

Vimy Inspires Tomorrow

Module 5: Youth and Canada's War Effort

Overview:

This activity highlights the different ways that young people contributed to Canada's war effort during the First World War. It asks participants to analyze photographs and high school yearbooks for evidence of youth leadership in wartime. Participants can then go on to develop an idea for a project that addresses an issue in their own community or school.

By the end of this module, youth should be able to:

- Understand the concepts of leadership and taking action to address a need, in relation to the past and present.
- Identify examples of youth leadership during the First World War.
- Develop a plan for taking action on an issue within their local community.

Time required: 1 to 1.5 hours (depending on time allocated to project idea development)

Facilitator's plan:

- Divide participants into small groups.
- Share the activity documents with each group or each participant. If delivering the module virtually, email the document ahead of time if possible.
- Participants should read the summary (context) about Canada's war effort and the role of young people.
- Working in groups, participants will analyze photographs and high school yearbooks to identify evidence of the different ways that wartime youth demonstrated leadership. In each case, refer to the provided questions to prompt a group discussion once participants have had an opportunity to view the sources.
- Participants will then proceed to develop an idea for a project that addresses an issue in their own community or school.

Note to facilitators:

This module is designed to get participants thinking about/ contributing to a community project. They should be encouraged to submit the idea for this project to the Vimy Inspires Tomorrow program to be eligible for additional leadership training and coaching, which will assist in implementing the project. For more information, please consult the [Guidelines and Terms and Conditions](#) page.

Context:

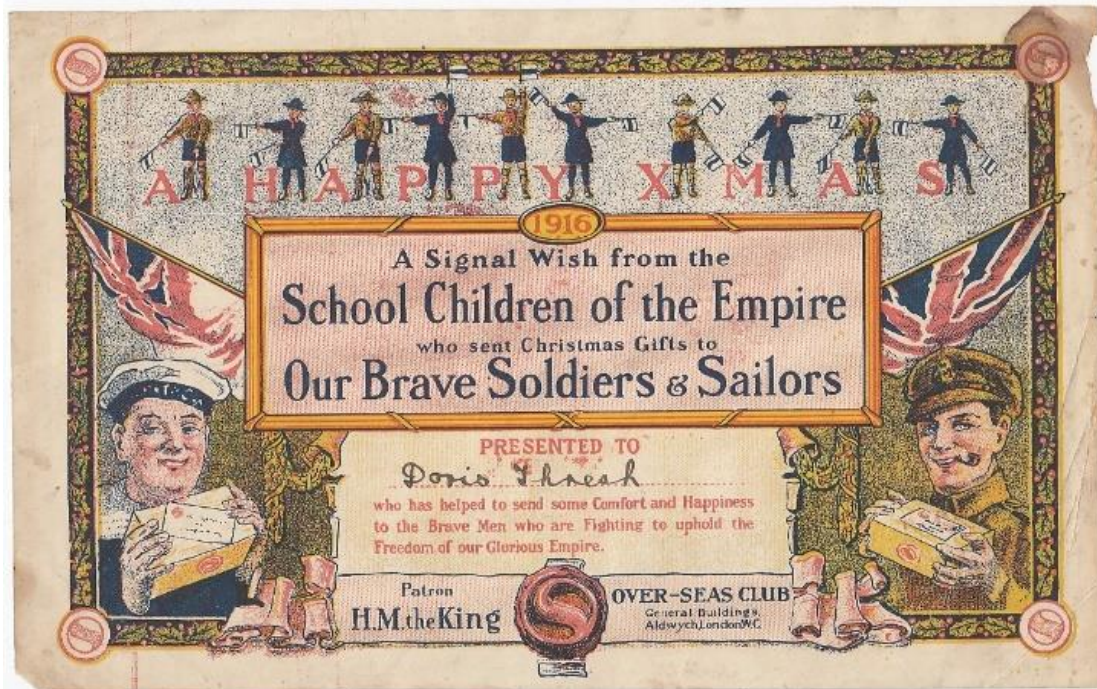
The First World War was a “total war”, meaning that Canadians across nearly all areas of society participated or were impacted in some way. While battles were fought overseas, the contributions of civilians on the home front - including children and teenagers - were essential to Canada’s larger war effort.

