This article conveys the experiences of Silas, who was a stretcher-bearer during the First World War. Silas was a conscientious objector who decided to join non-combatant service upon being drafted. Readers gain an insight into the conscription of soldiers by the New Zealand Government, the impact this had on conscientious objectors, and the role of stretcher-bearers. A glossary and photographs support the text, and links to websites for further information are included at the end. Some students may need support with the concepts and the subject-specific vocabulary of war.

Be aware of and sensitive to students who have personal experience of war and of students whose families come from countries on different sides of conflicts.

Texts related by theme

“Boy Soldiers” SJ 4.3.08 | “The Anzac Button” SJ L2 Feb 2012 |
“One Man’s War: The Story of Archie Baxter” SJ L4 Mar 2012

Text characteristics from the year 6 reading standard

a significant amount of vocabulary that is unfamiliar to the students (including academic and content-specific words and phrases), which is generally explained in the text by words or illustrations

some ideas and information that are conveyed indirectly and require students to infer by drawing on several related pieces of information in the text

sentences that vary in length and in structure (for example, sentences that begin in different ways and different kinds of complex sentences with a number of subordinate clauses)

illustrations, photographs, text boxes, diagrams, maps, charts, and graphs that clarify or extend the text and may require some interpretation

figurative and/or ambiguous language that the context helps students to understand
Possible curriculum contexts

**SOCIAL SCIENCES**
LEVEL 3 – Social studies: Understand how groups make and implement rules and laws.

**ENGLISH (Reading)**
LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how texts are shaped for different purposes and audiences.

**ENGLISH (Writing)**
LEVEL 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.

Possible reading purposes
- To learn about the role of stretcher-bearers during the First World War
- To understand how and why conscription was implemented and how it affected people
- To identify the author’s purpose for writing
- To explore the concept of conscientious objection.

Possible writing purposes
- To explain the job of a stretcher-bearer
- To describe the conditions in the trenches during the First World War
- To evaluate the use of conscription
- To describe the life of a grandparent.

Possible supporting strategies
**Identification of new vocabulary**
Identify new vocabulary that the students should prioritise for learning.

The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

Introduce the text by linking into the students’ prior knowledge of the First World War. You may need to provide background information for students with little prior knowledge. Ask the students to discuss what words and phrases associated with war they would expect to encounter in the text. Add identified words to a word web or vocabulary lists.

Select some words from the vocabulary lists as a basis for instruction on root words and affixes, for example, “volunteer”, “voluntary”, and “volunteers”.

Direct students’ attention (if required) to the use of capitalisation. Clarify the use of capital letters in order to support their understanding.

Possible supporting strategies
**Making connections to prior knowledge**
Make connections to any prior knowledge that the students have about Anzac Day and the First World War. Provide information if necessary. Discuss the views about war that were held by New Zealand society at the time – how there was a belief that people had a responsibility to take part. Discuss the concept of conscientious objection.

Tell students that the war occurred in other parts of the world, not New Zealand. Provide a map to identify the places mentioned in the text. Discuss the distances between New Zealand and Europe.

Support the students to recognise the modes of transport available at the time and the length of time it took to get to Europe.

Possible supporting strategies
**Reviewing features of factual articles**
Before reading, review the features of factual articles, prompting the students to think about the features that help to organise a text and guide the reader.

For students who are likely to find this text challenging, you could spend some time previewing the content (and the language). For example, you could give pairs of students one of the photos. Have them label everything they can and discuss what they think the photo is showing and what the article could be about. Then have each pair present their photo to the others. (If appropriate, provide the opportunity for students who share a first language other than English to research and discuss their photo in this language. You may want to give them time to do that before this session. Then they could spend the time in this session preparing to share their ideas in English.) After each pair presents their photo, discuss the photo (and what the students have presented) as a group. During this discussion, also note and introduce key vocabulary and record it, beginning a vocabulary list that the students add to as they read. If appropriate, also record the predictions to check later as you all read the text.

Text and language challenges

**VOCABULARY:**

**SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:**
- Knowledge of the First World War and where it took place.
- Knowledge of the distances to, and the times taken to get to, the Northern Hemisphere.
- Knowledge of the public perceptions around conscription and conscientious objection at the time.

**TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:**
- Photographs, captions, glossary.
- Afterword that is clearly differentiated by a heading.
- Language signalling time and sequence, for example, “in 1914”, “By 1916”, “First”, “After training”, “when the food arrived”.
- Sentences using “so” and “because” to signal reason and result.
- Knowledge of the distances to, and the times taken to get to, the Northern Hemisphere.
- Knowledge of the public perceptions around conscription and conscientious objection at the time.
- Mostly past simple verb forms, such as “began”, “introduced”, “had”, “had to”, “believed”.
- Many passive verb forms, for example, “were drawn”, “was drawn”, “was drafted”, “were sent”, “was also taught”.

Possible supporting strategies
**Predictions to check later as you all read the text.**
Provide a map to identify the places mentioned in the text. Discuss the distances between New Zealand and Europe.

Support the students to recognise the modes of transport available at the time and the length of time it took to get to Europe.

Possible supporting strategies
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Identify new vocabulary that the students should prioritise for learning.

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Make connections to any prior knowledge that the students have about Anzac Day and the First World War. Provide information if necessary. Discuss the views about war that were held by New Zealand society at the time – how there was a belief that people had a responsibility to take part. Discuss the concept of conscientious objection.

