

Historica Canada Education Portal

Shell Shock, Battle Exhaustion, and PTSD

Overview

This activity will help students become more aware of the terms Shell Shock, Battle Exhaustion, and PTSD.

The stress that comes from soldiers fighting under the conditions they faced was extremely difficult to deal with. This lesson outlines the development of the concept of battle exhaustion, from the initial understanding of shell shock during the Great War to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in our current Canadian missions.

Aims

To develop the students' understanding of the emotional side of war and the stress that comes from fighting in war and battle conditions.

For students to gain a better understanding of the term Shell Shock, and where and when it originated.

For students to see how society treated soldiers diagnosed with shell shock.

Background

Students at this point should have a good understanding of trench warfare from the Great War, and the impact of war on the soldiers from an emotional standpoint. A good understanding of the return to civilian life post-War is also beneficial.

Activities

Procedures:

Pre-Lesson Activity:

1. Based on information gleaned from any sources the students have (past history classes, Hollywood movies, historical fiction, family experience, etc), ask students to brainstorm what they know about shell shock/PTSD/battle exhaustion. Ask students to identify what considerations should be made when considering the mental well-being of a soldier during combat.

2. As a class, identify the different ideas and discuss the considerations that they have made. Students should begin filling in the first half of a ["Then and Now" T-Chart worksheet](#).

3. Based on the brainstorm activity, ask students to predict what approaches they think doctors may have taken during the Second World War in order to improve upon the treatment of the mental wellness of soldiers in the First World War. Do they believe that positive changes were made? Was there an improvement? Revisit this question after students have had an opportunity to do some research.

Lesson:

1. Discuss the development and progression of battle exhaustion from its initial understanding to its current status.
2. Using the internet and a Canadian news outlet (CBC, Globe and Mail, etc.) have students research post-traumatic stress disorder and the Afghanistan mission. Have students find links to emotional disorders and the current conditions that Canadian soldiers face.
3. Students are to bring back their findings to the class and discuss the current situation of mental health treatments and soldiers. By this point, they should be able to fill out the "Now" half of their "Then and Now" T-Chart.
4. Create a timeline of the progression/development of our understanding of emotional health from the Great War to today. This timeline can be based on the information in their T-Chart.

Resources

[Works by Mark Humphries and Terry Copp](#)

[Esprit de Corps: Shell Shock](#)

[Esprit de Corps: Desertion and Shell Shock](#)

[Canadian War Museum: Shell Shock](#)

Various Articles (from www.pubmedcentral.nih.gov)

[Historical Approaches to Post-Combat Disorders](#)

[Shell Shock Revisited](#)

[From Shell Shock and War Neurosis to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder](#)

[Shell Shock, Gordon Holmes and the Great War](#)