

# Women and Leisure During the First World War

EDUCATION PACK





# Contents

Women and Leisure During the First World War	03
Lesson Plan 1: Introductory Exercises	04
Lesson Plan 2: Songs from the First World War	06
Lesson Plan 3: Vesta Tilley	08
Lesson Plan 4: Ruth Dodds	10
Lesson Plan 5: Bella Reay	12
Credits	14

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# Women and Leisure During the First World War

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**In summer 2016 theatre company Cap-a-Pie began working on a project for Key Stage 2 pupils that shared stories of what North East women were doing during the First World War.**

Cap-a-Pie worked with Dr Stacy Gillis, Dr Emma Short, and Dr Paul Wright (all from Newcastle University) who were working on a project, funded by the AHRC's "Living Legacies 1914-1918" Centre, and with volunteer citizen researchers Polly Hunt and Janet Longbottom.

Stacy, Emma and Paul had been working on a project about women and leisure during the First World War. This project involved training local groups in how to use archives to uncover forgotten stories and histories. Polly and Janet were part of this training cohort and had been researching in local archives: both had an amazing account of fascinating and surprising stories that they unearthed.

Working with Polly and Janet, Cap-a-Pie has put together a programme for Key Stage 2 pupils to learn, through theatre and drama, what women were doing during the First World War.

## How to Use this Pack

Cap-a-Pie delivered this programme in 2016 and 2017 to Year 3 classes at St Lawrence RC Primary School and Hotspur Primary in East Newcastle. All the activities in this pack have been thoroughly "road tested" by teachers and pupils. The programme is aimed at Year 3 pupils but with some re-working could be used with other Key Stage 2 classes.

Lesson Plans 1 and 2 are introductory activities that you should do with your class. These are followed by three lesson plans that each focus on a different woman who was alive during the First World War. You can pick and choose to do as many of these as you'd like.

Cap-a-Pie would love to hear from you if you have any questions or would like to know more. It would be great to hear any feedback. Please get in touch with Cap-a-Pie at [admin@cap-a-pie.co.uk](mailto:admin@cap-a-pie.co.uk).



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# Lesson Plan 1: Introductory Exercises

## The First World War

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If you haven't covered it already in class, it may be a good idea to give your pupils some back-ground to the First World War in general: the origins, the countries involved, propaganda, fighting conditions and end of hostilities.

There are some great resources for teaching the First World War available. Here's a link to the BBC's primary school material;

[www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/0/ww1)

You can book a Box of Delights from Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. The boxes contain artefacts from the First World War. There is a box for the Front Line and the Home Front.

[twamschools.org.uk/boxes-of-delight](http://twamschools.org.uk/boxes-of-delight)

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### Pierrot Groups

To begin thinking about what women were doing during the First World War your class is going to become a Pierrot troupe.

Pierrot (pronounced: Pea-air-oh) troupes were concert parties or groups of entertainers popular in Britain during the first half of the 20th century. Pierrot troupes put on travelling shows of songs and comedy, often at the seaside.

During the First World War these groups would sometimes perform to raise money for soldiers

at the front. There were even Pierrot troupes in the British Army. The war was a difficult time for all involved and Pierrot troupes were a small way to lift the spirits of people during this period.

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### Lucy Severs

During her research Janet interviewed a local woman about her mother's experience of being in a Pierrot troupe.

Local ex-head teacher, Lucy Severs, who died in 2017 aged 98, spoke to Janet about her mother's wartime years on Tyneside. Kathleen Alexander, Lucy's mother, moved from the pottery-making factory to munitions-manufacturing and enjoyed her new-found freedom to have 'nights out with the girls' at the local variety theatres and cinemas. It was at one such event that she met her future husband, who was killed at the Front a few months before the war ended.

Kathleen, Lucy Severs' mother started a volunteer Pierrot troupe with friends and family. The troupe went to local seaside towns (often changing into costume on the train!) to help raise funds for soldiers coming back from the front. St Dunstan's charity, later to become the British Legion, operated all over the region organising events to raise funds for charitable reasons such as 'sticks for blind soldiers'.

Kathleen's troupe performed a mixture of songs, juggling, story-telling and dancing. It was obviously an important part of her young adulthood and formed her main hobby after the war ended.

Lucy Severs remembered some of the songs her mother sang to her from the war years: 'The Boers have got my daddy', from the recent South African Boer War, and 'It's a long way to Tipperary'.

