

WAR STORIES

As with so much of our work at Netherton Moss, the impetus for our whole school performance comes from the children, their interests and from what is going on in the wider world. In a period where the news bulletins were dominated by the commemorations to mark the centenary of the First World War, the children were keen to understand more about these historic and tragic events, and we wanted them to make the link between the pageantry of these national commemorations and the grainy images of the past and we therefore agreed to make this the focus for our whole school topic.



A visit to the Imperial War Museum in Salford was the perfect way in which to launch the topic that would eventually lead to our performance. Tickets in hand we all went off for our day at the museum. With so much to see and do the children were exposed to the sights and sounds of trench warfare, the uniforms, the kit, the food and the rats even the smell of a mustard gas attack. Part of the exhibition was devoted to winners of the

Victoria Cross in particular those from the Northwest. The children found the medals themselves very interesting and the citations that described the courage shown both moving and fascinating. It was one of the children who first spotted that one of the recipients was local to our school. A later visit to an exhibition at our local Library gave us all the information we needed about Lance Sergeant Arthur Evans VC DCM. His story and that of so many more brave individuals was to inspire our performance.



With such rich sources of information and first-hand experiences the scriptwriters got to work. The class who wrote the script made several more trips to the local library and war memorial in order to build a picture of Arthur Evans and his life during the war. One of their most important tasks was to construct a narrative that was serious yet had moments of humour and was commemorative and respectful in its tone. At the whole school level the challenge for the teachers was to find a way for children of all ages to access such challenging historic events. As with much of our work in school, good literature was to provide the key to unlocking the past. Each year group selected a series of story books through which the children could explore the different aspects of the war at their own level. We used the school curriculum to investigate the historical events of the war and its geographical consequences.



All of this work took place against the backdrop of the many national commemorations and events. The installation of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London inspired some of the artwork that decorated the performance space. Exhibitions of the work of War Artists and Photographers and the profiles of the War Poets as they captured the horror of war enabled the children to respond to their learning through a range of artistic media and all of this formed part of our final performance. The Football Association asked that all schools play a commemorative football match in the week of the 14th December and this too would become an essential feature of our story.



The driving force behind our arts performance is always participation, everyone must be involved, no question. From Reception Class to Year 6 all the children have a role. The older children write every word of the original script and each year group then makes a contribution to the overall performance, through drama, dance and music. Each of these elements is woven together by the Drama Club who used the script to link together all of our work.

Our final performance, *War Stories* saw a group of children in the present day as they discovered a lost box of letters, postcards and photographs sent home from the front by a great-grandparent. The content of each letter and card takes the children back and reveals a different aspect of life during the war. From the pressure of recruitment to the life of women in the munitions works, the paintings of the War Artist Paul Nash to the story of our local VC recipient, the horror of life in the trenches as seen through the eyes of the War poets, to the nurses of the field hospitals and the peace of the Christmas Truce and its famous football match. The conclusion to the performance was far more poignant than joyful as the soldiers of the football field joined those from the battlefield as they lay down amidst a sea of our youngest children dressed as poppies!



Each class produced a range of stunning artwork linked to the performance in order to decorate the auditorium; every child in the school produced a poppy that formed a sea of red that stretched right the way around the hall. Silhouettes of men in the trenches, recruiting posters, tombstones and work inspired by the War Artists all provided a thoughtful backdrop for our performance. The stage space itself was prepared by the stagecraft team who made the set, props and projected images; they also controlled the sound, lighting and special effects. Last but not least the publicity team who designed and produced the posters, programmes and tickets to ensure that our finished work was enjoyed by a capacity crowd!



The footnote to this remarkable piece of whole school collaboration is that it received regional recognition when it won *The Educate Award* for 'Outstanding Arts in a Primary School' and was runner up for the 'Wow Recognition Award'



Everyone in school made their own poppy to stretch around our Performance space

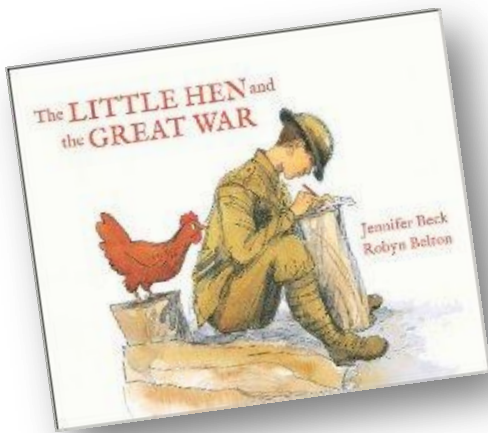




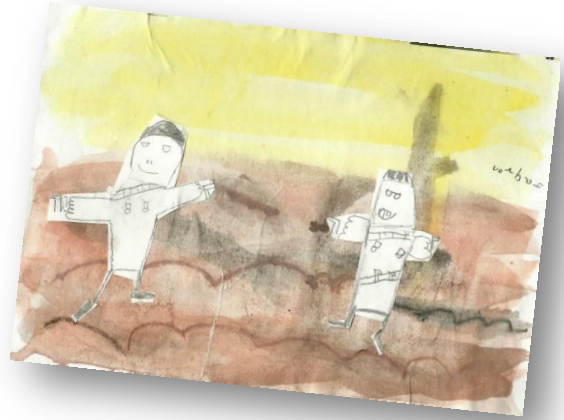
Infant Artwork



Lower Junior Artwork



Jazz Class loved the art work in this book and wanted to try and create their own versions using similar styles, water colour washes and water colour pencil detail.



