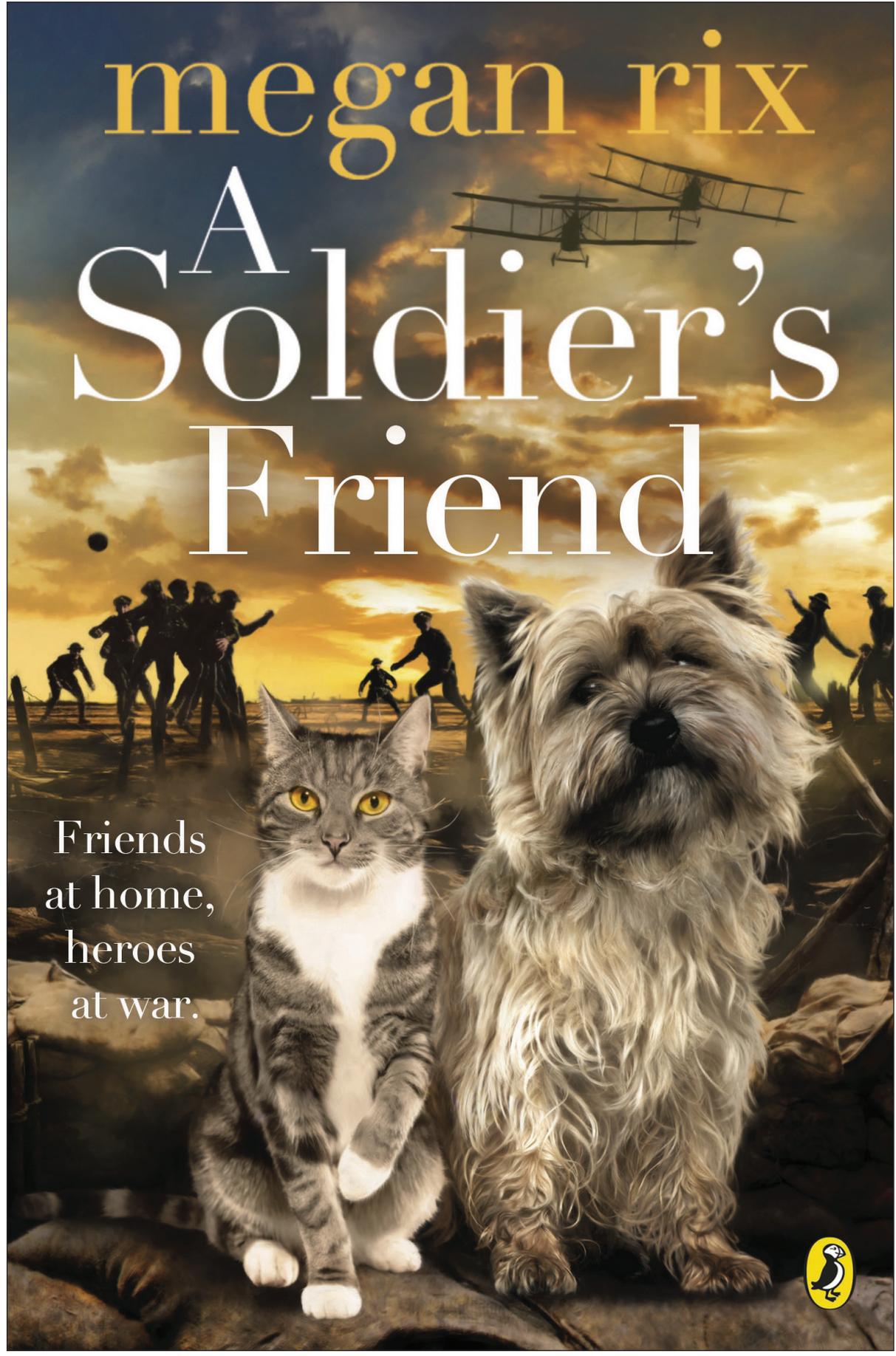
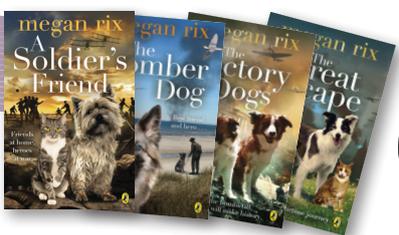


A Soldier's Friend

by Megan Rix



megan rix
A
Soldier's
Friend

Friends
at home,
heroes
at war.



