INVESTIGATION 4

What patriotic activities did many students perform on the home front during the Great War, and why?

Advice to teachers

This investigation explores some of the activities students performed on the Australian home front, and why, during the Great War.

1. You are encouraged to read the Background information as context before you commence work with students.

2. Provide your students with sources 4.1–4.12.

3. You may distribute the Source Analysis Worksheet on page 18 and ask students to make notes, or ask them to complete the Tuning in activities.

4. Discuss with students what they have learned from the sources and Tuning in activities along with their answers to the overall investigation question.

5. To help them answer the questions, you may choose to provide sources from other investigations in this resource or from the CD-ROM. You may also choose to provide the Background information, but this should be done only after students have formed conclusions based on analysis of the sources.

6. Students may undertake further research or explore personal values and attitudes through the questions and activities in Going further.
Background information

Many school authorities reminded their students and teachers that the best way for anyone on the home front to honour an Australian soldier at the battlefront, make his time away more bearable and boost his morale was to become immersed in the activities of fund-raising, comforts-making and letter-writing. Students were directed in many schools to perform such duties during school-time (sometimes with school resources), or give of personal resources and time after-hours. The output across all school types and across the nation was, collectively, enormous. Even when teachers, older students or students’ families were opposed to the war – and to war in principle – they appear to have been able to separate the politics of war from the people suffering it. School authorities appealed to the deep sentiments of caring for Australians and others in distress, and honouring those who had died. Their appeals lifted most individuals and groups beyond war-related grievances, as in the social divisions over conscription, and achieved extensive support in fund-raising and comforts-making. Examples of the teachers who objected are not well documented. Aggrieved teachers may also have carefully avoided scrutiny; education departments had the ‘machinery’ of centralised, regulated bureaucracies to manage, publicise and motivate—and ‘punish’ teachers who did not perform as requested.

But the achievements in all areas of fund-raising and comforts-making suggest that the aggrieved formed a minority, and the output remains beyond what fears and competitiveness can explain. School histories, personal papers and reminiscences of teachers and students furnish detailed accounts, often of pride in what individuals and communities were doing. While some historians have argued that encouraging school students in war-related patriotic activities was a politically-driven ploy for securing popular support for the war, in which case students were exploited, the paradox is that children were granted unprecedented responsibility and autonomy in their communities. They were freed to exercise initiative, think creatively, step out of desks and classrooms, work in teams and engage in activities as never before in and for the wider community.

School students undertook the patriotic activities as directed by their teachers. Skipton State School boys who pulled a wagon of cast iron as if they were horses, may have felt exploited, embarrassed or physically sore. They may have wanted to impress teachers or, on the other hand, been scared of ‘getting into trouble’, especially in acting against not only what teachers directed but what other groups expected.

But many students—and teachers—understood the need to be involved in comforts-making and fund-raising activities. In addition to family, friends and others on active service, they knew teachers at the front, or older former students or the brothers, sisters, fathers or relatives of schoolfriends, and the records express that many were proud to help people they knew. Many schools also received genuinely grateful letters from Australian soldiers overseas or convalescing locally, or displaced persons overseas, who had received items grown, manufactured or purchased by Australian school communities.
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**Learning activities**

**Tuning in**

1. Create and complete a table summarising some of the patriotic activities performed by school students on the Australian home front, along with the stated purpose of those activities. An example is provided to assist you.

   **Patriotic activities performed by school students on the Australian home front, and for what purpose**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patriotic activity</th>
<th>Performed during school hours</th>
<th>Performed ‘in spare time’</th>
<th>For what purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sewing milk jug and cake covers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>to sell to donate money to the Patriotic Fund</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. A variety of situations prompted students to become involved in patriotic activities. For example, Edith Dennis of Perth State School in Tasmania (Introductory Investigation and Investigations 1 and 2) wanted to help her two brothers who had enlisted.

   a) List the variety of reasons indicated by the sources for why school children became involved in the activities.

   b) Can you think of reasons not indicated by the sources for why students became involved? Add them to your list above.

   c) Who would have been some of the main organisations or groups influencing young people to become involved in the activities?
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1. a) Identify any two patriotic activities that you think students may have enjoyed performing. Explain why you think the students would have enjoyed these activities.
   b) Identify any two activities that you think students may not have enjoyed. Suggest why.
   c) Identify any two activities that you would have enjoyed. Why?
   d) Which two would you have least enjoyed? Why?

