

LESSON PLAN 1: DESERTION

Description:

In this lesson, students examine primary sources regarding desertion in the 118th Battalion. Working in groups, students are assigned a soldier and are tasked with presenting to the rest of the class who their soldier was, and the circumstances surrounding their desertion. Afterwards, as a class, students will discuss why soldiers deserted, and how the military dealt with desertion.

Recommended Grade Range:

All provinces and territories except Quebec: Grades 10 to 12. Quebec: Secondary 4 and 5

Prerequisites:

This lesson should follow previous discussions and lessons on the First World War.

Objectives:

- Students will learn how to conduct primary source research and present their findings.
- Through their primary source research, students will analyze the reasons soldiers deserted during the First World War, and how the army dealt with the issue.

Estimated Time:

1 class period (2-3 if doing extension activities)

Materials Required:

- Computer lab with internet access.

Lesson:

Engage in a short discussion about what it means to desert. Ask students to speculate what reasons someone might have for choosing to desert. Ask what they would do as a military commander if they were faced with the problem of desertion. How would they punish deserters? How would they keep up morale in order to discourage desertion in the first place? Direct students to go to the [soldier PDFs](#) provided on *Waterloo at War* and have them read the brief description of the [118th Battalion](#) and [Lieut-Col. Lothead](#).

Break students into groups, and assign them a soldier. Direct them to the PDFs containing all files relating to desertion. Instruct them to find the relevant documents relating to their soldier, and from these documents construct a brief account of their soldier's service up to their charges of desertion.

Suggest various techniques (or "tips") for conducting primary source research in a group: splitting the document up among group members, scanning pages to find the documents relating to their soldier, constructing a time-line of events, and communicating with their group members of their findings.

Groups should briefly present their findings to the class. As a class, revisit the questions asked at the beginning of the lesson, based on what actually happened in the 118th Battalion.

Extension Activities:

If more than one period is devoted to this lesson, teachers are encouraged to further explore with their students how historians use primary sources to construct their accounts. At the beginning of the lesson, explain to students the difference between primary and secondary sources, and that students will be working with the former.

Once students have conducted their research, have them create a presentation that narrates their soldier's experience. As a class, discuss students' experiences working with primary sources.

Questions to ask:

- What were difficulties in using primary sources to construct their soldier's story?
- What would they make sure to keep in mind the next time they work with sources?
- What is the importance of primary sources to our understanding of the past?