



A glimpse of hope in WWI – Christmas truce

Christmas Eve 1914 – It all started with German soldiers singing, shouting Christmas Greetings and putting up Christmas decorations. The British and German trenches were so close that soldiers could see and hear each other. Therefore in some places soldiers had agreed not to fight. That is what we now call the **Christmas Truce**, an extraordinary event that paused WWI for a day. It was a day in which soldiers had the possibility to spend time with the “enemy”, to play football, to exchange biscuits or small presents. It was a day of hope and peace in the middle of what Sassoon called “the hell”.

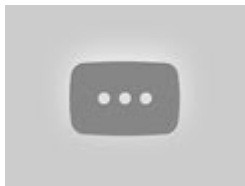
TEACHING WITH MOVIES

Film – Joyeux Noel



[Vai al video](#)

Film – Oh What A Lovely War



Vai al video

Consider how people reacted to the Christmas truce and complete the table.

CHARACTER REACTION

Soldiers

Officers

TEACHING WITH PRIMARY DOCUMENTS

Letters from the front:

- <https://www.france24.com/en/20141224-wwi-letter-describes-christmas-truce>
- <https://www.northumberlandarchives.com/2015/12/22/first-world-war-letters-from-the-front-the-christmas-truce/>

Ask your students to investigate the Christmas Truce from the point of view of the soldiers who wrote home. Let them choose two/three letters and then organise a plenary review

- How would it feel after the truces ended for a soldier to shoot at someone he knew?
- Can common people stop wars?

TEACHING WITH POEMS

The British poet laureate **Carol Ann Duffy** portrays the Christmas Truce in her poem. She investigates life in the trenches, soldiers' feelings and the moments leading up to the incredible event of the Christmas Truce.



Vai al video

Read the poem and complete the exercises

1. The poet takes into consideration every aspect of the war. Highlight with two different colours the negative and positive aspects of those days highlighted in the poem.
2. What is the role of silence in the poem?
3. What does the phrase "sudden bridge from man to man" mean?

TEACHING WITH COMMERCIALS, NEWSPAPERS AND SONGS

SONG

My name is Francis Toliver, I come from Liverpool.
Two years ago the war was waiting for me after school.

To Belgium and to Flanders, to Germany to here,
I fought for King and country I love dear.

'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung.
The frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung.
Our families back in England were toasting us that day,
Their brave and glorious lads so far away.

I was lying with my messmate on the cold and rocky ground,
When across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound.
Says I, "Now listen up, me boys!" each soldier strained to hear,
As one young German voice sang out so clear.

"He's singing bloody well, you know!" my partner says to me.
Soon, one by one, each German voice joined in harmony.
The cannons rested silent, the gas clouds rolled no more,
As Christmas brought us respite from the war.

As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent,
"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" struck up some lads from Kent.
The next they sang was "Stille Nacht," "'Tis 'Silent Night,'" says I,
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky.

"There's someone coming towards us!" the front line sentry cried.
All sights were fixed on one lone figure trudging from their side.
His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shone on that plain so bright,
As he bravely strode unarmed into the night.

Then one by one on either side walked into No Man's Land,
With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand.
We shared some secret brandy and wished each other well,
And in a flare lit soccer game we gave 'em hell.

We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home.
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own.
Young Sanders played his squeezebox and they had a violin,
This curious and unlikely band of men.

Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more.
With sad farewells we each began to settle back to war.
But the question haunted every heart that lived that wondrous night:
"Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"

'Twas Christmas in the trenches where the frost so bitter hung.
The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung.
For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war,
Had been crumbled and were gone forevermore.

My name is Francis Toliver, in Liverpool I dwell,
Each Christmas come since World War I, I've learned its lessons well,
That the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame,
And on each end of the rifle we're the same.

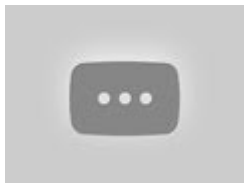


[Vai al video](#)

NEWSPAPER ARTICLE

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2004/dec/19/christmas.lornamartin>

COMMERCIAL



[Vai al video](#)

Divide the class into 3 groups and ask each group to consider the material provided. Let them write a short essay to describe the historical event and its protagonists.