



Overview

Although students will be aware of the role soldiers play in wartime, few will know about the role of nurses. This article describes the work of New Zealand nurses who travelled to Africa and Europe during the First World War.

“Grey Angels” links to the timeline “New Zealand at War” (pages 2–6) and shows how the huge numbers of wounded soldiers were helped. The details may be distressing for some students, particularly those who have experiences of war.

The vivid descriptions of the conditions in hospitals and war zones are contrasted by the sense of calm and care in the work the nurses carried out. The use of real names and stories of nurses, photographs, and direct quotes will help make the text accessible for most students. To learn more about the First World War, go to: <http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/war/first-world-war>

Texts related by theme “Windfall” SJ L3 June 2014 | “The Pioneer Māori Battalion” SJ L3 June 2014 | “New Zealand at War” SJ L3 June 2014

Text characteristics from the year 5 reading standard

abstract ideas, in greater numbers than in texts at earlier levels, accompanied by concrete examples in the text that help support the students’ understanding

sentences that vary in length and 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

The Somme and Passchendaele

Edna described the Somme as a ghastly place. She was right. Although New Zealand soldiers didn’t become heavily involved until near the battle’s end, the cost was still high: two thousand New Zealand soldiers were killed (at least half of these men still have no known grave).

But a more terrible experience for the New Zealanders came a year later in 1917. This was when they took part in a series of battles near the Belgian village of Passchendaele. The campaign, which began in June and lasted many months, was poorly executed. During the fighting, men sometimes struggled through barbed wire under machine-gun fire. They were also shelled and gassed. The soldiers could hardly move because of the freezing cold and deep mud – and the surrounding countryside was said to look like a moonscape.

THE WESTERN FRONT

KEY

- 1 Passchendaele
- 2 Ypres
- 3 Messines
- 4 The Somme

The Western Front line (1916–1917)

SCALE 100km

A ghastly place: New Zealand soldiers on the Somme battlefield, 1916.

On the Move

During the war, nurses were sent wherever they were needed, although never to the front line. Still, some New Zealand nurses got very close, especially those who worked in the **casualty clearing stations** behind the hospitals in France, where there were terrifying air raids. Edna stayed in England, moving first to the New Zealand hospital at Codford and then to the one at Oatlands Park.

Many of the patients at Oatlands Park were “limbies”. But the hospital also cared for other seriously wounded soldiers. In October 1917, the long convoys of ambulances came again. This time, they carried survivors from Passchendaele. The men were, as Edna put it, “dreadfully knocked about”.

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

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

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

Possible curriculum contexts

SOCIAL SCIENCES (Social Studies)

Level 3: Understand how people make significant contributions to New Zealand's society.

ENGLISH (Reading)

Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.

ENGLISH (Writing)

Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.

Possible reading purposes

- To understand the important contributions nurses made to New Zealand's war effort in the First World War
- To learn what happened to soldiers who were injured in the First World War
- To gain a deeper understanding of the conditions and results of the war.

See [Instructional focus – Reading](#) for illustrations of some of these reading purposes.

Possible writing purposes

- To write about another aspect of the First World War
- To write a personal response to the article
- To research and write about nurses in modern wars
- To write a letter to a nurse at the front, telling him or her about life back in New Zealand.

See [Instructional focus – Writing](#) for illustrations of some of these writing purposes.



The New Zealand Curriculum

Text and language challenges

VOCABULARY:

- Possible unfamiliar words and phrases, including “patriotic songs”, “bonnets”, “active service”, “boundless”, “exotic”, “dysentery”, “pneumonia”, “shrapnel”, “amputated”, “frostbite”, “barges”, “tonic”, “ghastly”, “galore”, “bear pain”, “moonscape”, “mustard gas”, “blistered”, “pandemic”, “lice”, “post-traumatic stress disorder”, “civilians”, “selfless”, “autobiography”
- War-related words and terms, such as “Western Front”, “campaign”, “convoy”, “artillery”, “shelled”, “gassed”, “casualty clearing stations”, “armistice”, “shell shock”
- The names of places and battles
- The expressions: “the walking wounded”, “the cost was still high”, “knocked about”.