Children and youth, like many other members of society, volunteered or worked to ‘do their bit’ for the war. They helped with local agriculture and food production by cultivating fruit or vegetable gardens, often at their own homes. These were commonly called Victory Gardens. Children and youth also recycled useful materials and participated in fundraising activities. Young girls were encouraged to knit socks for soldiers overseas.

Children and youth were also recognized for their efforts. Here are examples of certificates from 1915 and 1916 that one young person received for sending gifts to soldiers overseas.



Source: [Certificate] Empire Day. Attributed to Doris Thresh. Presented by The Overseas Club. 1915. Collection CCGW



Source: [Certificate] A Signal Wish from the School Children of the Empire. Attributed to Doris Thresh. Presented by The Overseas Club. 1916. Collection CCGW.

These certificates praised young people for their help to “send some comfort and happiness to the brave Sailor and Soldiers of the British Empire,” suggesting that their efforts also helped boost the morale of those who served.

This included teenagers. Many farm workers enlisted to fight, so thousands of teens aged 15 to 19 were recruited to help with the harvest on farms. While the minimum age to enlist in the war was 18 and later 19 years of age, many boys lied about their age, eager to join the fight. An estimated 2,000 of these young men were killed during the war.

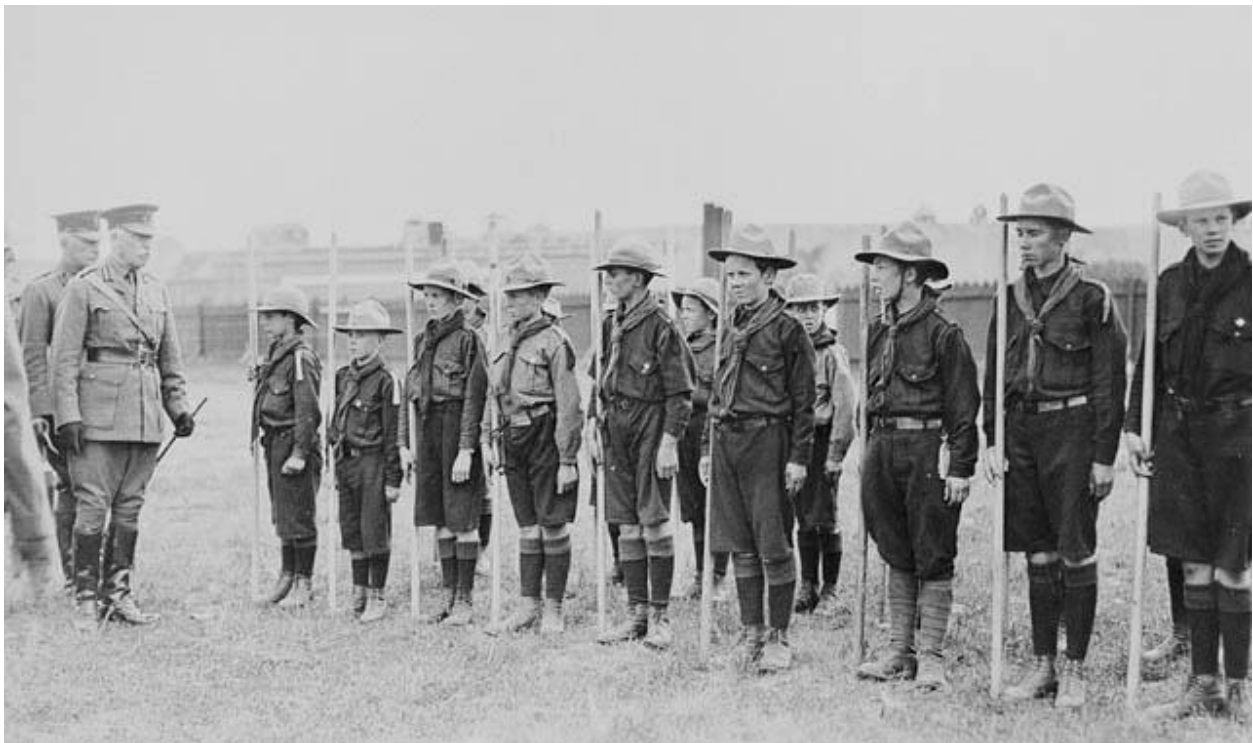
Families were impacted by the constant worry of having a father, husband, son, or brother fighting in the war. Some families were also impacted financially. The Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF) helped ease some of the financial worry, as money raised by the CPF was distributed to soldiers' families in need of financial support.

