

WORLD WAR I LETTERS

Purpose

You've been learning about the impact of the First World War on both soldiers and civilians. Writing a letter from the perspective of one of these two groups will help you exercise your historical empathy and creativity skills as you demonstrate your knowledge of events associated with the First World War. This should give you a better idea of what it was like to live through World War I, and perhaps will also give you a sense of what it might be like for soldiers and civilians who are in war-torn areas around the world today.

Process

1. You're going to write a fictional letter from a World War I soldier or civilian to their loved ones. To get you in the writing mindset, read this primary source excerpt from the diary of Private Walter Hutchinson, a British soldier from Yorkshire who participated in the first days of the Battle of the Somme, the deadliest battle in the history of World War I.

"On Saturday July 1st we set off for the trenches about 10 o'clock. As soon as we got on the road we saw an awful sight for there was wounded men by hundreds coming from the line. When we was going across the marsh, German shells was dropping all round but none of us was hit. We then landed to a communication trench. But before we had time to get in it Fritz [German troops] sent us a tear shell. That was our first taste of gas..."

We hadn't gone far up the trench before we came across three of our own lads lying dead. Their heads been badly damaged by a shell. Their names were Voice and Webster Brothers.

We had to go scrambling over the poor fellows—in and out, in and out. It was one of the awful sights I had ever witnessed and at this point our own lads was coming out wounded as we was following them in. Then the order came down dump everything and fix bayonets you have got to fight for it lads.

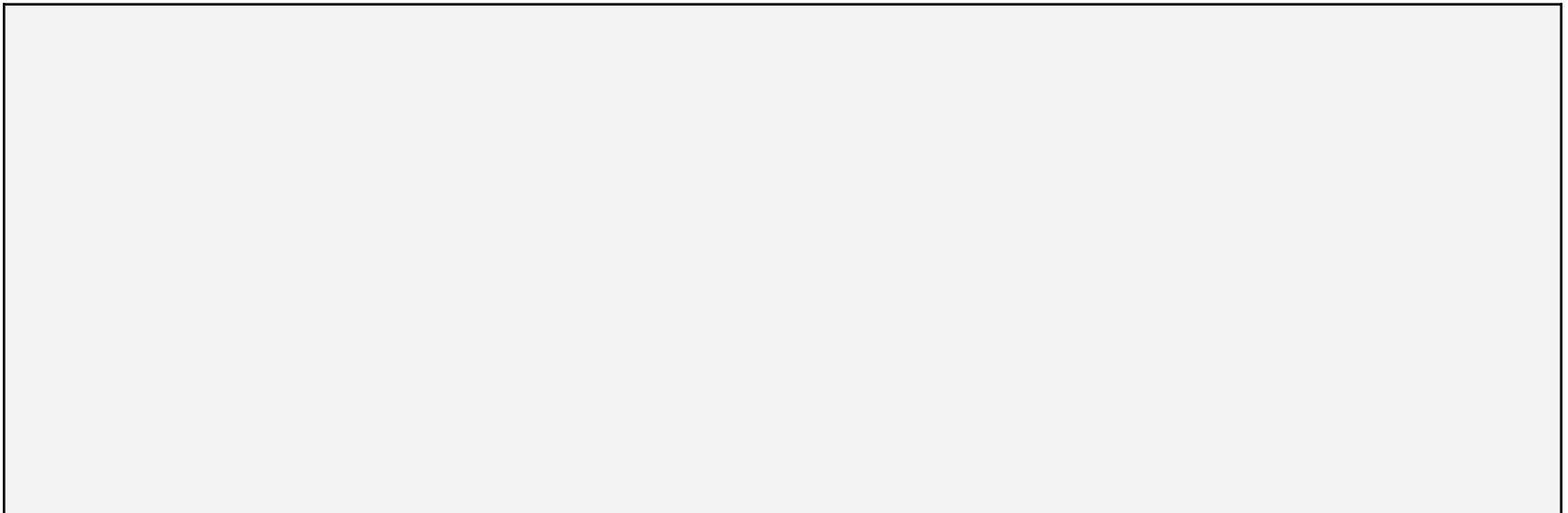
We obeyed the order like men...

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I was talking to these three men some 10 yards away and a shell dropped and killed all the three of them. It was an awful sight. I then went and reported the matter to the officers and they came at once to the scene. We then got the poor fellows buried which was a very difficult task for shells was dropping all round us."

Source: Hutchinson, Walter. "Extended Extracts: Diary from the Somme," *The Telegraph*, February 21, 2007.
<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1543319/Extended-extracts-Diary-from-the-Somme.html?>

2. What do you think it might have felt like to be Private Walter Hutchinson?



3. Choose the perspective from which you'll write—soldier writing home or civilian writing to a family member fighting in the war. If you choose to write from the perspective of a soldier, use the Walter Hutchinson diary excerpt you just read in addition to any prior knowledge you have. If you choose to write from a civilian's point of view, use your prior knowledge (including the [Helen Fairchild](#) and [Rosa Luxemburg](#) graphic bios and the "[Lost Generation](#)" article). Below, fill out the Bio Card with your basic information. This should inform the letter you write.