Possible supporting strategies

Identify words and expressions that may be unfamiliar to your students, especially those related to war, medical care, injuries, and illnesses. Plan strategies to use before reading to support students with the vocabulary. Use these strategies alongside activities to support prior knowledge (see below). Remind students to use the glossary at the back of the Journal.

English language learners may need support to understand the colloquial expressions and figurative language. See ESOL Online, Vocabulary, for examples of strategies for supporting vocabulary. *The English Language Learning Progressions: Introduction*, pages 39–46, has useful information about learning vocabulary.

SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED:

- Some knowledge about New Zealand's participation in the First World War
- Knowledge of the roles of nurses and hospitals
- Knowledge of the roles of medical teams in wartime
- Awareness of the kinds of injuries and diseases soldiers might have suffered.

Possible supporting strategies

Build knowledge of the First World War by exposing students to texts that explain New Zealand's involvement. The text should be read in conjunction with the related stories and articles in this and other School Journals. Build prior knowledge of the kinds of injuries that would be inflicted (for example, by shrapnel and bayonets) and the kinds of illnesses soldiers would suffer.

Support students to make connections between the text and what they know about how recent wars are waged.

You could use mind maps to support students with some of the concepts and language. Divide them into groups. Ask half the groups to create a mind map with key words associated with the First World War and the other half to create a mind map with key words associated with nursing. Have the groups share their mind maps and then co-construct a mind map together about nurses in the First World War, highlighting, feeding in, explaining, and recording key concepts and vocabulary as you do so.

TEXT FEATURES AND STRUCTURE:

- Article told in chronological order, following the movements of nurses over the period
- Lots of time and sequencing language, for example, “that day”, “When war was declared”, “in January 1915”, “three months later”, “Later in the year”
- Lots of language giving locations and directions, for example, “On Wellington's Glasgow Wharf”, “to the war”, “in Europe”, “near Rio de Janeiro”, “on the Western Front”
- Sub-headings
- Text boxes
- Photos with captions
- Illustrations
- Footnotes that appear at the end of the article
- The map at the front of the Journal that relates to this article.

Possible supporting strategies

Skim the article with the students to help them to get a sense of its structure and purpose. Prompt them to use the headings, text boxes, and photographs to identify the subject and the era it is set.

Provide opportunities for more extensive previewing for students who will find the text challenging. Have the students make predictions from the headings and selected images. Discuss and record their predictions.

If students have not met footnotes before, point these out and explain how to use them.

Use timelines and/or maps to support students to follow the sequence of events and the locations. You could have students construct or co-construct a timeline and add the key events and times as you read. You could provide photocopies of maps and have students record places and key events on their maps.



Sounds and Words

Instructional focus – Reading

Social Sciences (Social Studies, level 3: Understand how people make significant contributions to New Zealand’s society.)

English (Level 3 – Structure: Show a developing understanding of text structures.)

Text excerpts from “Grey Angels”

The work was punishing. It was very hot, and the nurses worked long hours. Some men were sick with illnesses like dysentery and pneumonia. Others had serious bullet or shrapnel wounds or broken bones. There were no antibiotics. Sometimes a soldier’s arm or leg had to be amputated, and the nurses would help with the operation.

Students (what they might do)

The students draw on their experiences of nurses and what they have learnt about the First World War to **visualise** the situation for the nurses as they arrived in Egypt. They use information in the next sentence to understand the meaning of “punishing”. They **ask questions** about the illnesses and how the soldiers got sick. They **ask and answer questions** about the nature of the nurses’ work and evaluate the hardships and horrors they faced.

Teacher (possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to draw on sources of information as they read.

- Remember to use everything you already know about the war and combine it with what you are reading to help understand the text. (Model how to do this by referring to the charts you created before reading and modelling how you can use what you already know to understand the text.)
- Ask yourselves questions about the work the nurses were doing and the soldiers’ illnesses.
- Why do you think there were no antibiotics? How could you find out? What would be the result of there being no antibiotics?
- From what you’ve learnt, what do you think operations would have been like? How do you think Edna felt about the work she was doing?