Another source of fundraising were Victory Loans, the Canadian government encouraging citizens to purchase war bonds as a loan to help finance the war, which could be redeemed after the war.

Activity 1: Photograph Analysis

An important source of evidence we can use to interpret the past are photographs. Historians analyze photographs to understand their content (who, what, when, where etc.) and context (purpose, audience, significance, etc.), and then use this information to develop historical arguments.

Although taking photographs was not as common in the past as it is today, due to technological and socio-cultural differences, there are some photographs that exist of Canadian children and youth in wartime. Look at the following photographs and try to identify information about the content and context—you may use the captions to help you too.



Brigadier-General E.A. Cruikshank reviewing a group of Boy Scouts in Calgary, Alberta.

Source: Library and Archives Canada/PA-147490.

<http://central.bac-lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3622999&lang=eng>



Kathleen Herbert sells victory bonds outside Toronto city hall, circa 1915.

Source: City of Toronto Archives, Fonds 1244, Item 969

<https://gencat.eloquent-systems.com/city-of-toronto-archives-m-permalink.html?key=52504>



Boys harvest flax near the Willowdale Airfield outside Toronto, circa 1917.

Source: Canada's History, courtesy of City of Toronto Archives/F1244-IT4639-2

<https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/military-war/children-of-conflict>

Group Discussion Questions:

In what ways did youth contribute to the war effort?

What leadership skills and competencies are youth demonstrating in these photographs?

What are some ways that you and/or other youth you know demonstrate leadership within your school and community, perhaps in similar ways to the children and youth in the photographs?

Activity 2: Yearbook Analysis

Another source we can look at for evidence of youth involvement in the war effort is yearbooks. Similar to school yearbooks today, many high school students in the past contributed to their school's yearbooks, which were often issued monthly in many cases. The yearbooks highlighted updates from clubs and sports teams, included creative writing pieces from students, and many even featured photographs and artwork.

While many high school yearbooks have unfortunately not survived the passage of time, or have not been digitized to allow for more widespread access, there are many surviving yearbooks from Victoria High School in Victoria, British Columbia. This student yearbook, the *Camosun*, was published monthly throughout the First World War. To view some of the digitized issues, visit this link:

<https://onedrive.live.com/?authkey=%21AJTKZX%5FIJ1yYhdY&id=99A9BAC0D7F4B155%2129001&cid=99A9BAC0D7F4B155>

Read through the following pages from select yearbooks and consider what youth leadership looked like during the First World War:

[May 1915](#), pages 33-34 "Beta Delta"

[November 1915](#), pages 6-7 "Service Roll"

[November 1916](#), page 19 "V.H.S. Patriotic Aid Association"

[December 1917](#), page 16 "Red Cross Concert"

Group Discussion Questions

What examples can you find of different ways that youth demonstrated leadership during the First World War?

How did youth at Victoria High School contribute to the war effort? Do you notice any continuities and/or changes in their contributions over time?

What are some ways that you and/or other youth you know demonstrate leadership within your school and community?

Develop A Project Idea

After learning about examples of how youth in the past took action to address wartime needs, now it's your turn! Identify an issue within your school or community—it could be related to a club or team you are part of, or an issue that touches you or someone you know. Brainstorm ways that you might address this issue by working together with a team of people, including those most directly impacted, in order to understand their needs and the best ways to approach helping them.

Develop a project idea you can implement in your school or community. You may wish to submit this project idea to the Vimy Inspires Tomorrow program, to be eligible for *additional leadership coaching and a \$2,500 project grant* to help bring your project to life and support your community goals.

Be sure to refer to the information on the [Guidelines and Terms and Conditions](#) page for more information.

Sources consulted and additional resources:

The Canadian Encyclopedia, Historica Canada:

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/canadian-children-and-the-great-war>
<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/wartime-home-front>

Canadian War Museum: <https://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/life-at-home-during-the-war/the-war-economy/farming-and-food/>

Canada's History: <https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/military-war/children-of-conflict>

Gough, B. (2014). *From classroom to battlefield: Victoria High School and the First World War*. Heritage House Publishing.

Karn, S. (2018). Voices of youth in wartime: Students at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School during the Second World War. *Ontario History*, 110(2), 176–196.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1053511ar>