A Soldier's Friend



Introductory notes

by Megan Rix

Megan Rix has written several wonderful books in which cats and dogs are the central characters in the story. The identities and dilemmas of the animals are often more vivid than those of the humans. Rix's writing is never sentimental and tells of the powerful bond between people and animals in an informative, realistic and moving way.

Set at a time of war in Europe, the books represent a good way to study these periods. Rix provides excellent brief historical notes at the ends of the books answering many of the questions that the books provoke.

In this book World War One has just started and everyone talks about it being all over by Christmas. We find out about life in the trenches and the roles that animals played as messengers as well as their potential to help shell shocked soldiers returning from the trenches.

Activities here are intended to encourage further reading of the books so quoted texts have largely been chosen from the beginning of the books to avoid spoilers! The recommendation would always be to read the whole book but these resources are designed so that this is not essential. Alternatively they could be used alongside a couple of weeks of chapter reading to the class.

Activities address **National Curriculum Literacy** guidelines as well as the following Key Stage 2 requirements and guidelines for other subjects:

History guidelines:

- An aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

Geography guidelines:

- Locate the world's countries, using maps to focus on Europe (including the location of Russia).

More ideas

- Make a model trench outside in sand or earth.
- Find your local war memorial to visit or photograph and research some of the names you find.
- Investigate the suffragette movement and the way in which the war changed women's rights.
- Is the book a useful guide for understanding how to charm cats and dogs?

Below is a list of the activities. The extracts are largely in order from the book but could be used in any order.

1. Puppy p.3 (comprehension)
2. Goodbye! p.5 (playwriting)
3. Football p.8 (interrogating the text)
4. Dogs and Cats p.11 (logic/persuasive writing)

5. Maps p.14 (geography/history)
6. Trenches p.16 (comprehension/DT)
7. Favourite parts of A Soldier's Friend p.19 (review)



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1. Puppy

by Megan Rix

This passage is from the very beginning of the book, soon after this we find out that Britain is at war with Germany.

Extract from Chapter 1

The little shaggy-coated cairn terrier puppy trotted down the cobblestoned street in the late afternoon sunshine. Every now and again he looked up at his owner through the grey fur that half flopped over one of his eyes and his little tail wagged happily. But the man didn't reach down and pat him like the little dog wanted him to. He didn't even look at the pup.

'This'll do as well as any,' the man muttered gruffly as they came to a stop outside a large grey building that loomed above them with a sign in front of it saying **BATTERSEA MUNITIONS FACTORY**.

The small puppy looked up expectantly with his head cocked to one side. His tail still wagged as his lead was tied to a post. Perhaps this was a new game? He tried to lick his owner's hand, but was brushed away. 'None of that now,' the man muttered briskly. The puppy sat down. He watched as the man stood up and turned away. Then the little dog jumped up and tried to follow his owner as he headed off down the street, but a second later the little pup was jerked back by his lead. He pulled again, as hard as he could, twisting this way and that, but he couldn't get loose. He barked and then he barked again, now desperate, but his owner didn't come back.



Alert Cairn Terrier sitting and looking up

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1. Puppy

Name _____ Date _____

1. Underline all the words and phrases that tell us about the man's mood and feelings.
2. Use the words underlined in question 1 to help you describe the man.

