

<b>CHRISTMAS TRUCE</b>		<b>Student/Class Goal</b> The group is concerned about the current armed conflict and wants to better understand the reasons behind war and how the human element could affect the outcomes of war.
<b>Outcome</b> <i>(lesson objective)</i> Students will research information about a truce at Christmas during WWI using several media sources and write an opinion paper detailing the motivation of this event.		<b>Time Frame</b> 2-3 hours
<b>Standard</b> <i>Convey Ideas in Writing</i>		<b>NRS EFL 4-6</b>
<b>COPS</b> Determine the purpose for communicating.	<b>Activity Addresses Components of Performance</b> Students will evaluate historical information and then communicate their understanding of war and the human condition.	
Organize and present the information to serve the purpose, context, and audience.	A variety of media resources allows students the opportunity to build their understanding of this event in history.	
Pay attention to the conventions of the English language usage, including grammar, spelling, and sentence structure to minimize barriers to readers' comprehension.	Students will have had considerable practice in writing and should be able to master the conventions, leading to greater readability by others.	
Seek feedback and revise to enhance the effectiveness of communication	Self and peer editing can be used to clarify the writing.	
<b>Materials</b> <i>WWI Fact Sheet</i> <i>The Christmas Truce</i> Anticipation Guide <i>War Game</i> by Michael Foreman <i>The Christmas Truce</i> or <i>Joyeux Noel</i> Movie <i>Structured Notes</i> Graphic Organizer <i>The Christmas Truce Letter</i>		
<b>Learner Prior Knowledge</b> The students will know of the importance of Christmas in many cultures and may know little about WWI facts. They should be familiar with the writing process and all conventions.		
<b>Instructional Activities</b> Step 1 - Initiate a discussion about war in general. Learners will have heard about WWI, but may not know any of the details surrounding the war. The <i>WWI Fact Sheet</i> gives some historical information about this war, then check out the World War I Wikipedia or other historical resources before leading the discussion.  The Christmas Truce is a true story, but not well known by the general public. In his history of 1914, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle called the Christmas Truce "an amazing spectacle" and in a memorable description, saluted it as "one human episode amid all the atrocities which have stained the memory of the war." The phrase sums up the attraction of the truce: it is the human dimension which means that this relatively obscure event in the fifth month of a 52-month war is still remembered and will continue to catch the imagination.  Introduce the <i>Anticipation Guide</i> to the students as a tool to gather historical information about the war as they work through the discussions and various resources this lesson spotlights. Groups can work together to find the answers to the questions by assigning each person in the group specific numbers, such as 1, 4, 7, 10, etc. and then each member can share their information with others in the group. Internet sites on the Christmas Truce and WWI can also be shared as a resource for their research.  Step 2 - Admit Slips enables students to focus their attention on the reading by preparing responses, ideas and questions that anticipate the reading for that day. Copy the cover and information on the book jacket of <i>War Game</i> by Michael Foreman and give to students. Allow them to study the illustration and read the jacket and then write three questions they think this reading will answer or list three pieces of information they believe we will learn from the reading; or you might want to ask students to make a prediction, ask a question or analyze the reading.		

When completed (or the next day) students work in groups to discuss their predictions and questions. Then compile everything into a class list. Group this master list based on commonalities and decide on the three to five most important questions they believe will be answered in this reading. Read aloud *War Game* by Michael Foreman to the class. Lead a discussion around the questions posed by the group.

Step 3 - Introduce the *Structured Notes* Graphic Organizer and explain that each person will be documenting important historical information about the Christmas Truce using several types of media sources – a trade book, a video and a letter. The teacher can model one example from the book for each category. Stress to the class that everyone will be looking at the characteristics of war as well as the humanity of war. Students can review the book independently or in pairs and list additional information for each condition.

Step 4 - As a class, view the movie together. Students will complete the *Structured Notes* Graphic Organizer on *The Christmas Truce* as they watch the movie. This will help them focus on the main points of the film. After the film go over their notes as a group.