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### Activity 1: Class Discussion

Class discussion led by the teacher.

1. Ask your pupils what they do to make themselves happy during a difficult time. And as a follow-up question, what do they do for fun?
2. What do they think that people would do for fun 100 years ago? Some examples include things like reading, playing hopscotch, marbles, hula-hooping, follow the leader, and hobby-horses.

After this, introduce the idea of the Pierrot troupe as something that would bring some pleasure and show some pictures of Pierrot's from the era.

Find some images by searching online for Pierrot troupe.

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### Activity 2: Becoming a Pierrot Group

Pupils begin to create their own Pierrot troupe.

1. How does your Pierrot troupe bow as it receives applause from the audience? Take a few suggestions and get pupils to come and perform their bow at the front of the class. Class vote or teacher chooses the winner. All pupils learn the winning bow and practice bowing together.

2. A real Pierrot troupe from 100 years ago called themselves 'A gang that sang'. Pupils work in pairs to come up with some rhyming slogans. The last syllable of Pierrot (rhymes with 'oh') is a good place to find a rhyme. Here's an example:

*"Year 3 Pierrot  
We go to and fro!"*

3. Are there any other signatures that the group has such as how they start and end their shows, a special handshake, and unique name?
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### Activity 3: Making Costumes

Pierrot troupes were known for their costumes that included ruffles around their necks, pointy hats or skullcaps and black pom-poms. Get your pupils to use cardboard and wool to make their own black pom-poms as part of their Pierrot costumes.

Here's a link to making pom-poms in various ways;

[blog.hobbycraft.co.uk/how-to-make-pom-poms](http://blog.hobbycraft.co.uk/how-to-make-pom-poms)

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### Activity 4: Class Discussion

When the First World War began there was much excitement and men signed up to fight in their droves, thinking the war would be fun and that they 'would be home by Christmas'. But the reality of war was very different to what they first thought.

How would the pupils feel if they were involved in a war?

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# Lesson Plan 2: Songs from the First World War

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There are many famous songs from the First World War. These were often uplifting songs that even served as pieces of propaganda for soldiers and those on the Home Front.

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## Activity 1: Warm Ups

### Mouth Aerobics

Get your pupils to

- pretend to chew gum
- pretend to suck a lemon
- make horse lips
- make kisses
- make a scary face
- make puffer fish cheeks
- twitch their noses like rabbits

Get your pupils to make the sounds 'ha-ffu-chi' whilst breathing out slowly and then quickly.

### Rubber Chicken

Get your pupils to stand in a circle and shake their right arm, then left arm, then right leg and left leg into the circle. First to the count of 8, then 4, then 2, then 1. As they shake, they count. It also works counting backwards, but is trickier!

## Activity 2: Learning Songs from the First World War

### Starting a Song

1. You might sing the first phrase yourself to show your pupils the pitch and the starting words. Or, one of the pupils can play the starting note on a chime bar, glockenspiel, keyboard etc.
2. You might count 1,2,3,4 at the pitch of the starting note. Most songs will fit this model, but some need to be counted in 1,2,3 and then the 'pick-up' note.
3. It's important to get the general range of a song within your pupil's register. As a general rule it helps to suggest getting louder as you sing higher and quieter as you sing lower.

To prepare your pupils to sing, remind them of the three 'S's - **Silence**, **Stillness** and **Smiles**.

To the right is a selection of songs (choruses only) with links to YouTube clips of the songs if you are unfamiliar with the tunes. Pupils can choose actions to bring the songs to life and to help them to remember the words.

**“Pack up your Troubles”**

*Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,  
And smile, smile, smile!*

*While you’ve a Lucifer to light your fag,  
Smile, boys, that’s the style.*

*What’s the use of worrying?*

*It never was worthwhile.*

*So, pack up your troubles in your old kit bag,  
And smile, smile, smile!*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXC51Vv3YIE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXC51Vv3YIE)

**“Your King and Country Wants You”**

*Oh! we don’t want to lose you  
but we think you ought to go.*

*For your King and your Country  
both need you so.*

*We shall want you and miss you,*

*But with all our might and main,*

*We shall cheer you, thank you, kiss you,*

*When you come back again.*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTJXwOs2\\_bA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTJXwOs2_bA)