3. Underline (in a different colour) all the things that tell us about the dog.
4. Describe the dog in your own words.

5. What do you think the dog is feeling at the beginning and at the end of the passage?

6. Why do you think this has happened?

7. Where does this take place?

8. Write a paragraph explaining what you think will happen next.



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2. Goodbye!

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 2

'I don't want anyone seeing me off,' Oliver said firmly. 'I'll have Patrick and the others with me so it's not like I'm heading out to the Western Front alone or with strangers.'

'What is the Western Front exactly?' Lizzie asked Oliver. It was talked about all the time, but not marked on the map at school.

'It's the thin strip of land between Germany, France and Belgium that we're trying to hold, to stop the Germans from making their way through Belgium and into France . . . But you two don't need to worry about that. Now there's one thing I'd like to do before I leave . . .'

'What's that?' Arthur asked him.

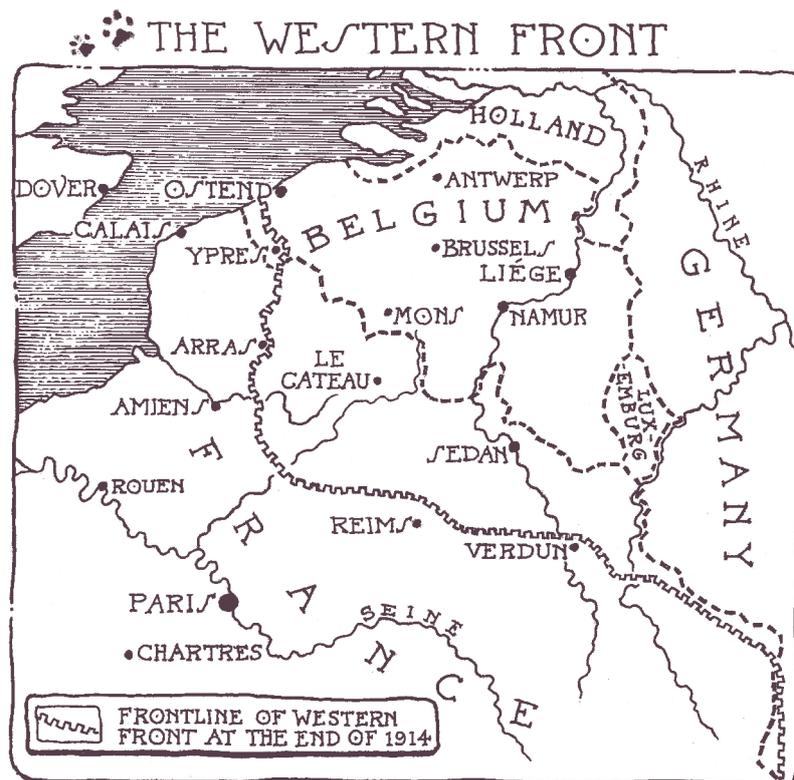
'Well, I reckon there won't be much time for football at the front – wouldn't be surprised if there's none at all. So, one last very quick game, before I go?'

He looked at Arthur and Lizzie.

'Course,' Lizzie said.

'Good idea,' said Arthur. 'Take care and come home soon,' Mrs Jenson said as she kissed Oliver on the cheek.

'I will. Don't worry about me.'



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3. Football

by Megan Rix

Extract from Chapter 3

As you are reading these extracts think about where they are taking place.

‘Flip a coin for who’s in goal?’ Oliver said. But Arthur knew Oliver liked scoring goals more than saving them.

‘I’ll be in goal,’ he told him.

Lizzie and Oliver played against each other. Oliver had the ball first and dribbled it down the street, but then Lizzie tackled him and got it away from him. She dribbled the ball towards Arthur, only to have Oliver take it off her, and then Lizzie get it again. She hesitated as she looked at Arthur in goal, waiting for her to strike. Oliver was leaving. He should be the one scoring.

‘Go on, Lizzie,’ Oliver said.

And Lizzie shot the ball straight into the goal space with her left foot.

