

# Revising the Narrative: Localising World War I History

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## Syllabus content

Stage 5 History, Depth Study 3: 'Australians at War' (World War I)

## Duration

Three to five weeks; ideally to coincide with school Anzac Day commemorations.

## Rationale

The narrative of World War I is one with global implications. It was a true 'World War' that engaged combatants from an array of diverse nations and contexts. However, the narrative also encompasses our local communities, through the experiences and stories of the individuals who served in the war. Our schools are a microcosm of those communities and, as such, are in a unique position to examine World War I through this lens. This teaching idea is designed to run concurrently with student learning in the 'Australians at War' topic in the Stage 5 History mandatory course. Student learning in regular lessons will feed directly into the suggested development of WWI service people biographies, which can be used to frame the WWI narrative for school and/or local commemorative services for ANZAC and Remembrance days. At Corowa High School, this has developed into a community initiative, garnering support and assistance from our local RSL sub-branch. This relationship has been an important factor in students' understanding of the role that history plays in the construction of national and local identity.

## Learning aims

- Develop core research and source analysis skills.
- Enhance understanding of Australia at War through a close study of local narratives.
- Develop historical narratives for public consumption.

## Introduction

### Activity 1. Background

WWI was a global conflict, but the impact of the war was felt on several levels, including within our own communities.

- What do we know about the impact of the World War I on the Australian community?
- How can you find out more about this?

### Activity 2. Sources, commemoration & the ANZAC legend

Spread a range of WWI primary and secondary sources around the room, including diary entries, letters, poems, photographs and posters giving an insight into personal experiences of ANZACs; and newspaper articles or journals about commemoration and Australian identity.

- Make notes about each of the sources.
- What do they tell us about the role of ANZAC in a modern Australian identity?
- Is this still prevalent in our communities today?
- Scan this QR code to read an article by Joan Beaumont examining the changing role of ANZAC in an increasingly diverse Australia.



## Researching ANZACs

### Activity 1. What makes somebody 'historically significant'?

By democratising the narrative of WWI, can we revise the Australian national story and the role of our communities within it?

- Scan this QR code and save the 'Revising the Narrative' profile form.
- Using the mapping function on the National Archives of Australia 'Discovering Anzacs' choose a service person from your local community to research. The digitised record will provide key information about individuals, including their age at enlistment, religion and identifying markings.
- Record any information you find on the profile form and consider how your chosen service person's personal and local story might contribute to revising the narrative about WWI.



[https://  
discoveringanzacs.  
naa.gov.au/](https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/)

### Activity 2. Personal experiences

Letters from the front published in Australian local newspapers can illustrate how information was shared and communicated locally during WWI, helping to piece together the smaller stories of this conflict.

- Using the key word phrase 'letters from the front' (including inverted commas) in the advanced search function in the National Library of Australia's 'Trove' newspaper database find newspaper articles from the period 1900 to the 1920s.
- After reading the published letters, consider and discuss the nature of Australian communities between 1900 and the 1920s.
- Go to the Australian War Memorial website to find information about the unit of the Australian Imperial Force in which your chosen ANZAC served, including any accounts of battles in which they were involved. Using this information, piece together an account of the war experience of your chosen soldier



[https://trove.nla.gov.  
au/](https://trove.nla.gov.au/)

## Constructing a narrative

- **Why did this person enlist?** Consider the general reasons why people enlisted and how the individual's local context influenced or motivated them to enlist. Include some information about the community in which they enlisted.
- **Where did this soldier enlist and train?** This would also include some discussion about what that training entailed and why it was necessary.
- **What was this soldier's wartime experience?** Include an account of any battles that they participated in, illnesses and hospitalisations, and any other relevant information available through the sources. Consider the individual's military occupation in your discussion.
- **How did the community react to the war?** This is an important aspect in analysing the local impact of the war on communities around Australia.

## Sharing the ANZAC stories

Consider sharing the researched stories via one or more of the following:

- **School exhibition:** set up a space at your school where you can display and share the stories of the ANZACs you researched, inviting community members and parents to view them.
- **Booklet:** compile the biographies into a pdf or a printed booklet that can be distributed within your community.
- **Commemorative event:** share the biographies you have written at an Anzac Day or Remembrance Day service to share the WWI stories of local service people with your community.
- **Videos, published books, formal speeches:** Scan these QR codes to see other ways to share your ANZAC biographies.



# TEACHING HISTORY

Journal of the History Teachers' Association of NSW Inc (HTANSW)

First published in 1961

ISSN 0040-0602



ASIA &  
AUSTRALIA

2023  
Volume 57  
Number 1

