.be/Q6iZmy-FyU)). Pause and add explanation where necessary.
2. While the video is playing the facilitator sets up the visual barrier and map, and arranges the tokens as shown on the “[Solution Map](#)” and as described on the “[Setup Cheat Sheet](#)”.
3. Follow the directions on the video, being ready to pause where necessary. Should you choose to present the activity manually, follow the following process (steps 4 to 8).
4. Explain to the groups, now each named a “Corps”, that there are two roles in this activity. Each Corps must select only one “Headquarters (HQ) Mapper” who will place their group’s objects/blocks on the “[Vimy - Blank Map](#)” at the direction of the “[Reconnaissance Pilots](#)” (the remaining group members). Explain that the “Pilots” of each Corps act individually, so they should order themselves to “Fly” first, second, third, and so on.

PILOTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO POINT WITH FINGERS WHEN DIRECTING THE MAPPER!

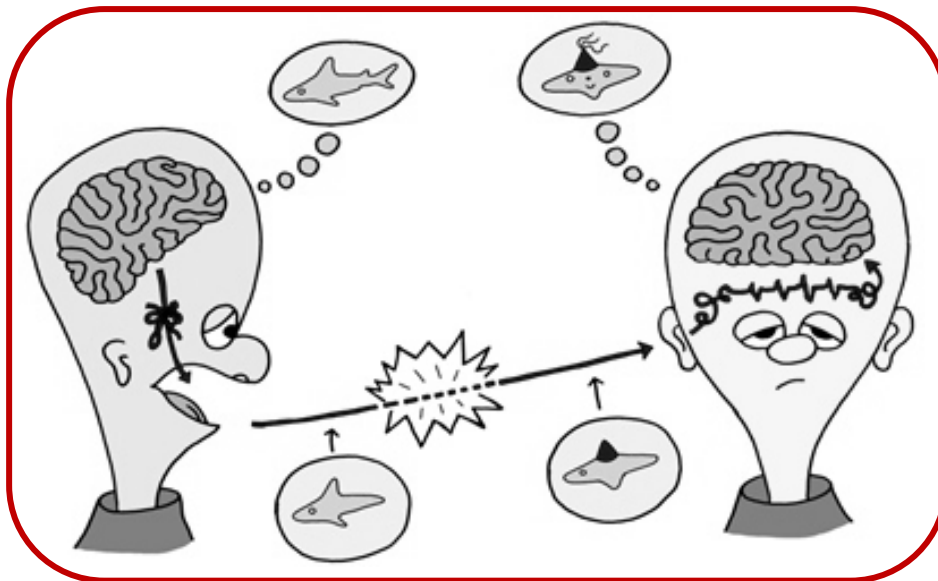
Hint: it’s a good idea to ask the Mappers to raise their hand once selected by their group, that way you know when they’re ready to begin.

5. When all Corps are ready to begin the exercise, the facilitator calls up the first “Pilot”, from each Corps concurrently, to study the battlefield layout for 20 seconds.
6. Once the 20 seconds has expired, the “Pilot” has another 45 seconds to return to their Corps’ HQ and to communicate to their respective “HQ Mapper” how to reproduce the facilitator’s battlefield layout while the “Mapper” arranges the items as directed.
 Only the pilot may talk to the Mapper at this time. The others must stay silent.
! REMEMBER: without pointing and without cell phones (pictures)!

7. After each arranging attempt, the facilitator checks each HQ's map. If any Corps' map has the correct arrangement of all items, that Corps wins, but if all HQ's maps remain incorrect, the second "pilot" of each Corps "flies" up to study the Facilitator's battlefield for another 20 seconds... and the cycle continues (with individual pilots flying timed sorties over the battlefield and then reporting their findings) until a winner has been declared.
8. Once a winner has been declared, project the solution using the video.

C- Scoring:

The first Corps to produce an exact replica of the facilitator's structure wins.



Options for increasing/decreasing difficulty:

1. As the exercise progresses, the facilitator can adjust the time of each session, as necessary.
2. For younger participants it may be helpful to stop the activity after the second pilot and give the groups 90 seconds to discuss and make a plan of action now that they have an idea of the task and its challenges.
3. The facilitator can have all "Pilots" do an exercise or run a course (to induce stress) before communicating with the Mappers (e.g., 5 jumping jacks), but the time must be adjusted to account for this.
4. If teams get very adept, the facilitator can run the groups through a consecutive order of objects, for example, positioning of a given unit on a given date (but the facilitator may need help to do all of this concurrently).

Debrief

Questions and Prompts: Note: There is one main debrief within this presentation (slide 18). **(5 min)**

Debrief Key Idea 1: Battlefield Reconnaissance

Build understanding of the learning process experienced by the Canadian Corps in WW1:

Explain to the participants that new technologies that became prevalent in the FWW presented all belligerents with problems that had never been faced before. Consequently, the armies had to create brand-new solutions to these challenges and many of these solutions were discovered through trial and error. In other words, the military men at all levels had to learn their way through the “fog” of war, much as you and your group just learned your way through that activity.

