



Ten of the Best: Books that help introduce children to the First World War

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203 [2]

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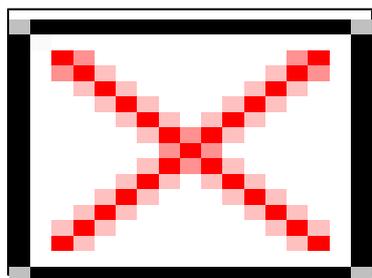
Books about World War One.

As the remembrance events planned to mark the centenary of the beginning of the first world war in 2014 draw nearer, teachers will be looking for helpful books. Margaret Mallett chooses ten of the best.

War is a difficult subject to broach with the under eights. But it is a sad, everyday reality for many children across the world and we cannot hide distressing realities from the young when they ask and question. My list includes some traditional information books that aim to explain to young readers the unfolding story of the events from 1914- 1918. But many of my chosen books are information stories which tell powerfully of the experience of individuals living through the war at home or in the trenches . For me, the best books emphasize, through writing and illustrations, our shared humanity even with those who are in conflict with us.?

War Game: Village Green to No-man's-land

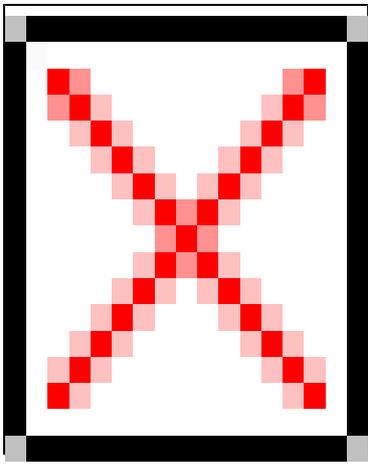
Michael Foreman, Pavilion, 9781843650898, 96pp, £9.99 pbk



An involving written text and dramatic watercolours combine to tell of a remarkable event from the point of view of young Will and his friends who have recently arrived at the front. On Christmas Day 1914 soldiers on some parts of the Western Front came out of their trenches into no-man's land between the battle lines. Soldiers from each side exchanged small gifts and played football. Alas conflict was resumed as soon as the day was over but men on each side had met each other in a friendly and human manner. (7+)

Archie's War: My Scrapbook of World War 1, 1914-1918

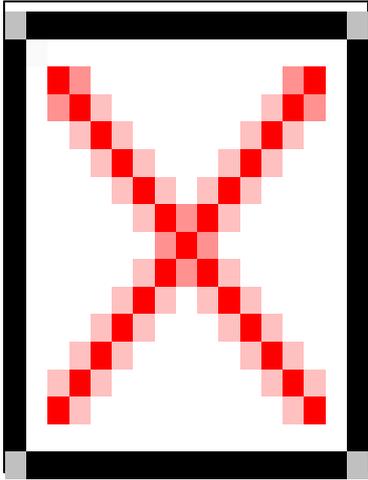
Marcia Williams, Walker Books, 978406304275, 48pp, £7.99 pbk



This book has enormous appeal for young readers not least because the narrator is a child living through the war. Archie confides his personal response to all that happens in his daily life in his scrapbook. Each page is alive with comic strip, doodles, drawings, mementoes, photographs and letters. The creator of the book shows that comic strip can communicate sad events and feelings as well as upbeat and amusing ones. It has the power to inspire a creative response through writing, art work and drama. (8+)

Charlie's War Illustrated: Remembering World War One

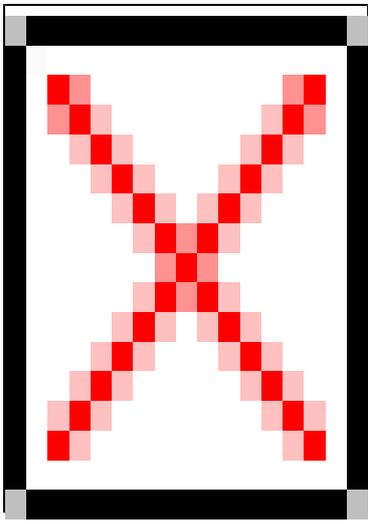
Mick Manning and Brita Granstrom, Franklin Watts, 9781445110332, 32pp, £11.99 hbk