**TEACHER NOTE** Choose either film that meets your needs. *The Christmas Truce* Film can be purchased on line at [www.TheHistoryChannel.com](http://www.TheHistoryChannel.com). Check local libraries for this or similar videos/ DVDs. *Joyeux Noel* can be rented from a local movie rental store.

Step 5 - Using the Christmas Truce Letter, the group can decide if they would like to participate in a story-telling performance or use it for a [reader's theater](#). The group might want to end the performance singing Silent Night or they might like to write in their journals which holiday song is meaningful to them and why. Discuss with students what it was like the next day when fighting began again. What if the soldiers never returned to their trenches? Can they predict the outcomes of the war or this battle if the truce had held?

Step 6 - Students will write a one page response where they focus on the motivation for the truce and whether such a thing might happen today. They will use the knowledge they have gleaned from the book, film, letter, discussion and questions. Students share and discuss their papers with the class.

**Assessment/Evidence** (*based on outcome*)  
Opinion Paper

**Teacher Reflection/Lesson Evaluation**  
*Not yet completed.*

**Next Steps**  
The Treaty of Versailles and how it leads to WWII.

**Technology Integration**

**Purposeful/Transparent**  
Students will better understand WWI. WWI has often been thought to be the most important of all wars fought in the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It was the first to use weapons of mass destruction (submarine, airplane, missiles, tanks), and the first with participants from all the major industrialized nations in the world.

**Contextual**  
This information provides students with a better understanding of war and gives them content knowledge that will help them with the GED test about WWI.

**Building Expertise**  
Transference of knowledge from multiple media sources into a written opinion paper builds on the student's understanding of content and writing conventions.

## World War I Fact Sheet

### 1. Causes of WW I

Extreme nationalism - each country believing theirs was superior to all others

Imperialism- the drive for stronger nations to take over weaker ones

Economic Rivalry - trade competition between the European countries

Military Growth - arms build up of the European countries

Alliances - Triple Alliance of German, Austria-Hungary and Italy and the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia

2. War began over the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary
3. War started June 28, 1914 and ended November 11, 1918
4. U.S. entered war April 6, 1917 after Germany had sunk several American ships
5. Approximately 10 million people were killed in battle, 20 million were wounded in the war, and 13 million civilians died from war-related famine, disease and injuries
6. Thirty-two nations fought in the war
7. The Big Three of the peace talks were President Woodrow Wilson from the USA, Prime Minister David Lloyd George from Great Britain, and Premier Georges Clemenceau of France.
8. The Treaty of Versailles officially ended WWI
9. The unfairness of the Treaty of Versailles is one of the causes of WWII

Source: Wallbank, Walter T., History and Life, The World and its People, Scott, Foresman and Company, Glenview, Illinois, second edition, 1982.

### Additional Internet Resources:

Christmas Truce <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/christmastruce.htm>

WW I <http://history1900s.about.com/od/worldwari/Christmas%20Truce>

Christmas Truce <http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/christmastruce.htm>

WWI <http://www.historywiz.com/worldwarone.htm>

## About the Story

The Christmas Truce of 1914 has been called by Arthur Conan Doyle “one human episode amid all the atrocities.” It is certainly one of the most remarkable incidents of World War I and perhaps of all military history. Inspiring both popular songs and theater, it has endured as an almost archetypal image of peace.

Starting in some places on Christmas Eve and in others on Christmas Day, the truce covered as much as two-thirds of the British-German front, with French and Belgians involved as well. Thousands of soldiers took part. In most places it lasted at least through Boxing Day (December 26), and in some through mid-January. Perhaps most remarkably, it grew out of no single initiative but sprang up in each place spontaneously and independently.

