



Classroom Activities using the memoirs of Sgt. John Wall

The memoirs of Sgt. John Wall give a fascinating insight into the lives of Victorian soldiers. They can be used as a basis for both historical investigation and literacy work at Key Stage 2.

The information sheet and extracts from his memoirs can be used for combining both an enquiry into conditions for Victorian soldiers and using literacy skills to record the information that your pupils have gathered.

Keeping a Diary

Your pupils can keep their own diary of a Victorian soldier. This should be a daily diary and will last for one week.

These diaries should include some information about:

- Rations and Pay (extracts 1 and 3)
- Route Marches (extract 2)
- Families in the Army (extract 4)
- Life on a Troopship (extract 3)
- Army Discipline (extract 5)

One thing that is missing from Sgt. Wall's memoirs is any mention of his home life. The diary created by your pupils could include some material about what a Victorian soldier might miss from his home.

We recommend that each diary entry be between 100-150 words long.

Discussion Points

Each of the extracts can be used as the basis for a whole-class discussion which are designed to make your pupils think about some of the issues surrounding the life of a Victorian soldier and also develop their listening and discussion skills.

Your pupils should read the relevant notes and memoir extracts first.

Extracts 1 and 3 – Rations and Pay

In these extracts we learn that Victorian soldiers had to pay for their food and provisions. Do your pupils think that it was fair that the soldiers were expected

to do this?

Extract 2 - Route Marches

In this extract we learn that it was felt that soldiers from rural areas were generally fitter than those from urban areas? Can your pupils think of reasons why this should be the case?

Extract 3 - Life on a Troopship

This extract explores life on a troopship and details a theft that took place on the ship. Do your pupils think that conditions on the troopship were good? Also how would they have dealt with the theft on the ship?

Extracts 3 and 4 - Army Families

These two extracts throw some light on the lives of the families that followed the Victorian army abroad. Do your pupils think that the families should have shared in the hardships of army life? What would they do to improve it?

Memoirs as Historical Sources

Ask your pupils to think about the extracts as historical sources. Is there a difference between a diary and a memoir? Is it a primary or secondary source? Why might certain things have been included and others left out? Is it a reliable source?