

The Animals' War

History KS3: Lesson 6

Canaries and tunnels in WWI





History KS3

Lesson 6: Canaries and tunnels in WWI



Lesson Plan Duration: one hour

■ Context of Lesson/Key Ideas:

The Centenary of the First World War is an ideal opportunity to look at the role of animals during this time. This lesson looks at the work of the tunnellers and the role played by canaries in subterranean warfare.

■ Aims and Objectives:

- Understand that both sides dug tunnels so that they could explode mines beneath the enemy's trench systems.
- Know that soldiers fought underground – attacking the enemy's trenches and defending their own.
- Know that canaries and mice were used (and often died) in the tunnels to give warning of poisonous gas.

■ National Curriculum coverage:

- KSt3: The First World War. To inspire pupils' curiosity to know more about the past. To equip pupils to ask perceptive questions, think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, and develop perspective and judgement.

■ Resources (links and downloads available from website):

- 1 YouTube clip 'One of our mines is missing!' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxG12ZYm3Q8>
- 2 Sources:
 - a. WWI map of La Boisselle section of the Somme front*
 - b. Aerial photos of The Glory Hole near La Boisselle (1915)
 - c. Photo of Lochnagar crater near La Boisselle (1916)
 - d. Aerial photos of La Boisselle (2011)*
 - e. Map of trench system and The Glory Hole near La Boisselle *
 - f. Diagrams of i) Lochnagar tunnels profile ii) clay kicking and iii) shaft construction
 - g. Photo of tunnel digging
 - h. Photo of French officer listening in tunnel
 - i. Photo of soldier holding canary in cage
 - j. Accounts of Second Lieutenant George Eager, Second Army Mines Rescue School, 1916 and Lieutenant Geoffrey Cassels, 175th Tunnelling Coy, Royal Engineers (RE), 1916
 - k. Photo of Mine Rescue Station
- 3 Resource sheet 1: Questions on sources
- 4 Resource sheet 2: Answers to questions on sources
- 5 PowerPoint 5: *Mines and tunnels*
- 6 Robert Hall, underground with military historian Simon Jones: www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13734877

* Colour copies of Sources 2a, 2d and 2e are available from Animal Aid.



■ Learning tasks:

Starter (5 minutes)

- Show film clip from YouTube: 'One of our mines is missing!'
- Field suggestions as to what happened and what the cause may have been.

Main (45 minutes)

- Form students into teams of three or four. Provide each team with a set of sources (a - k) and Resource sheet 1 (Questions on sources). Ask them to study sources and to answer the questions on the sheet.
- Ask students to arrange evidence in a sequence (timeline) to tell the story of what happens.
- Use PowerPoint 5: *Mines and tunnels*, to assist when giving the answers.

Plenary (10 minutes)

- Play BBC report – Robert Hall interviewing military historian Simon Jones underground:
www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-13734877

Homework/extension

- a) Produce a PowerPoint on the role of canaries in the WWI tunnels.
- or b) Write a week's worth of diary entries for a tunneller in WWI. Include canaries, mines, gas, camouflet.



Resource sheet 1 Questions on Sources

Sources a - e:

1. What are the red and blue lines on the map of La Boisselle (Source a)?
2. Roughly how far apart were the front lines of the opposing armies?
3. What are the features marked by the black circles or star shapes on the map of La Boisselle (Source a)?
4. How were these features formed?
5. Why were they created?
6. Locate where the photo (b) was taken on map (e).

Sources f - g:

7. How were the mines laid or put in position?
8. If you have access to the internet, find out when work on the Lochnagar mine started and when it was detonated by studying the timeline at: www.laboisselleproject.com/timeline/

Source h:

9. What is this French officer doing and why?

Source i - k:

10. What is the animal in the cage (Source i)?
11. Can you find similar animals in cages in the illustration (f ii) and (f iii) and the photo (k)?
12. Why did the men who dug the tunnels take these animals underground?
13. What do you think happened to many of the animals used in the mines?



Resource sheet 2 Answers to Questions on Sources

Sources a - e:

1. What are the red and blue lines on the map of La Boisselle (Source a)?
(British - red - and German - blue - trenches)
2. Roughly how far apart were the front lines of the opposing armies?
(About 50 yds/45 metres)
3. What are the features marked by the black circles or star shapes on the map of La Boisselle (Source a)? **(Mine craters)**
4. How were these features formed? **(Explosive mines)**
5. Why were they created?
(Mines were exploded to blow up the enemy's front line trench before an attack)
6. Locate where the photo (b) was taken on map (e).
(see slide 5 in the Tunnels and mines PowerPoint)

Sources f - g:

7. How were the mines laid or put in position?
(Tunnels were dug beneath no man's land)
8. If you have access to the internet, find out when work on the Lochnagar mine started and when it was detonated by studying the timeline at:
www.laboisselleproject.com/timeline/
(11 November: New tunnel in Lochnagar Street started by 185th Tunnelling Company and 1 July: 7.28am 179th Tunnelling Company detonates four mines: one at Y Sap of 18,144kg, two at the Glory Hole of 3,629kg each and one at Lochnagar of 27,215kg.)

Source h:

9. What is this French officer doing and why?
(Listening for German miners tunnelling to attack the allied tunnel)

Source i - k:

10. What is the animal in the cage? **(Canary)**
11. Can you find similar animals in cages in the illustration (f ii) and (f iii) and the photo (k)?
12. Why did the men who dug the tunnels take animals underground?
(To detect dangerous gas)
13. What do you think happened to many of the animals used in the mines?
(Many died as a result of being poisoned)