2. a) Think of an individual or group of people involved with a special cause whom you would like to assist. You may take some ideas directly from this resource. For example, you may wish to write or send parcels to serving Australian Defence Force personnel. Visit http://defence.gov.au/anzacday/mail. Alternatively, you may choose to assist a different cause, such as victims of war, animal welfare or an environmental or humanitarian group.
   b) Investigate more about the needs of the person, group or cause.
   c) Plan how you can assist. (You may be able to work on aspects of your activity in curriculum areas other than History/Humanities, for example in English, Art, Physical Education or Textiles).
   d) Embark on your activity. Promote it. Report to the class during and at conclusion.
   e) Evaluate your activity. What would you do the same or differently if repeating the activity?

3. a) Research further how other groups on the Australian home front supported Australians in need of assistance locally, as well as Australians and peoples of other nationalities overseas.
   b) Where possible, use local or school histories as well as resources recommended at the conclusion to this resource to discover the activities associated with organisations specific to your local community. Your research may reveal individuals and organisations who spoke against schools becoming involved in patriotic activities.

Going further
Source 4.1

Young Workers’ Patriotic Guild Certificate that belonged to Marie Aulich of Tarnagulla State School, Victoria.

Private collection.

Children from Tambo Crossing State School, Victoria with their Patriotic Guild Certificate, 1917.

Source 4.2

‘How did you raise the money for the Patriotic Fund? …

[A teacher at Broughton State School in Victoria described how] boys and girls made milk and cake covers out of squares of net and beads … we supplied the whole district. The girls made small dresses, children’s socks and stockings, iron-holders, tea cosies, and collars and feeders for babies. The boys cut chaff, gathered old wool that was lying about in the paddocks, and sold rabbit-skins and horsehair. One boy … used to go out into the shed on Saturday morning and shear … [W]orking at home—washing dishes, cleaning boots, feeding horses, pigs, and fowls, chopping wood, gathering sticks.’


Source 4.3

‘As a result of discussion and private voting amongst those who were entitled to academic and sporting prizes in 1914, it was decided that they would forgo the prizes and ask that the money be devoted instead to the relief fund for the Belgian nuns, a fund set up because of the devastation caused by the invasion of and fighting in Belgium. Each boy was presented with a certificate telling of the honour gained and the object for which the prize was forfeited.’


Source 4.4

[The Hutchins Head Master] suggested that [the boys] could play their part in the war effort by a series of weekly subscriptions. Hutchins was proud to give not only her “last shilling”, but in a few weeks 116 pennies, 134 threepenny pieces, 68 sixpences, and 60 shillings.’

Source 4.5

‘Tins for our troops, in this case collected by the children of New South Wales. Forty to fifty 45-kilogram boxes of sweets “intended as Christmas presents for our soldiers, and for the most part ... sent in by the school children of the State”, were prepared in one week alone in the spring of 1915.’

Source 4.6

‘During the year a large part of the time set apart for needlework has been spent in doing something for our troops; and the amount of sewing, knitting, &c., has been surprising. The girl who cannot knit is the exception ...

I am led to make special mention of the magnificent results that have attended the efforts of our schools in collecting funds, and in assisting movements to raise money for the Red Cross, the Belgian Relief and other patriotic funds.’


Source 4.7

‘You can all help by buying war savings stamps instead of spending your money on lollies or on picture shows ... You can buy a little stamp at the post office for six-pence, and paste it into a little book, which will be given to you, and when you have got thirty-five stamps in the book you can change it for a war certificate for one pound, which means in three years you can get one pound for it, and that in the meantime your money will be used for getting food and clothes for our men at the front, and for sending other men out to help them, and for doctors and nurses to look after them when they are sick or wounded, and for rifles and cannon to defend them against the enemy. If we do not send these things, they will be defeated and killed, and it will be our fault.’

Heather Bonnin, Hours to Remember, Reflections on Life in South Australia 1889–1929 from The Children’s Hour, South Australian Government Printer, Netley, South Australia, 1987, p. 108

Source 4.8

‘The Wonthaggi [Victoria] Miners’ Union complained that some local teachers had honoured pupils who had raised or donated funds by naming them on the board, whereas children who had not contributed had been forced to stand in class.’

Source 4.9


Source 4.10

Any school, city or bush, or children with the smallest home-garden could convert soil to money or grow vegetables to send directly to the Melbourne or Caulfield hospitals.

Source 4.11


Source 4.12

‘[Letters to students]: ‘Dear Miss Clark, We got our sea-kit bags to-day and mine had your note in it ... I hope you will live long and have every happiness ... Dear Maude ... I thank you from the bottom of my heart for your kindness ... Dear Maggie ... I was the lucky soldier to receive your kit-bag. I thank you for every stitch you made in it ... Dear Gertie ... Thank you very much and accept the kindest regards of your new friend, Corporal L.T.’

Education Department, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, ‘From the Men at the Front’, School Paper, Grades V-VI, Dec. 1916, p. 159.