



Black and white photograph of two soldiers attaching a message to a pigeon.

Online Collections Database, 1986.19.4.52, www.theworldwar.org/research/database. National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

Cher Ami, the Heroic Pigeon of World War I

Recommended Grade Levels: 4-6

Course/Content Area(s): History & ELA

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LESSON OVERVIEW:	This lesson explores the heroic story of Cher Ami, a messenger pigeon from World War I, and engages students in a simulation activity that emphasizes the importance of communication and teamwork in historical contexts. Through a relay race and message-crafting exercise, students will gain a deeper understanding of historical events and the role of pigeons in wartime.
OBJECTIVES:	<i>Students will:</i>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand the historical significance of Cher Ami and messenger pigeons in World War I ● Develop skills in clear and concise communication ● Work collaboratively to complete a task ● Relate historical events to modern-day scenarios
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:	<p>National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework Standards:</p> <p>D2.His.1.3-5: Create and use a chronological sequence of related events to compare developments that happened at the same time.</p> <p>D2.His.2.3-5: Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today.</p> <p>D2.His.10.3-5: Compare information provided by different historical sources about the past.</p> <p>D2.His.16.3-5: Use evidence to develop a claim about the past.</p> <p>English Language Arts</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.</p> <p>ISTE Standards</p> <p>ISTE Standard 6: Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats, and digital media appropriate to their goals.</p>

TIME NEEDED:	1 class period (60 minutes)
INTERDISCIPLINARY:	History, English Language Arts, Physical Education
PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:	<p>Students should have a basic understanding of the following aspects of World War I before starting the Cher Ami activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How World War I Started: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The major causes of World War I, including the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, alliances, and the buildup of military forces. ● The key countries involved, such as the Allies (including France, Britain, and Russia) and the Central Powers (including Germany, Austria-Hungary, and the Ottoman Empire). ● How World War I Ended: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The major events leading to the end of the war, including the involvement of the United States and the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918. ● The impact of the Treaty of Versailles and its significance in ending the conflict. ● What Fighting Looked Like: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An overview of trench warfare, including the difficult conditions soldiers faced in the trenches. ● The use of new military technologies such as machine guns, tanks, and chemical weapons. ● Where It Happened: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The major battlefronts of World War I, particularly the Western Front in France and Belgium. ● The global nature of the war, with battles occurring in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. ● Communication Methods Before Modern Technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The various ways messages were sent during the war, including the use of messenger pigeons like Cher Ami, signal flares, and runners. ● The importance of communication in coordinating military efforts and the challenges faced without modern-day technology like radios or the internet.
MATERIALS NEEDED:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The book: Cher Ami: Based on the World War I Legend of the Fearless Pigeon by Melisande Potter (digital or physical copy) ● Paper and pencils ● Small boxes or envelopes (to represent message capsules) ● Printable message templates (Appendix A) ● Map of the “battlefield” (optional) (Appendix B) ● Timer or stopwatch ● Background information slides about Cher Ami

LESSON

PRE-ASSESSMENT/INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

Read the book *Cher Ami: Based on the World War I Legend of the Fearless Pigeon* to the students, explaining how messenger pigeons were used during World War I. Highlight Cher Ami's heroic journey and the significance of communication during wartime. Show pictures of Cher Ami and discuss the challenges faced by soldiers and pigeons.

DIRECTIONS:

Introduction (10 minutes)

1. Share the story of Cher Ami with the students using the book; *Cher Ami: Based on the World War I Legend of the Fearless Pigeon*.
2. Explain how messenger pigeons were used during World War I.
3. Show pictures of Cher Ami and discuss the importance of communication in wartime in the slides.

Simulation Setup (5 minutes)

1. Divide the class into small groups (4-5 students each).
2. Provide each group with a "message capsule" (small box or envelope) and a printable message template (Appendix A) and show them the trench map! (Appendix B)
3. Explain that each group is a team of soldiers who need to send an important message to their headquarters using a messenger pigeon.

Crafting the Message (10 minutes)

1. Each group will write a short message on the template (Appendix A), imagining they are soldiers needing to send crucial information to their commanders. Then show the students the map (Appendix B) and show them the finish line.
 - a. The Situation: Your unit is stuck in a series of bomb craters out of supplies. You know the enemy has you vastly outnumbered and is mainly situated to your north. You have reason to believe there might also be an enemy unit to the east. You believe the enemy knows your approximate location, but not how many are still alive in your unit. There are approximately 150 of you. You also have a high-ranking officer of the enemy captured.
2. Encourage creativity but remind them to keep the message clear and concise. Encourage them to consider what information is most important for both their survival and for the success of their aid. For example: "We are surrounded. Need immediate reinforcements. Location: Hill 234. - Lost Battalion"

Pigeon Relay (20 minutes)

1. Set up a relay course in the classroom, outside or in your school's gym (if possible), with various obstacles representing the challenges messengers faced (see suggested obstacles below).
2. One student from each group will act as the "messenger pigeon" and navigate the relay course to deliver their group's message to a designated point (headquarters).
3. Use a timer to see which group delivers their message the fastest, while ensuring the message is legible and complete.

Suggested Obstacles:

1. Trenches (Chairs and Desks):

- a. Arrange chairs and desks in a zigzag pattern to simulate trenches. Students must navigate through the trenches by weaving in and out between the chairs and the desks.

2. No Man's Land (Hula Hoops):

- a. Place hula hoops on the ground to represent areas that students must jump over or step into without touching the edges. This simulates the dangerous areas in no man's land.

3. Barbed Wire (Ropes):

- a. Use ropes stretched between two objects at a low height that students must crawl under without touching the ropes. This represents barbed wire obstacles that soldiers and pigeons had to navigate.

4. Bomb Craters (Cones):

- a. Set up cones in a random pattern to represent bomb craters. Students must carefully maneuver around these cones without knocking them over.

5. Communication Line (Tape/Chalk):

- a. Use tape or chalk to draw a line on the floor that students must follow to reach their destination. This represents the path Cher Ami had to take to deliver the message.

Debrief and Discussion (10 minutes)

1. Once all groups have completed the relay, gather the students to discuss the activity.
2. Ask questions like:
 - a. How did it feel to be the "messenger pigeon"?
 - b. What challenges did you face during the relay?
 - c. Why was Cher Ami's mission so important?
 - d. Relate their experiences to the real-life challenges faced by soldiers and pigeons during wartime.

Conclusion (5 minutes)

1. Summarize the key points learned from the activity.
2. Emphasize the importance of communication and teamwork in historical and modern contexts.

POST-ASSESSMENT:

Review the messages created by each group and discuss their effectiveness in conveying the intended information. Evaluate students on their participation, teamwork, and understanding of the lesson's objectives with these guiding questions:

Message Clarity and Effectiveness:

- How well did each group convey the intended information in their message?
- Did the message clearly communicate the key details, such as the importance of Cher Ami's mission and the challenges faced during World War I?
- Were there any aspects of the message that could be improved to enhance clarity and impact?

Understanding of World War I:

- Did the students demonstrate a solid understanding of how World War I started, how it ended, what fighting looked like, and where it happened?
- How well did the students incorporate their knowledge of World War I into their messages?
- Did the students effectively connect the historical context to Cher Ami's role and the importance of communication during the war?

Participation and Teamwork:

- How engaged were the students in the activity? Did they actively contribute to their group's work?
- How well did the students collaborate with their peers? Did they listen to each other's ideas and work together to create the message?
- Were all members of the group involved in the creation and presentation of the message?

Creativity and Critical Thinking:

- How creatively did the students approach the task of crafting their message? Did they use imaginative details to enhance the story of Cher Ami?
- Did the students show critical thinking in how they addressed the challenges faced by Cher Ami and the soldiers?
- How effectively did the students use descriptive language and narrative techniques to bring their message to life?

Overall Understanding of Lesson Objectives:

- Do the students grasp the significance of Cher Ami's mission and its impact on the outcome of the war?
- Did the students understand the importance of communication methods during World War I, especially in the absence of modern technology?

- How well did the students meet the lesson’s objectives, including understanding historical context, narrative writing, and teamwork?

MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS

For Students with Physical Disabilities: Modify the relay course to ensure it is accessible (e.g., removing or simplifying obstacles). Allow students to participate in a different capacity, such as timing the relay or assisting with message writing.

For Students with Learning Disabilities: Provide additional support during the message-writing phase, such as sentence starters or a word bank. Allow students to work in pairs or smaller groups for more focused assistance.

For English Language Learners: Provide visual aids and translations of key terms. Pair ELL students with bilingual peers or provide additional time to complete the message-writing task.

For Advanced Learners: Challenge advanced students to write more complex messages, including detailed descriptions or historical references. Allow them to design a more elaborate relay course with additional historical context.

General Accommodations: Offer verbal instructions along with written ones, ensure clear and concise instructions, and check for understanding frequently. Allow flexibility in the roles students take on during the activity to cater to different strengths and preferences.

Appendix A

Cher Ami, the Heroic Pigeon of World War I

Directions: Use the following template for students to craft their urgent message.

URGENT MESSAGE

TO: Headquarters

FROM: _____

MESSAGE:

LOCATION: _____

SIGNATURE: _____

Appendix B:

Cher Ami, the Heroic Pigeon of World War I

Directions: Use the following map for students before you start the simulation:

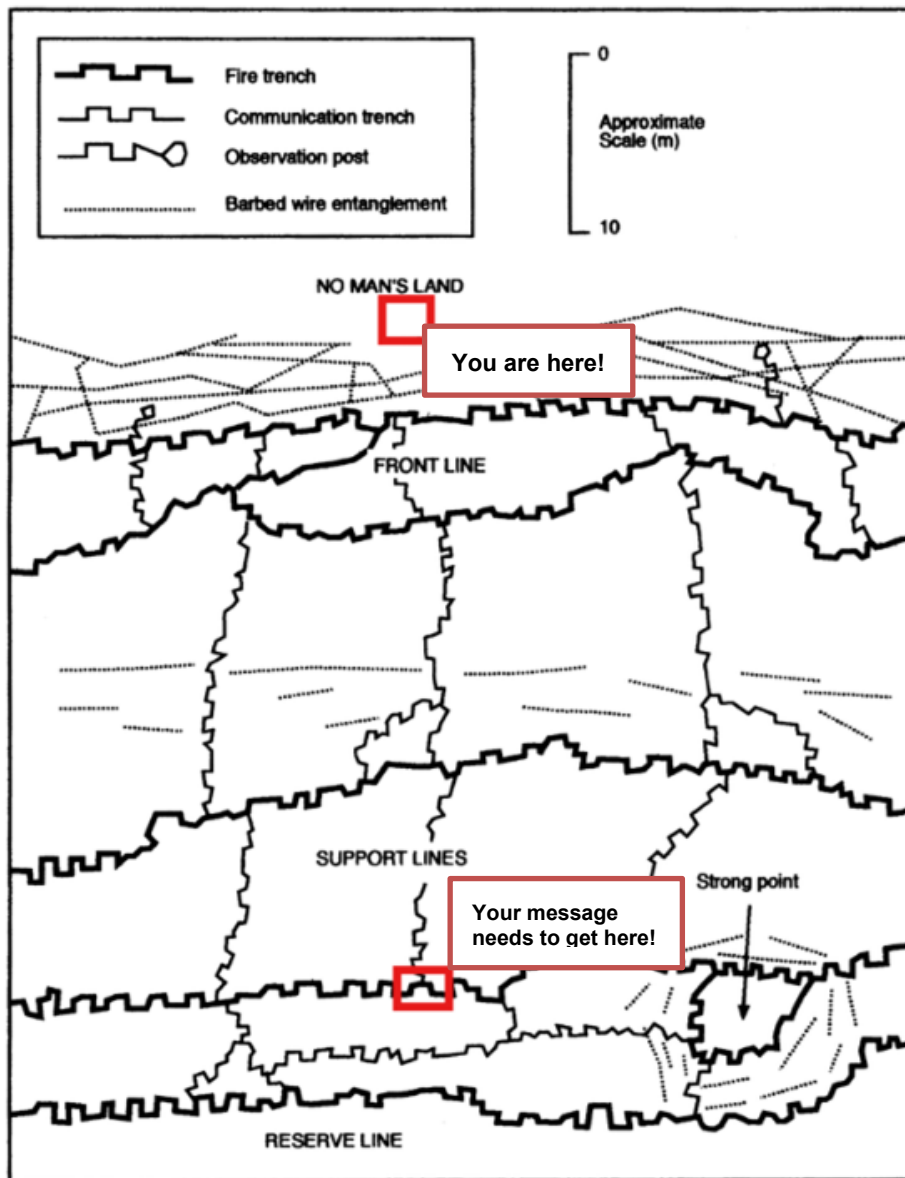


Fig. 3. Diagram of a typical trench system as used by both sides from 1915-1917. The fire trenches were arranged in rows each supporting each other, protected by barbed wire entanglements. Strong points, armed with machine guns, provided additional protection in case of a breakthrough by the opposing forces. Based on a diagram in Houlihan (1974).

Additional Resources:

- [Pigeons in War- Australian War Memorial](#)
- [The Impact of Animals During WWI](#)
- [Carrier Pigeons- National Museum of the U.S. Navy](#)
- [WWI A-Z: An A-Z Guide to the War that Shaped the 20th Century](#)
- [Unsung heroes of World War I: the carrier pigeons](#)

Primary Sources from the Museum's Online Collections Database:

- Object ID:1986.19.4.49: photograph of messenger pigeons in their carrier on the back of a soldier:
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=e00a15e9-0631-48be-8b3d-b76995ff7ea6>
- Object ID: 1986.19.4.53: photograph of a pigeon with attached message ready to be released.:
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=7093fcd4-7e15-4048-9796-bd2e10dcdd09>
- Object ID: 1986.19.4.56: photograph of text regarding the care and release of pigeons.:
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?component=AAAS&record=d2da7d57-8508-425a-8126-587eb33417e6>

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National World War I Museum and Memorial. (n.d.). The impact of animals during WWI. National WWI Museum and Memorial. <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/educator-resource/impact-animals-during-wwi>

Smithsonian Institution. (n.d.). Cher Ami. National Museum of American History. https://www.si.edu/object/cher-ami%3Anmah_425415

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Dillow, C. (2013, February 1). How homing pigeons find their way home. *Popular Science*. <https://www.popsci.com/science/article/2013-01/geologist-has-probably-figured-out-how-homing-pigeons-find-their-way-home/>

Doyle, P (n.d.). Diagram of a typical trench system as used by both sides from 1915-1917 [Diagram]. ResearchGate. https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Diagram-of-a-typical-trench-system-as-used-by-both-sides-from-1915-1917-The-fire-trenches_fig2_271808909