**“Keep the Home Fires Burning”**

*Keep the Home Fires burning*

*While your hearts are yearning,*

*Though your lads are far away  
they dream of home.*

*There’s a silver lining,  
through the dark clouds shining,*

*Turn the dark cloud inside out,  
‘till the boys come home.*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEzwTPPHx50](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEzwTPPHx50)

**“It’s a Long Way to Tipperary”**

*It’s a long way to Tipperary,*

*It’s a long way to go.*

*It’s a long way to little Mary*

*To the sweetest girl I know!*

*Goodbye, Piccadilly,*

*Farewell, Leicester Square!*

*It’s a long long way to Tipperary,*

*But my heart’s right there.*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPk21COWpkg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cPk21COWpkg)

**“Goodbye-ee”**

*Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,*

*Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee,*

*Though it’s hard to part, I know,*

*I’ll be tickled to death to go.*

*Don’t cry-ee, don’t sigh-ee,*

*There’s a silver lining in the sky-ee,*

*Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,*

*Nah-poo, toodle-oo, Goodbye-ee.*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8aCnmBVtQ4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e8aCnmBVtQ4)



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# Lesson Plan 3: Vesta Tilley

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**The cinema and the music hall were an important part of women's leisure time during the First World War. Through working in factories, delivering coal, driving trams and performing other typically male-dominated roles, women had disposable income and freedoms they didn't have before.**

Vesta Tilley was an English music hall performer who became one of the most famous male impersonators of her era. While not born and raised in the North East, she laid the foundation stone for the Sunderland Empire in 1906 and there is now a cafe located opposite the theatre named after her. Vesta became so successful at recruiting men to the forces that she had a platoon named after her!

Exploring the world of Vesta Tilley allows us to look at the world of the music hall as well as the idea of performers swapping genders in the theatre.

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## **Activity 1: Introducing Vesta Tilley**

Show your pupils pictures of Vesta Tilley. Without knowing whom the pictures are of, can your pupils tell that the person dressed 'as a woman' is the same as the person dressed 'as a man'?

There are many pictures of Vesta Tilley in feminine dress (a feminine persona is something she cultivated off-stage to mark a

contrast between her and the male characters that she played). Showing these to the pupils alongside pictures of her impersonating men gives you an idea of how seriously she took her craft.

The idea of gender swapping on-stage can also be introduced through pictures of contemporary pantomime dames with whom the pupils may be familiar.

If you Google Vesta Tilley you can find lots of pictures of her to show your class.

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## **Activity 2: Crossing Differently**

This exercise is about crossing the room differently and focuses on the pupils changing their physicality as they move. For example, if a pupil was asked to cross 'happily' they might move with a big smile on their face and a spring in their step until they reached the line on the other side.

The main thing for the pupils to think about with 'Crossing Differently' is how do these different provocations change how I move my body?

This is especially important when pupils are 'changing gender' - by all accounts Vesta Tilley took the authenticity of her performance very seriously and committed to her portrayals when impersonating a man. Moving in a way that is

different to their own may give the pupils an idea of the skill required for Vesta Tilley to be convincing as her different characters.

Divide the class into two with one line of pupils facing the other on opposite sides of the room.

To begin with give the pupils fairly simple provocations in the form of emotions such as those listed below.

- Happy
- Sad
- Confused
- Angry

Then move into the world of the UK in the 1910s. What would someone look like crossing the room as if they were:

- going to the theatre (pupils may need some background information here, such as: women often had fans in their hands, men had canes, women might have to lift their long skirts up to avoid muddy puddles, men might hold women's elbows to escort them, men might tip their hats politely, etc).
- or hunting for autographs from people as famous as Vesta Tilley?

Let's look at swapping genders in performance. Nowadays, gender can be seen as something relatively fluid. During the First World War there were very rigid ideas around gender and the following provocations are to be explored in the context of 100 years ago. Ask both male and female pupils to cross the room as

- a man
- a woman

Vesta Tilley had many different male personas on-stage. Get your pupils to cross as Vesta Tilley playing

- a soldier
- someone from the upper classes

### Activity 3: Class Discussion

Tell your pupils about how men were convinced to sign up to fight by Vesta Tilley and other women.

Vesta Tilley famously recruited many young men during one performance. After singing 'Your King and Country Want You' at the Palace Theatre in Clayton, Miss Tilley left the stage and walked among the audience, gathering star-struck young men as she went who enlisted on the spot.

