

# Black History Month

## Ideas for school assemblies and pastoral sessions

October is Black History Month across the UK. In cemeteries and memorials across this country and the world, you can discover the stories of those from the Black community who served in both World Wars. This resource is designed to provide you with a selection of ideas as to how schools can incorporate the stories of those Black service personnel in our care and their contributions to the war effort into their work around Black History Month.

### Their Service Our History

At the Commonwealth War Graves Commission we are responsible for the care of 1.7 million servicemen and women who died during both the First and Second World Wars.

Although these men and women are all treated the same in death, they come from an incredibly diverse range of backgrounds and countries.

Black History Month shines the spotlight on those we commemorate from the Black community.

This year, we want school communities to consider the range of people we remember and to think about those who may not always have been remembered from the Black Community.

We have created a short animation to explore the theme of who do we remember, while posing a flipped question, of who might we have 'forgotten'?

The stories included explore the range of experiences those people from the Black community had whilst serving and also prompts a consideration of what had changed between the two World Wars.

These suggested activities encourage young people to reflect on all those, whatever their background, we remember today.

These activities can be differentiated by the class teacher to be suitable for pupils of all ages.

## Black History Month Assembly

The animation can be used as an element of an assembly on the theme of **Their Service Our History...** to introduce [the animation](#), you could talk about:

<p><b>Their Service Our History</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What countries and nationalities do we think about when we talk about those died in both world wars?</li> <li>• Explore the idea that these were World Wars and that those men and women who died in them would come from a much more diverse range of backgrounds than we might first think of.</li> <li>• It is important to remember ALL those who gave their lives.</li> <li>• Black History Month gives us the chance to focus on those from the Black community who gave their lives in the two wars.</li> <li>• The animation introduces a story previously 'forgotten' and can be used to illustrate this point.</li> <li>• There are a range of stories from both wars on the powerpoint that could also be used in an assembly and a slide that shows how we are starting to ensure we commemorate all those who died equally.</li> </ul> <p>** Assembly can be adapted to a 9-11 audience by using stories from the powerpoint rather than the animation if more suitable.</p> <p>The CWGC database can be searched via <a href="http://cwgc.org">cwgc.org</a> You can discover those from your community and those from across the globe who died during the world wars.</p> <p>Our '<a href="#">How to research...</a>' <a href="#">guides</a> will help you or your pupils discover more about these individuals and who they were.</p> <p>Use the CWGC <a href="#">For Evermore: Stories of the Fallen</a> portal to explore stories of those we commemorate and find stories to share over Black History Month.</p> <p>Second World War African oral testimonies can be found here: <a href="#">Voices of Veterans – VJ Day 80</a></p>	<p>11-16</p>
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## Pastoral Sessions

These can be used either as a follow up to an assembly, or as stand-alone activities.

1. Think about and discuss who comes to mind when we talk about those who died in the World Wars – what countries/nationalities/religions?
2. Consider the idea that these were 'World Wars' - what does that suggest might be right or wrong about the ideas gathered in Question 1? Can students broaden their contributions? This could be introduced by the teacher or take the form of short discussion in small groups, depending on the age and awareness of the young people.
3. Play the [CWGC Animation](#) video. This will introduce the idea that we might not always remember all of those who died in the world wars.
4. As a class, or in pairs or small groups, reflect on the key messages of the animation. This may provoke conversations surrounding:
  - Who do we remember?
  - Why might some of those people been forgotten or not treated equally?
  - Why is it important to remember all those who died?
  - How can we remember all those who died in the world wars in the future?
5. Use the stories on the powerpoint to explore some of those who died during both World Wars from the Black Community and how we are working to commemorate them equally.
6. Give each pupil a CWGC Tribute wreath (see image below – printable version on the final page) or pupils could draw a version themselves. These wreaths are made of the flowers of remembrance from each of our member governments.
7. Each pupil should then record their thoughts on why we should remember all those who served and died.
8. Create a display on a noticeboard or window in the classroom with all the different images as to who we remember.
9. We would love for you to share any work your students do for Black History Month. Please email your pictures to [education@cwgc.org](mailto:education@cwgc.org).