Presented as the reminiscences of Mick Manning's grandfather , this sensitive account has a conversational tone. A moving illustration shows English soldiers passing a column of German prisoners as they travel along a French country lane. A soldier who knows a little German hears a prisoner say he is missing his children. 'The Germans don't look like monsters to me. They're just like us!' concludes another. The art work in the book is varied, informative and perfectly complements the written text. The last double spread shows grandfather and grandson looking at a war memorial against a background of soldiers reciting John McCrae's poem 'In Flanders fields the poppies blow'. This would be a good starting point for discussing with children why the poppy was chosen as the emblem of Remembrance . For imaginative suggestions about children's activities, teachers and children would find a visit to the War Memorials Trust website helpful: www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/ [3]">www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org [4] (8+)

The 1910s Scrapbook: The Decade of the Great War

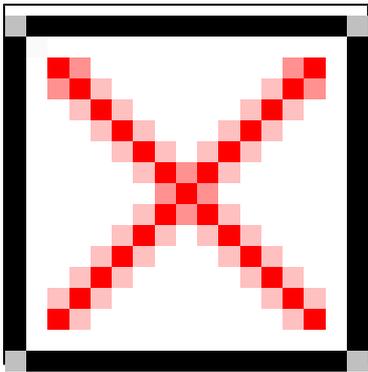
Robert Opie, Pi Global Publishing Limited, 9780954795474, 62pp, £14.95 hbk



The rich and colourful visual information here helps contextualise the events of the war. Pictures of life at the front and at home provide inspiration for reflection and discussion. Adult support and explanation would be needed, particularly for younger primary school children. (8+)

The Best Christmas Present in The World

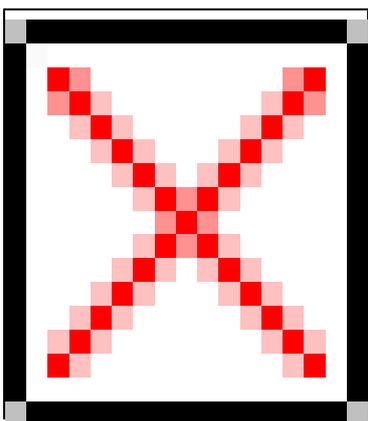
Michael Morpurgo and Michael Foreman (ill), Egmont Books, 9781405215183, 48pp, £5.99 hbk.



A young soldier writes a letter to his wife, Connie, telling her about the Christmas truce of 1914. She does not receive it and Jim's letter is found years later in the hidden drawer of an antique desk. The moving written text and involving illustrations help young readers empathise with the characters and rejoice in their meeting with Connie, now aged 101 years, in a nursing home (8+)

One Boy's War

Lynn Huggins-Cooper & Ian Benfold Haywood (ill.), Frances Lincoln Children's Books, 9781847801265, 32pp, £6.99 pbk

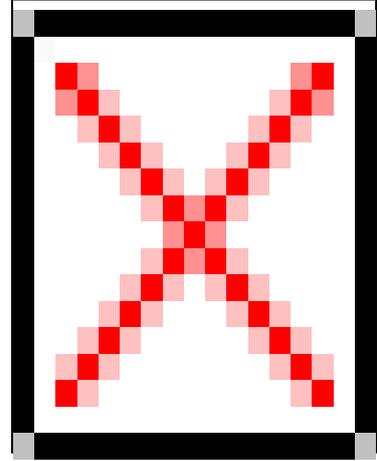


'Everywhere I go I see flags and recruiting stations. It's like they're calling to me'. Sydney, living in County Durham, is taken up by the excitement of the recruitment campaign and goes to war at only sixteen years old. Written in the first

person, this story is hugely involving. The pictures of contemporary furniture, kitchen utensils and clothes help bring to life for young learners what it was like at this time. The contrast between Sydney's enthusiasm to play his part in the war and the reality of living in the horrendous rat-ridden trenches is stark. This is an emotional and terribly sad story which may be too bleak for some young readers. There is more about the real person, Sydney Dobson, on whom the story is based, at www.oneboyswar.co.uk/ [3]">www.oneboyswar.co.uk [5] (9+)