- *Ask: Describe any **communication** challenges experienced by the pilots and/or the mapper and how could those challenges have been avoided?*
- *Ask: Which character traits were the most important for the mapper or the pilot to possess?*
<ALL TRAITS can be explored here>
- *Ask: Which tools could be used to ensure better success for the operation?*

Participants might say language (e.g., Military Alphabet), math (e.g., map grid + coordinates), measuring tools (e.g., compass + ruler), photos (e.g., air photography), a process (e.g., complete part A, then B, then C, etc.), etc.

<Thoughtfulness can be explored here>

Debrief Key Idea 2: Battlefield Reconnaissance

Make sure to communicate the gravity of the pilot situation to the participants:

Explain to the pilots that they would have been doing this under rifle, machine gun, and artillery fire and that their life expectancy as a pilot was only a few weeks.

- *Ask the students what might happen if there was a mistake on the map? What if they were the person that ordered a group of soldiers into an area thought to be clear but wasn't, so your comrades walked into an ambush? How would you feel? How could you best prevent that from happening? What if you were ordered by a superior to take something that you thought would cost more than 10,000 of your men? ← (Insert Currie + Passchendaele sidebar if there's time)*

<ALL TRAITS can be explored here>

Setup Cheat Sheet (for Battlefield Reconnaissance Activity)

The following description is easiest to understand with the “Solution Map” (p. 7, below) in hand as a visual aid (but don’t show the participants).

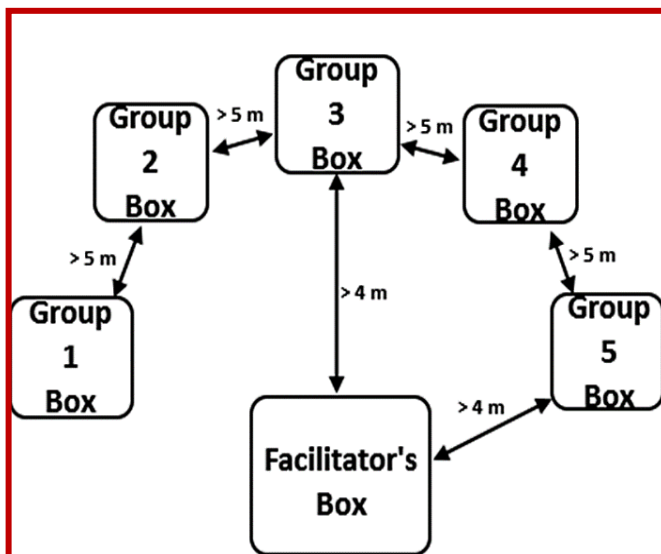
Minimum Required Blocks: (1 set for the facilitator, another set for **each** participating group)

- 1- green token (4th Can Division)
- 1- dark blue token (2nd Can Div.)
- 4- red flag tokens that represent the German strongpoints during the battle. Listed from NW to SE: at 125 m.a.s.l. [**The Pimple**], at 145 m.a.s.l. [**Hill 145/Vimy Monument**], at 130 m.a.s.l. [**La Folie Farm**], and at 135 m.a.s.l. [**Hill 135**]
- 3- black with dark red crosshatch-coloured tokens that represent the German “Vimy Group”. Listed from NW to SE: **16 Bavarian Division, Prussian 79 Div., 1 Bavarian Div.**

Note: coloured paper, Legos, etc. can be substituted for any of the above.

Setup Directions:

1. Print the following image documents: “[Solution Map](#)” (on next page)- for facilitator use and the “[Vimy - Blank Map](#)”- for participant use. (Note: Try to print to as large a size as possible -11 x 17- with a landscape orientation).
Don’t forget that you will need a “[Vimy - Blank Map](#)” for each group participating, but only 1 solution map. (Note: it helps to have a 2nd solution copy to have with you as you check each group’s map).
2. Prepare the Facilitator’s Station by placing the 11 tokens listed above on their respective appropriate marking as shown on the “[Solution Map](#)”. Block this “Solution” Map from the view of the groups.
3. Prepare each group’s “Mapper” station by allocating each station/group with a complete set of the 11 tokens listed above and a “[Vimy - Blank Map](#)”. It’s best to do this after the presentation. Otherwise, the items will distract the participants.



Recommended:

If you can use little plastic soldiers and other more realistic objects, the activity is more engaging to the participants.

Activity Adaptations:

- Red herring objects can be added to each group’s set of objects to throw them off.
- The items can also be moved as time (rounds) progress.
- Rather than a single block, the representative items can be constructed with multiple blocks.

SOLUTION MAP
(For Facilitator Use)