Other women also shamed young men into enlisting. If they knew of a young man who was able to serve but had not yet signed up they would approach him and give him a white feather as a symbol of his cowardice.

You could show your pupils a white feather to provoke a discussion around the question "If you don't want to be involved in a war, does that make you coward?"



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# Lesson Plan 4:

## Ruth Dodds

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**With a large proportion of young men overseas and a war to fight, it was left to women to fill the gap in the munitions factories to make bombs, guns and ammunition.**

A job in a munitions factory brought mixed fortunes. Disposable income, camaraderie with fellow workers and new responsibilities came with long shifts, uncomfortable and physically demanding working conditions and the dangers associated with working with explosive materials and machines.

The author and playwright Ruth Dodds spent some time working in Armstrong's Munitions Factory during the First World War. We know about her life as she wrote a diary including her time at Armstrong's and her experience of the First World War.

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### Activity 1: Tableau

In groups of four or five, pupils will make tableaux/freeze-frames to represent the things that women were doing during the First World War. Even though there was much change to the paid work that women were engaged in, the usual jobs of home making still needed to be done and the following provocations reflect what women were doing in the home and at work:

- Doing the washing
- Driving trams
- Delivering coal

- Farming the land
- Working in factories.

Get your pupils to show their tableaux to the rest of the class. Ask the audience what they see in the freeze-frame and then ask one of the performers to explain what everyone is representing.

If you have time, it can be a good idea to ask each group to add movement and sound, such as dialogue and sound effects, to their tableau.

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### Activity 2: Machines

Machines is an improvisation game where participants make machines in groups using their bodies and voices.

Sit your pupils on the floor with a clear stage area in front of them. Start them off with a basic provocation such as 'Happiness'.

1. Ask one pupil to come forward to the stage area and create a short repeatable action that represents happiness. One example could be that they repeat giving a thumbs-up and smiling. Make sure that what they end up doing is something that can be repeated over and over again. Once you are happy with what they have created, invite them to make a sound to accompany their action. If it is the thumbs-up and smiling action it could be saying 'yes' or something more abstract.

2. Invite another pupil to join the Happiness Machine. They must create their own repeatable action and sound that is different to the first person's action but complements what came before.
3. Invite three more pupils to join the machine so there is five pupils in total. Think about whether the machine has different levels. Ideally the machine should look connected in some way so it is not just five disparate performers.

Once you have completed that machine, clear the stage and give another provocation. Once again, feel free to give a simple provocation (sadness, for example) and make a machine of that.

After the group is comfortable with this format, move into First World War machines:

- Soldier machine
- War machine

And finally, make a literal First World War munitions machine:

- Bomb machine
- Bullet machine
- Gun machine

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### Activity 3: Sculpture Garden

A positive aspect of working in the factories for many women was the camaraderie and friendship that developed between workers. Ruth Dodds wrote about her friendship with fellow factory worker Annie Peacock.

1. To explore what friendship means to the pupils, get them into groups of three. One person will be the sculptor and the other two will be the clay.
2. The sculptor will mould their clay into a piece of art that represents friendship. This

is a silent exercise so pupils have to mould their clay without any explanation to their clay about what they want to make.

3. If they wish the facial expression to change, rather than moving it around themselves, they simply display the expression they want with their own face and the clay will then mirror that.

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### Activity 4: Class Discussion

Working in factories is a great example of something thought to be a job only for men before the First World War that then women took over doing.

One hundred years ago, joining the army as a soldier was something women were not allowed to do. While women have served in the British Military for some time, it is only recently that they have been able to fight in close combat roles.

Get your pupils to discuss the question "Women were not allowed to fight as soldiers in the First World War, but should they have been allowed?"



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# Lesson Plan 5: Bella Reay

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**During the First World War so many of the men were away fighting that women began to take over their roles, both in the workplace and in their leisure activities.**

With no men to play football the competitive leagues were suspended but there were many amateur matches in order to raise morale, to entertain and to raise money for those at the front. Women working in factories formed teams. Women working in ammunition factories were called munitionettes and this term was used to describe their football teams as well!