Unofficial and spotty as the truce was, there have been those convinced it never happened—that the whole thing was made up. Others have believed it happened but that the news was suppressed. Neither is true. Though little was printed in Germany, the truce made headlines for weeks in British newspapers, with published letters and photos from soldiers at the front. In a single issue, the latest rumor of German atrocities might share space with a photo of British and German soldiers crowded together, their caps and helmets exchanged, smiling for the camera.

Historians, on the other hand, have shown less interest in an unofficial outbreak of peace. There has been only one comprehensive study of the incident: *Christmas Truce*, by Malcolm Brown and Shirley Seaton, Secker & Warburg, London, 1984—a companion volume to the authors’ 1981 BBC documentary, *Peace in No Man’s Land*. The book features a large number of first-hand accounts from letters and diaries. Nearly everything described in my fictional letter is drawn from these accounts—though I have heightened the drama somewhat by selecting, arranging, and compressing.

In my letter, I’ve tried to counteract two popular misconceptions of the truce. One is that only common soldiers took part in it, while officers opposed it. (Few officers opposed it, and many took part.) The other is that neither side wished to return to fighting. (Most soldiers, especially British, French, and Belgian, remained determined to fight and win.)

Sadly, I also had to omit the Christmas Day games of football—or soccer, as called in the U.S.—often falsely associated with the truce. The truth is that the terrain of No Man’s Land ruled out formal games—though certainly some soldiers kicked around balls and makeshift substitutes.

Another false idea about the truce was held even by most soldiers who were there: that it was unique in history. Though the Christmas Truce is the greatest example of its kind, informal truces had been a longstanding military tradition. During the American Civil War, for instance, Rebels and Yankees traded tobacco, coffee, and newspapers, fished peacefully on opposite sides of a stream, and even gathered blackberries together. Some degree of fellow feeling had always been common among soldiers sent to battle.

Of course, all that has changed in modern times. Today, soldiers kill at great distances, often with the push of a button and a sighting on a computer screen. Even where soldiers come face to face, their languages and cultures are often so diverse as to make friendly communication unlikely.

No, we should not expect to see another Christmas Truce. Yet still what happened on that Christmas of 1914 may inspire the peacemakers of today—for, now as always, the best time to make peace is long before the armies go to war.

**THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE**  
**ANTICIPATION GUIDE**

1. Which war is this film about?\_\_\_\_\_
2. The western front was between what two countries?\_\_\_\_\_&\_\_\_\_\_
3. How long did the people think the War would last?\_\_\_\_\_
4. When the two armies "dug" in they found themselves fighting in what?\_\_\_\_\_
5. True or False In the winter of 1914 more people died of frostbite and gangrene than gun shots.
6. The troops (did, did not) receive Christmas presents while in the trenches.
7. What sounds did the British troops hear that they had not heard before while in the trenches?  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. What did the English see the Germans doing that shocked them?\_\_\_\_\_
9. What song did they sing together?\_\_\_\_\_
10. What did they call the space between the enemies trenches?\_\_\_\_\_
11. What did the German soldier bring to the other side?\_\_\_\_\_
12. They had an armistice. An armistice is a ceasefire. What holiday was it? \_\_\_\_\_
13. How did the English military leaders feel about the armistice? (Encouraged it, Discouraged it)
14. What grim task did the sides have when they came over the top of the trenches?  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. (Yes, No) Did anyone take photographs that Christmas day?
16. What game were they playing that they called "football?"\_\_\_\_\_

17. Who won the "football" game? \_\_\_\_\_
18. What fear prompts most of the soldiers to return to fighting? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How did the British officers end the armistice? \_\_\_\_\_
20. What did they tell the Germans say would happen to the soldiers if they tried to have another truce? \_\_\_\_\_
21. Was there a Christmas truce in 1915? \_\_\_\_\_
22. How many years did the First World War last? \_\_\_\_\_
23. In what country was the Christmas truce? (France , Belgium, Great Britain, Germany)
24. Having watched the film, what do you believe could have been the possible outcome of the war if the men had not resumed their fighting? Write a paragraph or two explaining your opinion.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

# THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE

Structured Notes Graphic Organizer



	Conditions of WWW I	Signs of Christmas	Soldiers' Behavior & Reactions
<b>War Game</b> Book	<i>They were in the trenches of the Western Front.</i>	<i>The tiny lights appeared in the German trenches.</i>	<i>Then a German climbed from his trench and planted a Christmas tree in No-Man's-Land.</i>
<b>The Christmas Truce</b> Movie			
<b>The Christmas Truce</b> Letter			

## Christmas Day, 1914

My dear sister Janet,

It is 2:00 in the morning and most of our men are asleep in their dugouts—yet I could not sleep myself before writing to you of the wonderful events of Christmas Eve. In truth, what happened seems almost like a fairy tale, and if I hadn't been through it myself, I would scarce believe it. Just imagine: While you and the family sang carols before the fire there in London, I did the same with enemy soldiers here on the battlefields of France!

As I wrote before, there has been little serious fighting of late. The first battles of the war left so many dead that both sides have held back until replacements could come from home. So we have mostly stayed in our trenches and waited.

But what a terrible waiting it has been! Knowing that any moment an artillery shell might land and explode beside us in the trench, killing or maiming several men. And in daylight not daring to lift our heads above ground, for fear of a sniper's bullet.

And the rain—it has fallen almost daily. Of course, it collects right in our trenches, where we must bail it out with pots and pans. And with the rain has come mud—a good foot or more deep. It splatters and cakes everything, and constantly sucks at our boots. One new recruit got his feet stuck in it, and then his hands too when he tried to get out—just like in that American story of the tar baby!

Through all this, we couldn't help feeling curious about the German soldiers across the way. After all, they faced the same dangers we did, and slogged about in the same muck. What's more, their first trench was only 50 yards from ours. Between us lay No Man's Land, bordered on both sides by barbed wire—yet they were close enough we sometimes heard their voices.

Of course, we hated them when they killed our friends. But other times, we joked about them and almost felt we had something in common. And now it seems they felt the same.

Just yesterday morning—Christmas Eve Day—we had our first good freeze. Cold as we were, we welcomed it, because at least the mud froze solid. Everything was tinged white with frost, while a bright sun shone over all. Perfect Christmas weather.

During the day, there was little shelling or rifle fire from either side. And as darkness fell on our Christmas Eve, the shooting stopped entirely. Our first complete silence in months! We hoped it might promise a peaceful holiday, but we didn't count on it. We'd been told the Germans might attack and try to catch us off guard.

I went to the dugout to rest, and lying on my cot, I must have drifted asleep. All at once my friend John was shaking me awake, saying, "Come and see! See what the Germans are doing!" I grabbed my rifle, stumbled out into the trench, and stuck my head cautiously above the sandbags.

I never hope to see a stranger and more lovely sight. Clusters of tiny lights were shining all along the German line, left and right as far as the eye could see.

"What is it?" I asked in bewilderment, and John answered, "Christmas trees!"

And so it was. The Germans had placed Christmas trees in front of their trenches, lit by candle or lantern like beacons of good will.

And then we heard their voices raised in song.

*Stille nacht, heilige nacht . . .*

This carol may not yet be familiar to us in Britain, but John knew it and translated: "Silent night, holy night." I've never heard one lovelier—or more meaningful, in that quiet, clear night, its dark softened by a first-quarter moon.

When the song finished, the men in our trenches applauded. Yes, British soldiers applauding Germans! Then one of our own men started singing, and we all joined in.

*The first Nowell, the angel did say . . .*

In truth, we sounded not nearly as good as the Germans, with their fine harmonies. But they responded with enthusiastic applause of their own and then began another.

*O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum . . .*

Then we replied.

*O come all ye faithful . . .*

But this time they joined in, singing the same words in Latin.