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to make connections.

- How do the words and photos help you to imagine what the battles were like?
- What connections can you make that might give you some sense of the conditions, for example, of doing an obstacle course or moving in mud?

EXPLAIN how readers integrate information and ideas as they read.

- When we read, integrate information from the text and from other things we know. This means we combine many ideas and pieces of information to understand what the author is telling us. Writers expect their readers to do this, so they don’t spell everything out. In this extract, the writer shows us what the conditions were like for the soldiers, allowing us to understand why this was “the most terrible experience”.
- We can infer too, that the nurses’ tasks with the survivors would have been extremely difficult.

Use a graphic organiser to support students with integrating information and asking questions. (1. Model your thinking and fill in the GO with an example. 2. Fill it in with the students, using another example. 3. Using a third example, have the students think, pair, and share their thinking and how they filled it in.)

Information in the text	What I know	My question/s	My conclusion

DIRECT the students to work with a partner.

- With your partner, discuss this section. What do you understand by shell shock and its causes? Why do you think some found it hard to understand?
- What have you seen on TV or read in books about what happens now when people are injured in wars? Who helps them? Where do they go?
- What do you think are some of the big differences between being a nurse in the First World War and being a nurse in a war zone now?
- Share your evaluation of the role of nurses in war.

ASK QUESTIONS to support the students to think critically and to share their thinking.

- You’ve read and thought a lot about the First World War. Do you think it is important to remember that war and the ways New Zealanders were involved? Why/why not?
- How is what you’ve learnt about nurses in the First World War relevant to your lives now?

GIVE FEEDBACK

- You’ve made good connections to the work nurses do now and compared their conditions to help you understand why Edna said it was “ghastly” and that she hardly knew what to do first.

But the most terrible experience for the New Zealanders came a year later in 1917. This was when they took part in a series of battles near the Belgian village of Passchendaele. The campaign, which began in June and lasted many months, was badly planned. During the fighting, men sometimes struggled through barbed wire under machine-gun fire. They were also shelled and gassed. The soldiers could hardly move because of the freezing cold and deep mud – and the surrounding countryside was said to look like a moonscape.

The students **make connections** between this extract, the photos, earlier passages in the text, and other texts to understand the phrase “the most terrible experience”.

The students **make connections** with any experiences of obstacle courses as they try to **visualise** the fighting. They use their vocabulary knowledge and the glossary to **infer** that the combination of dangers and conditions would have made survival almost impossible. By **integrating** what they have read about the nurses’ work with the information here and in other texts, students **make inferences** about the nature of the work the nurses would face.

These men were suffering from what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder. At the time, it was known as shell shock. For some people, especially civilians, shell shock was difficult to understand. Some even thought that shell-shocked soldiers were cowards. But nurses like Edna understood and tried to help. It’s thought that around 40 percent of the casualties from the Battle of the Somme had shell shock.

The students **evaluate and integrate** information from this and other texts to understand about shell shock. They **ask questions** about why some found shell shock difficult to understand and **form hypotheses**, for example, that a lack of obvious wounds meant civilians did not understand the men were wounded in other ways. The students **evaluate** the role played by nurses in helping the men recover and **form hypotheses** about the longer-term impact of the war on returning soldiers. They **make connections** between the text and what they know of recent wars to **infer** that far more is known now about post-traumatic stress. They think critically about their lives now and evaluate why we remember those who were involved in the war.

METACOGNITION

- What kinds of questions and connections helped you gain an understanding about what it was like to be a nurse in the First World War? Tell me about some of these.
- How did the structure of the text help you follow the events? What information did the photos give you?

Instructional focus – Writing

Social Sciences (Social Studies, level 3: Understand how people make significant contributions to New Zealand’s society.)

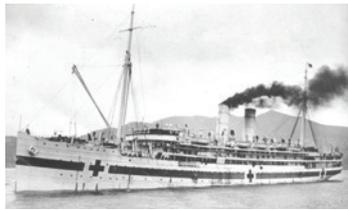
English (Level 3 – Structure: Organise texts, using a range of appropriate structures.)