Probably the best team in the North-East was the Blyth Spartans and their star player was undoubtedly Bella Reay (rhymes with 'day') a centre-forward. In 1917 The Spartans won the Munitionettes Cup with Bella scoring four goals in the final that was held in Middlesborough. Those four goals were part of the 133 that she scored in just one 30-game season. A year later she played for England against Scotland at St James Park.

The Blyth Spartans disbanded in 1919. After the war ended some women's football teams continued until 1921 when the FA banned women's teams from using their pitches.

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## **Activity 1: Guess the Goals Quiz**

Today, the top strikers in the Premier League

typically score between 20 and 30 goals per 39-game season; in the Women's Super League it's between 8 and 15 goals per 18-game season.

Going back 5 years, ask your pupils to guess how many goals the Premier League's and Women's Super League's top marksmen and markswomen scored in each season:

2012/13 - Robin Van Persie (26)

Kim Little (11)

2013/14 - Luis Suarez (31)

Natasha Dowie (13)

2014/15 - Sergio Aguero (26)

Karen Carney (8)

2015/16 - Harry Kane (25)

Beth Mead (12)

2016/17 - Harry Kane (29)

Eniola Aluko (9)

Then ask them to guess how many goals Bella Reay scored in the 1917 season (133).

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## **Activity 2: Soundscapes**

This exercise gets your pupils to imagine what the factory and the football pitch would have sounded like by creating soundscapes as a group to evoke those two environments. As a warm-up, the pupils will create a storm in the following ways:

- Rub hands together (wind)
- Tap one finger on palm (first raindrops)
- Tap four fingers (more raindrops)
- Clapping (more intense rain)
- Slapping thighs (thunder)

Work your way through the storm from the wind, all the way up to the thunder and then back down again.

For the factory and the football stadium, ask the pupils what they think could be possible sounds emanating from those spaces. When an idea is offered, ask the group to repeat the sound so you have a chorus. Once you have 5 or 6 of those sounds, move through them one-by-one in a similar way to the storm. After that, you can create an orchestra of the sounds, having multiple sounds going at the same time from different groups of pupils, bringing the volume up and down as you see fit.

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**Activity 3: Write your own Football Chants**

Pupils may be familiar with football chants from their local football team. In this exercise they will be writing new ones that will be in direct support of Bella Reay and her team.

The following can be taught to the pupils before asking them to write their own.

(to the tune of 'Jingle Bells')

*“Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way  
Oh what fun it is to see, the brilliant Bella  
Reay, hey!”*

(to the tune of 'Farmer in the dell')

*“Bella won the cup, Bella won the cup  
Hi-ho the derry-o  
Bella won the cup”*

This is a replica of the clapping rhythm teacher often use in class that pupils echo back:

*“Clap clap clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap  
clap clap”* but instead of the last two claps the pupils chant *‘Bella!’* so it will sound like:

*“Clap clap clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap  
Bella!”*

There are a number of ways that pupils can write their own chants:

- Writing down one short line about Bella Reay that will then be repeated in the same rhythm a certain amount of times:

e.g. *“Bella is amazing, Bella is amazing,  
Bella is amazing...”*

- Write two lines about Bella Reay and her team that rhyme and that can be repeated several times with the same rhythm.

e.g. *we love Bella Reay  
she scores goals everyday*

- A more advanced version is similar to the 'Jingle Bells' chant, i.e. thinking of a well-known song such as a Christmas carol and changing the lyrics to fit into an appropriate football chant.

Although 'Reay' rhymes with many different things, other words like 'Bella', 'football', 'Blyth' and 'striker' could be used to rhyme with in the chants.

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**Activity 4: Class Discussion**

Without the First World War, women playing organised football, working in factories and doing other typically male-dominated tasks may not have happened.

With that said, can war have any positives?

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We hope you enjoyed using this education pack. If you'd like to know more about Cap-a-Pie's work please get in touch.

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This Education Pack has been created by Brad McCormick and Katy Vanden for Cap-a-Pie with Polly Hunt and Janet Longbottom.

Photographs by Daniel Forth unless stated otherwise.

Cap-a-Pie would like to thank the following people and organisations: Citizen researchers - Polly Hunt, Janet Longbottom; Class teachers - Jack Gardner, Wendy Dowling and Sam Webster and all at Hotspur and St Lawrence RC Primaries; Researchers from Newcastle University - Dr Stacy Gillis, Dr Emma Short, Dr Paul Wright.



Kindly funded and supported by:

