

Deepening Understanding
LKS2 Historical Narrative
The Christmas Truce by Laura Curtis



The snow had been falling for what seemed like hours. It veiled all the mud with a blanket of pure white, a beautiful contrast to the usual appearance of the land. I peeked my head above the wall of frost-bitten ground and listened. All was silent except for one thing: the constant, low thudding of gunfire and bombs echoing around me. I breathed, watching my breath puff out in a haze of wispy white. A few hours earlier, I had seen Wilbur's final puff of breath disappear into the crisp air as the bullet took away his life. This was not how I imagined I would be spending Christmas Eve - stuck in a trench, in the middle of a field in Flanders. They had promised that the war would be over by Christmas. They were wrong.

I felt in the pocket of my heavy, damp army-regulation coat and I smiled. There it was as always, my photo of lovely Christine. I withdrew my hand and glanced at my watch: 11:00 pm. One hour until Christmas Day. With the moonlight casting a silver hue over the land, I tilted my head upwards, letting the snowflakes fall upon my helmet, my nose, my eyelashes. For a

second, I forgot where I was and I breathed. I was conscious of the rise and fall of my chest and the life in my body. I felt myself drift away over the tangle of the barbed wire, over the top of the broken, crushed carts, over the top of the miles of earthen channels dug into the ground...all the way back to Christine and she was singing...

Singing....? I was back in the here and now as one small, oh so familiar but almost forgotten sound made my ears prick to attention. I could hear beautiful, sweet, heartfelt singing floating across the divide. I felt my eyelids tremble as I tried to hold back a tear. The Germans were singing 'Silent Night' and the song came to us like a little stream of light through the darkness, blessing us with the spirit of the season.

Before I knew it a little stir in my stomach had spread to my throat and, without even being conscious that I was doing it, I opened my mouth and began to sing letting my words float back to the Germans. I felt a hand on my shoulder and heard him before I saw him. Sam was singing too and we smiled. A true, warm, smile that spread across our faces filling our bodies and hearts with a sense of happiness that we hadn't felt for months. I fell to sleep that night cocooned in a warm golden glow.

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I awoke knowing it was Christmas Day but also knowing that this year it felt different. Getting up to stretch the cold out of my bones, I hobbled outside as my breath once more made little clouds of white in the freezing air. As I walked through the trench, I heard murmurs of 'Merry Christmas' but ignored them. The golden glow had left me as the cold had invaded. Surrounded by death and destruction, I looked out into the stretch of desolate, dead land before me. What did I have to be thankful for? I watched my breath puff before me and it was then that I knew: I was lucky to be alive. With the spirit of Christmas once more slowly seeping into me, and despite the unimaginable horrors I lived and breathed each and every day, I smiled. It was Christmas.



Without thinking, but sensing that it was the right thing to do, I set one foot upon the rung of the ladder and pulled myself up into No-Man's Land, much to the shock of Sam. It was then that I saw him, the man standing on the opposite side. For some reason, even though for weeks we had shot bullet after bullet at each other, on this day I felt no fear. We were just two human beings, both wanting the same thing. Neither of us said a word but as one we both gingerly motioned forwards and raised our hands in the air - a sign that we had come in peace.

Finally, separated by a mere step, we stopped and gazed at each other. For the tiniest millisecond my breath caught in my throat as he withdrew something from behind his back but when I saw what it was my eyes grew wide. Clutching his football, he raised his eyebrows in a silent question and winked cheekily.

The next few hours passed by in a blur of flashing feet and laughter. Oh the sound of laughter! It rang through the air like the church bells back home, lifting our spirits and filling each other with the joy of being alive. After what seemed like only minutes, reluctantly we knew it had to end. As a parting gift, Otto gave me some German sweets. In return, I handed him my precious metal case given to all the British troops by Queen Mary. He needed the tobacco and sweets more than I did and anyway he had given me something much more important - hope, faith and joy.

The Christmas Day truce. For those few hours, we had been at peace and it was something that I would remember for the rest of my life.