‘You’re a natural, Lizzie,’ Oliver told her, giving her shoulder a squeeze.

Lizzie blushed at the compliment. She loved football, but not many of the other girls played, so she didn’t often get the chance.

Arthur kicked the ball back towards Oliver and Oliver dribbled it past Lizzie and straight into the goal. Then he scored two more goals in quick succession as Arthur groaned. He’d not stood a chance of stopping any of the goals so far. He kicked the ball back out again, but this time Oliver picked it up and kept hold of it.

Extract from Chapter 29

The football was almost as big as Sammy, but that just seemed to make him like it even more. It was too big for him to hold in his mouth, but he pushed it forward with his body as he raced after it into no-man’s land, excitedly yipping.

‘Fussball!’ came a shout from the German soldiers.

‘Anyone want a game?’ Oliver shouted into the icy air as he and Marko ran after the little dog.

Soldiers from both sides wanted to play and, within moments, more and more soldiers came to join in – far more than the usual



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3. Football (cont...)

by Megan Rix

eleven players per team. Soon there must have been fifty or more soldiers playing against each other. And not just British and German soldiers, but French and Belgian ones too.

Their pitch was no-man's land. Their goal wherever the goalie with his arms opened wide was.

Sammy was as happy as could be, racing round and round, not playing on any one team, but on both at once. The ball his prey and his prize. He even jumped up into the air to try and get it when Oliver kicked a long shot. The soldiers from both sides manoeuvred round him and were careful not to kick the little dog as he ran between them and the ball.

Mouser watched the men's legs running about, and Sammy running through them, as she was petted by soldiers from both sides. She herself was not the least bit tempted to join in and gave the occasional miaow when the play got too close to her.

But Sammy loved it and played on and off all day, with short breaks to catch his breath before the excitement of the game forced him back into it, until he was panting with exhaustion, while Mouser watched the game from different soldiers' laps.

Finally Sammy tired and rolled on to his back and held the ball in his forepaws. Oliver watched him and shook his head.

'You are one football-loving dog,' he said and the other soldiers laughed.

These two football matches happen in very different places. Discuss the differences and then answer the questions on the next page.



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4. Dogs and cats

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Extract from Chapter 5

‘Do they really have cats at the front? Why do they need trench cats?’ Lizzie asked. ‘Because of the rats,’ Kenneth told her. ‘And as an early warning if there’s a poison gas attack, of course.’

‘Shh, Kenneth,’ Amelia said, looking at Lizzie and Arthur’s stricken faces. ‘There won’t be any poison gas attacks.’

‘No,’ Kenneth quickly agreed. ‘But if there was one the cats and dogs, being so much smaller than the soldiers, would feel the effects of it first and it’d give the soldiers time to react.’

‘Like canaries in mines,’ Arthur said slowly. ‘As long as the birds keep singing, the miners know they’re safe.’

Extract from Chapter 7

‘Stand back!’ the sergeant yelled suddenly. Oliver dropped his shovel and stepped back in surprise as a collie dog came racing down the tunnel towards them, its face steady in concentration and a tin canister attached to its collar.

Oliver reached out to the dog. It seemed so desperate to him. But one of the more experienced soldiers, who’d been at the front almost since the start of the war and the Boer War before that, grabbed Oliver’s arm and pulled him back as he was about to touch it and the dog ran past.

‘Didn’t you listen in your training when they said it’s a court-martial offence to stop a messenger dog from doing his duty?’ the grizzled-looking soldier hissed.

Use the Carroll diagram on the next page to analyse how cats and dogs cope with combat.

Use these passages as well as earlier ones to help you think of reasons why people might be prepared to let their animals go to the Western Front.

Then make a poster to persuade people to donate their animals to the war effort.



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4. Dogs and cats

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

Reasons why they might be good in a war situation

Reasons why they might not be good in a war situation



Cats



Dogs



A Soldier's Friend



4. Dogs and cats

by Megan Rix

Name _____ Date _____

Poster to persuade people to send their cats or dogs to the Western Front.