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Bio Card

Name: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Country of origin (where you were born): _____

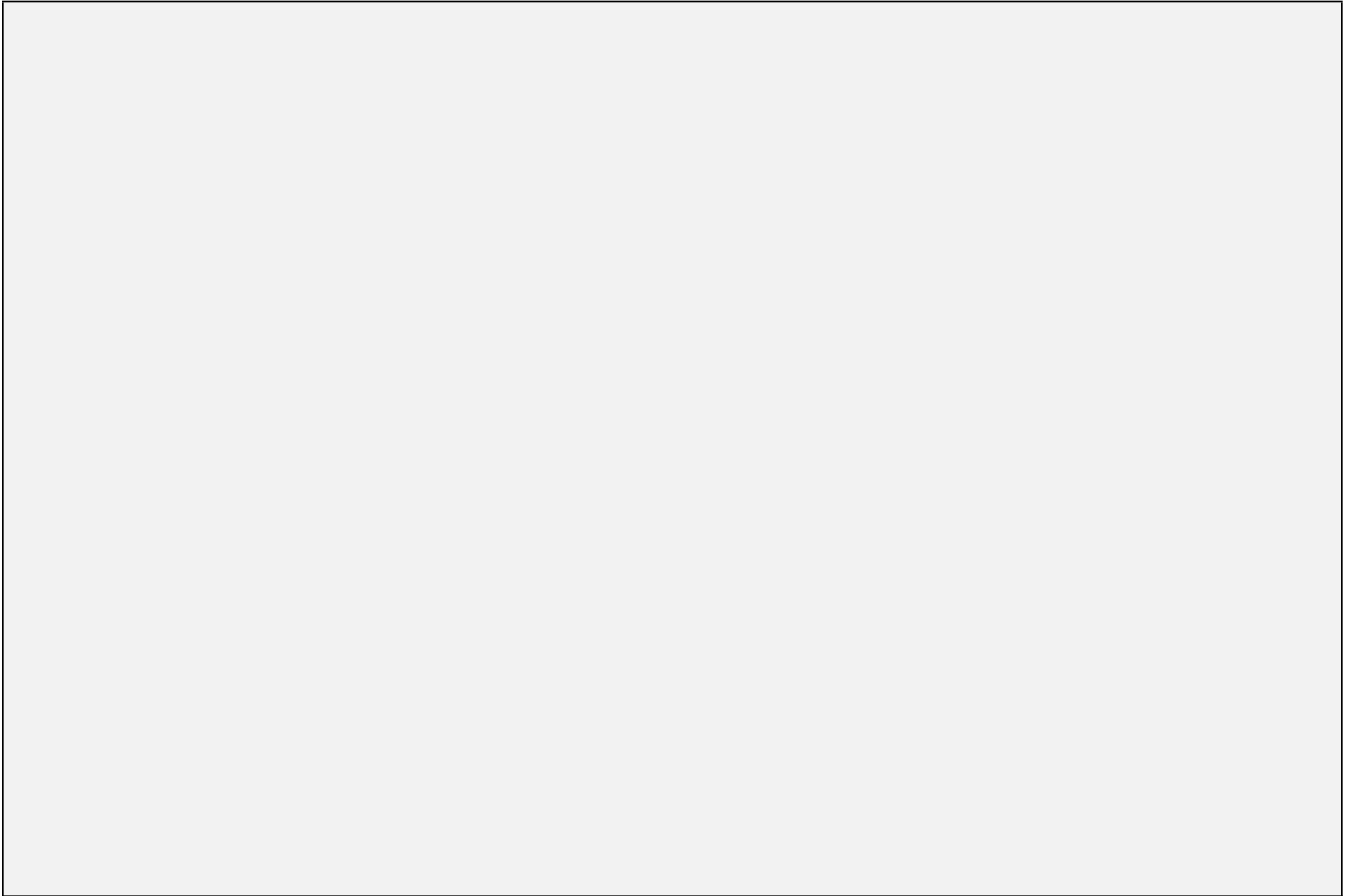
Location (where you live now): _____

Occupation (job): _____

4. Now, it's time to write! If you choose the role of the soldier, you're writing home to your family. Think about things like conditions on the battlefield or new weapons of war. Additionally, you can't just reuse or restate the information in Hutchinson's diary. Instead, you might need to do a little research to find out what things were like for your particular soldier. This may change depending upon whether you choose to "be" a soldier from the Allied or Central powers and may also change depending upon when the letter was written during the war.

If you choose the role of a civilian, you're writing to a family member who is serving in the war. Think about things like supporting the war effort or the reasons why your country is fighting. Again, details will depend upon where the family is located, whom they're writing to, where the soldier is located, and when the letter was written during the war.

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