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Sounds and Words
New Zealanders began volunteering for service immediately.

... so the New Zealand Government introduced conscription.

You had no choice: you had to go to war.

Students locate related information about volunteering and conscription within the paragraph and integrate this information to understand why the government introduced conscription. They infer from “You had no choice: you had to go to war” that conscription was the law. They make connections to their prior knowledge of law and evaluate this information.

Students locate, evaluate, and integrate information from the third paragraph on page 25 (“Conscientious objectors were very unpopular…”) and the first paragraph on page 25 to infer why people would consider conscientious objectors cowards.

Students integrate their prior knowledge of the word “waste” and identify that the phrase “waste of war” relates to the phrase “killed in the war” in the previous paragraph. They infer that the waste of war Silas referred to was the waste of people’s lives. The students go on to infer that the reason Silas cried was that he felt guilty that he was alive.

METACOGNITION
- How did the photos help you to understand the conditions during the war?
- What strategies did you use to check your understanding of the position Silas was in when he was drafted into the army?
- How did you use the glossary to help you to understand the text?
- How does knowing about how to integrate information help you when writing factual recounts?

On the hills above Christchurch was a memorial for local soldiers killed in the war, including some of his schoolfriends.

Later, he told his family that he cried when he saw it, thinking of his friends and the waste of war. “I cried because I was alive but they were dead.”

Students integrate their prior knowledge of the word “waste” and identify that the phrase “waste of war” relates to the phrase “killed in the war” in the previous paragraph. They infer that the waste of war Silas referred to was the waste of people’s lives. The students go on to infer that the reason Silas cried was that he felt guilty that he was alive.

New Zealanders began volunteering for service immediately ... You had no choice: you had to go to war.

But Silas believed in the Bible, and the Bible said, “Thou shalt not kill.”

Conscientious objectors were very unpopular, and a lot of people thought that they were cowards.

Students locate related information about volunteering and conscription within the paragraph and integrate this information to understand why the government introduced conscription. They infer from “You had no choice: you had to go to war” that conscription was the law. They make connections to their prior knowledge of law and evaluate this information.

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### Instructional focus – Writing

**English** (Level 3 – Purposes and audiences: Show a developing understanding of how to shape texts for different purposes and audiences.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text excerpts from “Silas the Stretcher-bearer”</th>
<th>Examples of text characteristics</th>
<th>Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The stretcher-bearers’ job was to find wounded soldiers and carry them to safety. It was very dangerous. | **PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE**  
Authors have a purpose and an audience in mind when they write. When selecting language and content, they consider this purpose and audience. | **MODEL**  
how an author selects content and language to suit their purpose for writing and their audience.  
- When I read the sentence “It was very dangerous”, I thought about why the author included this in the text. I think her purpose was to show the reader that Silas was brave and not a coward. As a writer, she decided to include this sentence, and particularly the word “dangerous”, because her audience may not know that being a stretcher-bearer was very dangerous work.  
- As an author, you need to deliberately include content and language that meet your purpose. Review your writing with a partner. Tell them your purpose for writing and encourage them to suggest ways to improve the accuracy of your content or the clarity of your language. |
| First he went to a training camp at Featherston, ... | **CONNECTIVES** (linkages)  
Clauses, phrases, and single words are used to make links within and between sentences and paragraphs. These examples from the text are used to convey the passing of time and link information about training. | **EXPLAIN**  
that authors use clauses, phrases, and single words to support readers to link information and make connections across paragraphs. |
| After training, his company sailed to England. | **COMPLEX SENTENCES**  
A complex sentence has one independent clause and at least one subordinate clause. By using complex sentences, authors connect two or more ideas within a sentence and can add variety and interest to their writing. | **PROMPT**  
the students to notice these initial phrases and clause.  
- What do you notice about the way these three paragraphs begin?  
- How does this clause and how do these two phrases help us as readers? How do they connect ideas across the text? What has the author stressed by selecting them? (training)  
- Work with a partner to identify where you might be able to use connectives to link your paragraphs. What language will work best? |
| After more training in England, ... | | **ASK QUESTIONS**  
to support the students’ understanding of how complex sentences are constructed. Provide the sentence as a model and highlight the subordinate clause.  
- Does the highlighted clause make sense by itself? What does it tell us as readers?  
- What punctuation do you notice when the subordinate clause is first?  
- How else could we structure this sentence? What emphasis does this new structure create? What effect does this new emphasis have on the reader?  
- Reread your writing and think about how you have structured your sentences. What decisions did you make? Could you use complex sentences to connect your ideas? |
| Once the bearers had found a wounded soldier, they would bandage him up and take him to an ambulance. | | **GIVE FEEDBACK**  
I can see that you have been careful to select language that is suitable for your audience. Do you think you need to add a glossary?  
You have used effective connectives at the beginning of these paragraphs; they make the writing flow well.  
I can see you have used complex sentences to good effect. They really clarify your ideas and clearly express some important relationships. |

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**METACOGNITION**

- How did having a clear purpose for writing support you as you wrote?  
- When you were structuring your writing, what were you thinking about? Would you change anything?  
- Have complex sentences improved your writing? How?  
- How does knowing how to write complex sentences help you when reading complex sentences?  

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