Brothers at War: A First World War Family History

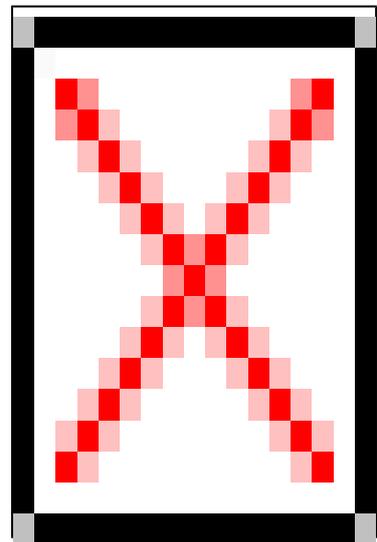
Sarah Ridley, Franklin Watts, 9781445108704, 32pp, £7.99 pbk



Letters and a prisoner of war's diary help the author and her daughter, Eliza, to learn about how four of their male ancestors experienced the war. Interesting details about the brothers' lives during a country childhood and then boarding school remind us that soldiers are people with lives and relationships quite apart from their role as fighting men. (9+)

The First World War

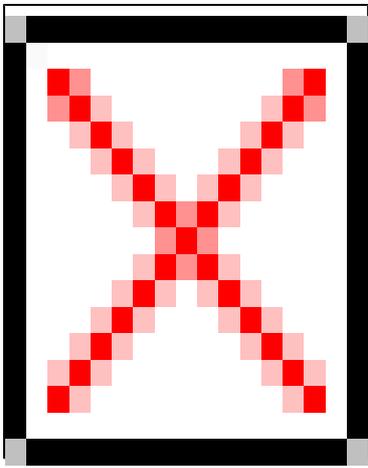
Conrad Mason, (Usborne Young Reading Series 3), Usborne Publishing Ltd. 9781409508106, 64pp, £4.99 hbk.



The pain and suffering war involves comes over clearly, and often movingly. The sequence of events is set out in short chapters and supported by annotated photographs and maps. Snippets of pertinent dialogue add interest. It is hard to imagine a better introduction to this challenging topic for the intended age group. Good value for money too. (9+)

The Usborne Introduction to the First World War

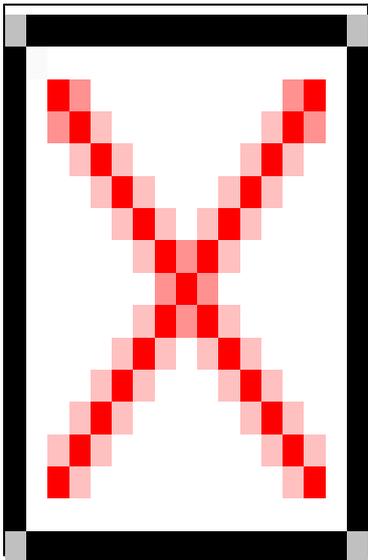
Ruth Brocklehurst and Henry Brook, Usborne, 9780746076552, 128pp, £12.99 hbk.



Main events on the front line and topics like 'On the Home Front' and 'Remembrance' are covered in short, well illustrated chapters in this book written in association with the Imperial War Museum- www.iwm.org/ [3]">www.iwm.org [6] . Additional information is available at www.usborne-quicklinks.com/ [3]">www.usborne-quicklinks.com [7] , keywords-History of Britain- then click on First World War. (9+)

War Horse

Michael Morpurgo, Egmont Books, 9781405226660, 192pp, £6.99 pbk.



This heart rending story about the experiences of a young farm horse, Joey, requisitioned by the army to serve on the western front shows the connection there can be between an animal and a human being. There are bleak as well as joyful moments. While I would hesitate to take children under 11 years to the film or play, many older primary school children enjoy listening to the book read aloud or manage to read it themselves. (There is an audio CD, an abridged version of the story, read by Dan Stevens (2010) Harper Collins, 9780007357444). (9+)

Margaret Mallett is a team editor of **English 4-11**, the primary journal of the English Association.

Page Number:

14

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