

Suits card sort

Life in the Trenches

This revision activity works best if you do it with a friend, and talk about it as you do it.

The cards on the page following represent 36 different features of trench warfare.

Print off and cut out the cards. Then, in discussion with others, sort them into four piles:

- ♣ — clubs (those that involved fear, discomfort, violence or death)
- ♥ — hearts (those that involved love or sex)
- ♠ — spades (those that involved jobs and activities)
- ♦ — diamonds (those that involved treats or fun)

When you have finished, sort the cards again, this time into those that affected:

everyone — significant numbers of soldiers — some soldiers — hardly anyone

There are no right or wrong answers; you need to discuss and argue your way to a consensus. Key in your discussion will be:

- *how* it affected soldiers' lives
- *how much* of an impact it had on soldiers' lives

When you have finished, discuss these three key questions:

1. How do you measure the 'impact' of a situation on someone's life?
2. Which development in your opinion had the greatest effect on soldiers in the trenches?
3. How dreadful, overall, was life in the trenches?

Soldiers sheltered from the artillery in underground dugouts with wood-slat walls	The parapet of the trenches was not always high enough to protect the soldiers from snipers	They laid duckboards in the trenches to stop themselves sinking into the mud
No-man's-land was a nightmare of craters, barbed wire and rotting bodies	They conducted raids to collect 'booty' and prisoners	The artillery bombardment before a 'big push' could last a week
In an attack, men went 'over the top' and ran across no-man's-land into the enemy machine guns	Sometimes men got caught in enfilading fire and crossfire	Few soldiers had been as far as France in their whole lives
The men built up a strong morale of comradeship and support	A battle was frightening but exciting	The men wrote humorous papers such as the <i>Wipers Times</i>
Concerts, boxing matches etc. were organised to keep the men entertained	The men usually spent 60% of their time on R&R	The men usually spent 3 days a month in the front line
Some parts of the trenches were quiet all through the war	Men met French girls and went to French cafes	Men liked to get letters from home, and wrote back home in their turn
Some men had enough time to study correspondence courses from the Front	Rations were dull but wholesome — working-class soldiers actually put on weight	All soldiers looked forward to leave
A 'Blighty one' got you sent home, but did not kill you	Lice	Rats
Mud	Rain and snow	Rotting bodies
Trench foot	Marching	Fatigues
Gas	There were 346 executions for cowardice — or shell shock	Patrolling was dangerous
'Mud, sleet, lice, noise, horror piled on reeking horror' (AJP Taylor)	'Our troops are in wonderful spirits and full of confidence' (Haig)	'Knock-kneed, coughing like hags, we cursed through sludge' (Owen)