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5. Maps

by Megan Rix

EUROPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY



EUROPE 1914



KEY

	GERMANY AND ITS ALLIES
	BRITAIN AND ITS ALLIES
	NEUTRAL



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by Megan Rix



5. Maps

Name _____ Date _____

During World War One Europe split into two main sets of allies with some countries staying neutral. Use the key to help you colour in the map:

Colour Germany in the 21st century in **red**.

Colour Germany and her allies in 1914 in **red**.

Colour the 21st century Britain (United Kingdom) in **green**.

Colour Britain (UK) and her allies in 1914 in **green**.

Draw compass points on both maps.

What country lies to the south-east of France? Whose side were they on in 1914?

What country lies to the south-west of France? Whose side were they on in 1914?

Was Greece one of the UK's allies in 1914?

Whose side were Denmark and Sweden on in 1914?

What was the difference between Spain and Portugal during the war?

The countries that made up Germany, Austria and Hungary in 1914 are now divided. Write the names of as many countries can you find in these areas in the 21st century?

Extension activity: Find out some present day facts about one of the countries that were in the German ally block during the war.



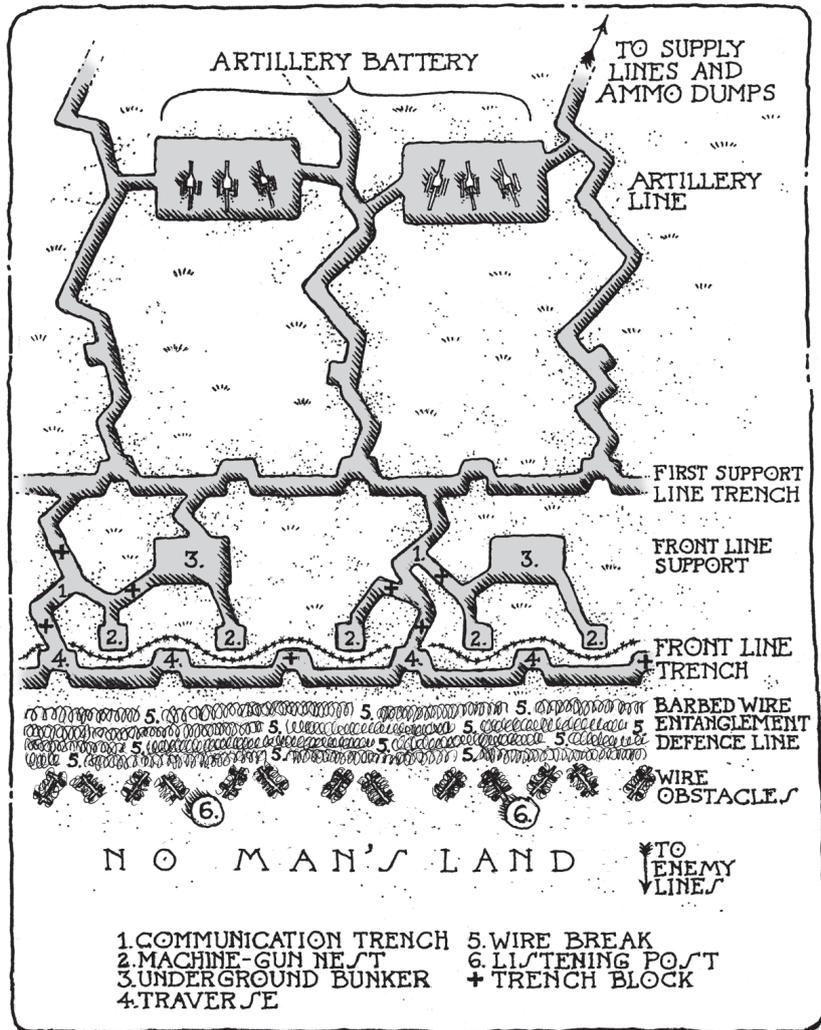
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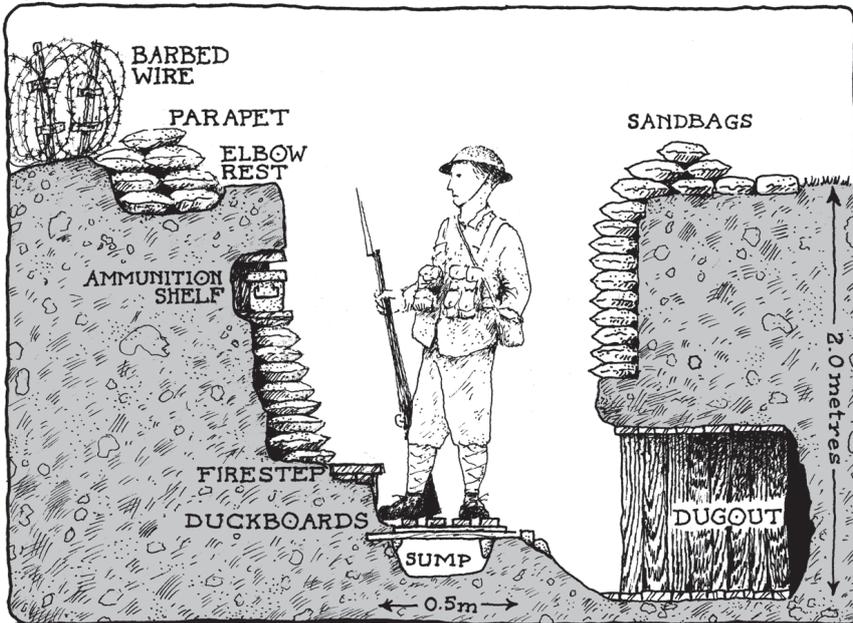
6. Trenches