*Adeste fideles . . .*

British and German harmonizing across No Man's Land! I would have thought nothing could be more amazing—but what came next was more so.

"English, come over!" we heard one of them shout. "You no shoot, we no shoot."

There in the trenches, we looked at each other in bewilderment. Then one of us shouted jokingly, "You come over here."

To our astonishment, we saw two figures rise from the trench, climb over their barbed wire, and advance unprotected across No Man's Land. One of them called, "Send officer to talk."

I saw one of our men lift his rifle to the ready, and no doubt others did the same—but our captain called out, "Hold your fire." Then he climbed out and went to meet the Germans halfway. We heard them talking, and a few minutes later, the captain came back with a German cigar in his mouth!

"We've agreed there will be no shooting before midnight tomorrow," he announced. "But sentries are to remain on duty, and the rest of you, stay alert."

Across the way, we could make out groups of two or three men starting out of trenches and coming toward us. Then some of us were climbing out too, and in minutes more, there we were in No Man's Land, over a hundred soldiers and officers of each side, shaking hands with men we'd been trying to kill just hours earlier!

Before long a bonfire was built, and around it we mingled—British khaki and German grey. I must say, the Germans were the better dressed, with fresh uniforms for the holiday.

Only a couple of our men knew German, but more of the Germans knew English. I asked one of them why that was.

"Because many have worked in England!" he said. "Before all this, I was a waiter at the Hotel Cecil. Perhaps I waited on your table!"

"Perhaps you did!" I said, laughing.

He told me he had a girlfriend in London and that the war had interrupted their plans for marriage. I told him, "Don't worry. We'll have you beat by Easter, then you can come back and marry the girl."

He laughed at that. Then he asked if I'd send her a postcard he'd give me later, and I promised I would.

Another German had been a porter at Victoria Station. He showed me a picture of his family back in Munich. His eldest sister was so lovely, I said I should like to meet her someday. He beamed and said he would like that very much and gave me his family's address.

Even those who could not converse could still exchange gifts—our cigarettes for their cigars, our tea for their coffee, our corned beef for their sausage. Badges and buttons from uniforms changed owners, and one of our lads walked off with the infamous spiked helmet! I myself traded a jackknife for a leather equipment belt—a fine souvenir to show when I get home.

Newspapers too changed hands, and the Germans howled with laughter at ours. They assured us that France was finished and Russia nearly beaten too. We told them that was nonsense, and one of them said, "Well, you believe your newspapers and we'll believe ours."

Clearly they are lied to—yet after meeting these men, I wonder how truthful our own newspapers have been. These are not the "savage barbarians" we've read so much about. They are men with homes and families, hopes and fears, principles and, yes, love of country. In other words, men like ourselves. Why are we led to believe otherwise?

As it grew late, a few more songs were traded around the fire, and then all joined in for—I am not lying to you—"Auld Lang Syne." Then we parted with promises to meet again tomorrow, and even some talk of a football match.

I was just starting back to the trenches when an older German clutched my arm. "My God," he said, "why cannot we have peace and all go home?"

I told him gently, "That you must ask your emperor."

He looked at me then, searchingly. "Perhaps, my friend. But also we must ask our hearts."

And so, dear sister, tell me, has there ever been such a Christmas Eve in all history? And what does it all mean, this impossible befriending of enemies?

For the fighting here, of course, it means regrettably little. Decent fellows those soldiers may be, but they follow orders and we do the same. Besides, we are here to stop their army and send it home, and never could we shirk that duty.

Still, one cannot help imagine what would happen if the spirit shown here were caught by the nations of the world. Of course, disputes must always arise. But what if our leaders were to

offer well wishes in place of warnings? Songs in place of slurs? Presents in place of reprisals?  
Would not all war end at once?

All nations say they want peace. Yet on this Christmas morning, I wonder if we want it quite enough.

Your loving brother,  
Tom

The Christmas Truce Letter <http://www.aaronshep.com/stories/061.html>