Text excerpts from “Grey Angels”

The Vast and Boundless Ocean

One of the nurses setting off that day was Edna Pengelly. When war was declared, Edna wanted to help – and she was lucky. Nursing was the only official way New Zealand women could go overseas to help the fighting soldiers. Edna applied to go on active service in January 1915, and three months later, she sailed away on the “vast and boundless ocean”.¹

¹ From Edna’s autobiography *Nursing in Peace and War* (all of Edna’s words are from this book)



“Our ship ... is beautiful. A great, white monster with three large, red crosses and one thick green stripe on each side. An angel on a mercy mission.”

(Nurse Lottie Le Gallais)

The hospital was busy, but it got even worse after the fighting on the Somme. In early September 1916, Edna wrote, “They say there will be plenty more coming across soon. It is a ghastly place.” Ten days later, patients were “pouring in” and there were “operations galore”. Sometimes, Edna scarcely knew what to do first.

Examples of text characteristics

HEADINGS

Headings help readers find their way. They can also give clues to what a section will be about.

USING SOURCES

When writers draw on real people and their words, their writing gains authenticity and immediacy. Readers can identify with the people more easily.

USING PHOTOS AND CAPTIONS

A photograph and caption relevant to the information adds interest and detail.

QUOTES

A direct quote requires correct punctuation and attribution. Adding the name in brackets, plus a footnote, is one way to do this.

DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS

“a ghastly place”

“pouring in”

“operations galore”

“scarcely knew what to do”

Teacher

(possible deliberate acts of teaching)

PROMPT the students to ask questions of themselves and each other as they plan their writing. They can use an agreed set of questions, for example:

- What structure will be best for the purpose?
- What structural supports will help the audience follow and understand the ideas?
- What headings will help the reader find the main ideas?

ASK QUESTIONS about the use of sources of information.

- Where will you find information for your writing? What sources are you drawing on? Are they reporting what someone said or are they quotes of what someone said to you?
- How close are your sources to the events you’re writing about?
- If you are able to use direct quotes, how will you select them? What criteria will you use?

PROMPT the students to use visual images.

- Remember the saying, “A picture is worth a thousand words”.
- Review your writing to find places where a good image (photo, illustration, diagram, chart, or map) will convey an idea more effectively than words.
- Use captions or labels to help readers connect the image to the text.

EXPLAIN the conventions for using quotes.

- If you’re quoting actual words, use the conventions for punctuating direct speech. Use the name of the source, using phrases such as “Edna wrote” or “he said”.
- If you are summarising in your own words, use the conventions for indirect speech, such as “Edna thought the conditions were terrible.”
- Quotes must always be attributed, and if possible, a reference given so readers can find the source themselves.

ASK QUESTIONS to help the students find places where they can add details.

- Think about the emotional and sensory impact you want to have. What details will help convey this?
- How can details help your readers to get your message?

Adding details often requires more precise and descriptive vocabulary and sometimes more challenging sentence structures (for example, adding adverbial phrases or relative clauses). Where appropriate, provide support for students to do this. This involves providing plenty of examples, analysing the examples, giving opportunities for scaffolded practice, and giving feedback on their use of the language.

GIVE FEEDBACK

- The headings helped me follow the timeline. They support and link to it clearly.
- You used your grandfather as a source and quoted his words directly. The punctuation is accurate, so it’s easy to tell the difference between what he said and what you thought.
- Your drawing of the soldiers is very effective here. You’ve used a description in another text and made a drawing to show how crowded the trains must have been.

METACOGNITION

- Why did you choose this aspect of the topic? How did you decide on the structure?
- Tell me how you found the information for your writing. Which parts are from those sources, and which parts show your own reflections? How does your structure help readers know the difference?
- When does a visual image work better than a description? Explain why you’ve used the images instead of writing more words.



Writing standard: by the end of year 5



The Literacy Learning Progressions