by Megan Rix

TRENCH WARFARE SYSTEM



CROSS-SECTION OF BRITISH TRENCH 1914



A Soldier's Friend



6. Trenches

by Megan Rix

Name _____

Date _____

Extract from Chapter 7

‘Why can’t they be straight, Sarge?’ one of the new soldiers asked. ‘It’d be a lot simpler.’ The sergeant held up his rifle and pretended to take aim at the men who’d been digging, but now straightened their backs to hear his answer. ‘If I shot this gun from here at you lot, just think about the damage I could do. You’d all be like sitting ducks. I couldn’t miss. But my gun doesn’t shoot in zigzags and a gas attack won’t spread as far either. The reason you’re digging like this is so you get a chance to go home and see your mothers one day.’

Look at the diagrams of the trench plan and the cross section of a trench and read the extract.

Colour the...

communication trenches in **red**,
machine-gun nests in **yellow**,
underground bunkers in **blue**,

transverses in **green**,
wire breaks in **orange**,
listening posts in **purple**.

What do you think the sump and duckboards are for?

What do you think the word ‘sarge’ in the extract is short for?

How deep are the trenches?

What pattern are the trenches built in and why?



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6. Trenches

Name _____

Date _____

If you were a soldier in the trenches, would you be in more danger if you were in the listening post or the supply lines. Why?

What is the artillery battery and why is it placed where it is?

What is the soldier in the picture holding and what two jobs could it do?

Why do you think there was barbed wire in front of the parapet?

Why do you think the firestep has that name?

Imagine that you have to organise the building of a new trench. Make a list of things you will need:

Write instructions for building the trench:



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7. Favourite parts of A Soldier's Friend

by Megan Rix

Name _____ Date _____

Score these on a scale 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being fantastic!)

	1	2	3	4	5
Finding out about dogs & cats					
Finding out about World War One.					
Doing the mapwork					
Reading the story					
Will you read the rest of the book?					

Draw a picture below of the part of the project that you enjoyed most and say why you liked it.