Drawing around a pupil for one of our big soldiers.



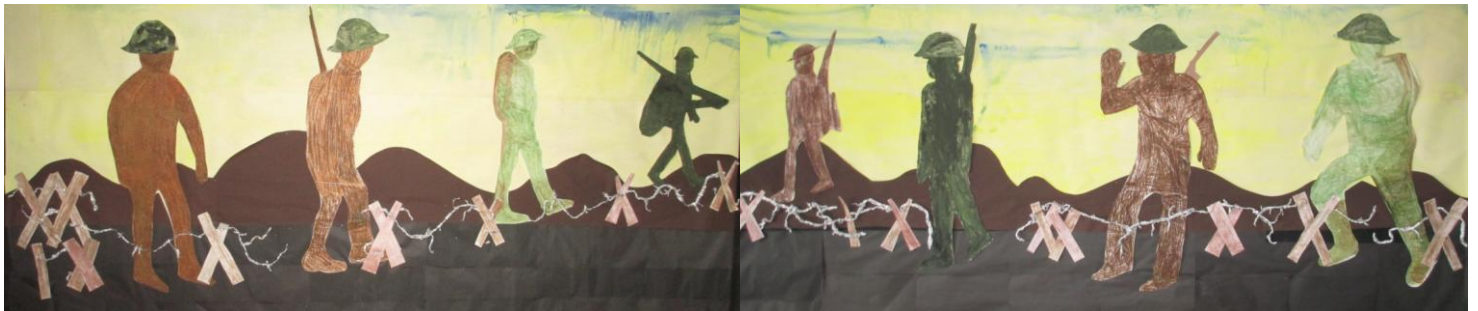
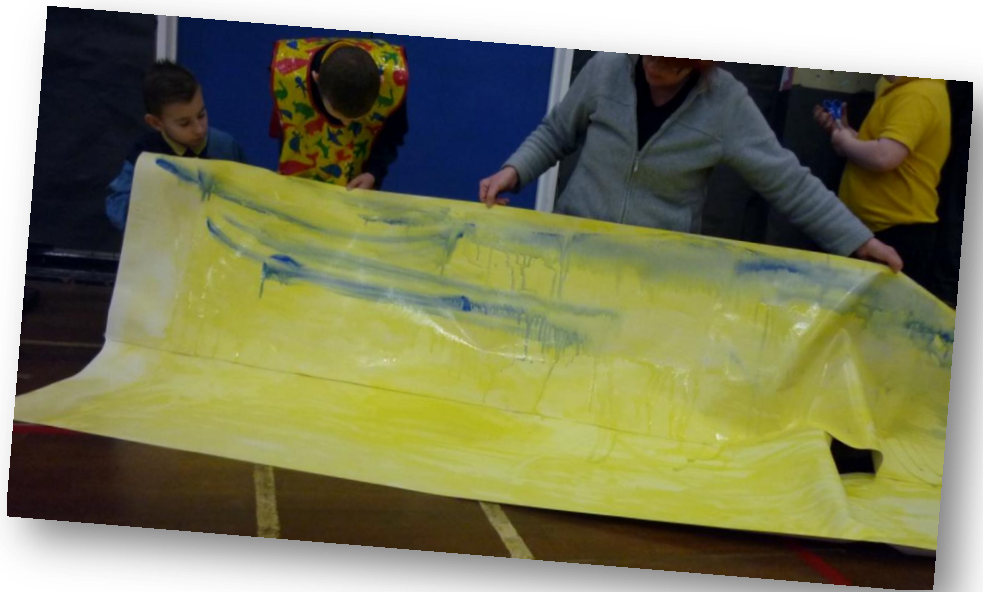
We had used washes on a small scale but on a big scale, we needed big decorators paint brushes!





A small scale trial

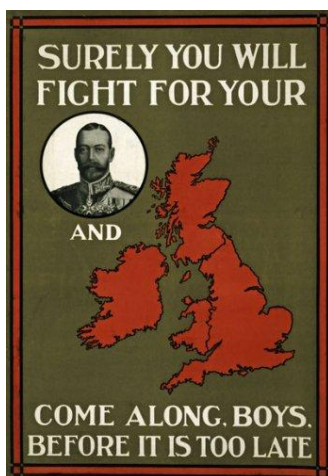
Keep adding lots of blue watercolour, hold it up and watch the dribbles!



The life-sized finished version provides the perfect backdrop to No Man's Land

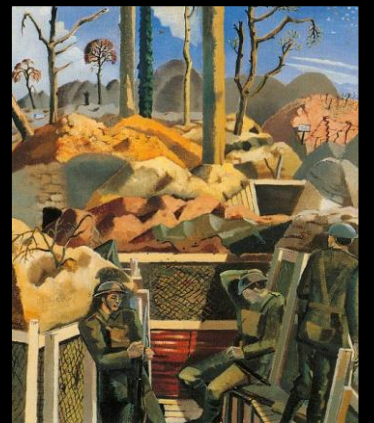
Year 5 Artwork

Children in Year 5 looked at the persuasive strategies used to recruit young men for the front line. They wanted to try and recreate this as part of their performance.





Year 6 artwork
inspired
by the War Artist
John Nash



Great literature that helped to inspired our learning