*The animation has been created for CWGC by students from the Technical University of Kenya (TUK) in partnership with students from Central St Martin's AUL in London.*

If you would like to keep up to date with more education news and ideas from CWGC, please join our mailing list: <https://mailchi.mp/cwgc/education-resources-mailing-list>





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# Black History Month

## Their Story, Our History

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A CWGC education resource



## British West Indies Regiment at Seaford Camp

- 19 soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment are buried at Seaford Cemetery in East Sussex.
- Hundreds of men from the Caribbean came to Britain wanting to serve in the British Army in the First World War.
- The British West Indies Regiment was formed at Seaford in 1915 after the War Office agreed to let Black men join the army.
- The conditions at the camp were very poor and most of the soldiers buried here died of illnesses such as mumps and influenza in the harsh winter of 1914- 1915.
- There are two cousins from St Lucia buried here. Nelson and Dennis Fevrier have consecutive service numbers suggesting that they joined up together.





## Regimental Serjeant Major George Williams

- George Williams served in the King's African Rifles during the First World War
- He continuously proved his bravery in battle.
- In 1915, in a battle at Jassin, on the borders of modern-day Tanzania and Kenya, he distinguished himself by going back under heavy fire to recover a machine gun after all the crew and porters had been killed.
- He was recommended for the Victoria Cross for this action but never received it due to ongoing argument about whether Black servicemen could receive the honour.
- He was, however, twice awarded the King's African Rifles Distinguished Conduct Medal.
- He was very well thought of by his commanding officers who commented that his name had been brought to notice for acts of gallantry four times in twelve months.
- George was killed in action on 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1918 in Portuguese East Africa (now Mozambique) .



## Sergeant Leslie Gilkes

- Between 1940 and 1942, some 3,000 West Indians enlisted in the Royal Air Force. One of these volunteers was Leslie Francis Gilkes of Siparia, Trinidad.
- He volunteered in 1942 and after training, joined Bomber Command flying in Lancaster bombers.
- This photo was taken in 1943 showing Gilkes chatting with a Canadian crew member. Three days later, Leslie was dead.
- On 3 August 1943, Leslie's aircraft was shot down on the way back from a bombing raid on Hamburg, Germany. The plane crashed into the sea just off the coast of the Netherlands.
- Sergeant Leslie Gilkes has no known grave as he was never recovered.
- His name is inscribed on the CWGC Runnymede Memorial, alongside those of 20,000 other missing servicemen and women of Commonwealth air services.





## Flight Lieutenant Emmanuel Peter John Adeniyi Thomas

- Peter Thomas came from Lagos in Nigeria to the UK to join the Royal Air Force, four months after the Air Ministry announced it would accept Black air crew.
- In 1942 he became the first Black African to qualify as a pilot and the first to be commissioned as an officer.
- He was a popular officer, liked by his comrades for his courtesy and good humour.
- In January 1945, Peter was serving at the RAF's No.4 Radio School at RAF Madley, helping to train wireless operators by taking them up to practice using equipment in the air.
- On the 12<sup>th</sup> January, in bad weather, his plane crashed into the mountainside on a training exercise in South Wales.
- Peter is buried in the CWGC plot at Bath Haycombe Cemetery, and his mother chose these very moving words to go on his headstone:  
*'Forgive my grief for one removed, thy creature whom I found so fair.'*  
Mother.

## Cape Town Labour Corps Memorial

- In January 2025, our newest memorial was unveiled in Cape Town, South Africa.
- This memorial commemorates over 1,700 South Africans who served in the military labour corps and died during the First World War.
- These men were previously unrecognised with no commemoration or known grave.
- The labour units supported the British Army in the fighting in Africa, transporting supplies, building roads, loading and unloading ships and carrying the wounded as well as burying the dead.
- Without them the army would not have been able to operate.
- This new memorial recognises them by name on African hardwood posts.
- It is one of the ways in which the CWGC are righting some of the historical wrongs of the past.