

Name: _____

Date: _____



Pretend to be a soldier in the trenches of the Western Front and write a letter home. Think about the things you can see, smell, hear and what you would do as you live in the trenches.

A large, blank, lined area for writing a letter, designed to look like a piece of aged paper with a central fold and slightly irregular edges.

artillery

rats

lice

trench

stew

mud

barbed wire

German

ration

soldier

sniper

front line

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Life in the Trenches

Environment

The trenches were long, narrow ditches in the ground with sandbags lining the top. Between the Allied and German trenches was no man's land. This was a dangerous place covered in mud, craters created by artillery shells and barbed wire.

The trenches were freezing and muddy in winter, often flooding because of the rain, and were full of flies in the summer.

Pests

As soldiers lived in the trenches, they had to share the space with many pests such as lice and rats. The soldiers' clothes were infested with lice, making them itch constantly. Soldiers didn't have the time or facilities to wash properly and clean their clothes. They would try delousing their clothes but this wasn't very effective as the lice would burrow into the seams of the clothes and lay eggs. Some soldiers even shaved their heads completely to get rid of the itching. Rats continued to be a big problem throughout the war. They thrived off the rotting food that the soldiers left and could reproduce quickly, meaning trenches were overrun. The rats would spread disease and began stealing food from under the soldiers' noses! A common solution to deal with rats was to use small dogs or cats to catch the rats. These often became morale-raising mascots for the soldiers living there.

Free time

Night time on the front line was spent watching the enemy trenches and being vigilant for an enemy attack. Soldiers were given chores and times in which they had to 'stand-to' to keep watch for enemy attacks. Free time was spent sleeping, usually sat upright against the side of the trench. When they weren't sleeping they would play cards or read letters from home. Many soldiers were away from home for months at a time and became homesick.



Food

Food was short in most places during the war but leaders knew that soldiers needed to be fed and healthy in order to be effective. By 1917 fresh meat was hard to come by and small amounts had to be stretched to feed more people. 'Maconochie's meat stew' and hard biscuits was a meal that many soldiers ate.

Other facts

The sound of gunfire and artillery barrages was almost constant. This interrupted the soldiers' sleep and contributed to the constant fear of an enemy attack. Many soldiers suffered from a form of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) known as shell shock. This often left them panicked, scared and sometimes unable to sleep, walk or talk.

In order to attack the enemy, the soldiers had to go 'over the top' of the trenches. This was often a terrifying moment for the soldiers as they would have to face the barbed wire, enemy machine guns and snipers to get to the enemy trenches. Many soldiers lost their lives in the effort to push back the enemy.

Censorship



Any letter sent home from the front line had to be carefully inspected by the officer in charge of the battalion. He had to check that the letter didn't contain any military secrets that might help the enemy if it fell into the wrong hands. The British government didn't want the letters to contain anything too sad. They wanted the people at home to feel positive about the war and stories of the poor conditions on the front line might damage this positive image. Use the list below to see the kinds of thing that the officer would censor by blocking them out with black marker before the letter was sent home.

It is imperative that military secrets do not make it to the enemy. It is an officer's duty to make sure the following information is censored from any correspondence:

- Position of where you are stationed
- The number of soldiers positioned with you
- The names of any other soldiers stationed with you
- The weapons that your battalion has
- Any details of planned attacks
- The names of any injured soldiers
- The names of any soldiers who had died
- Any information about the conditions for soldiers on the frontline

Censorship



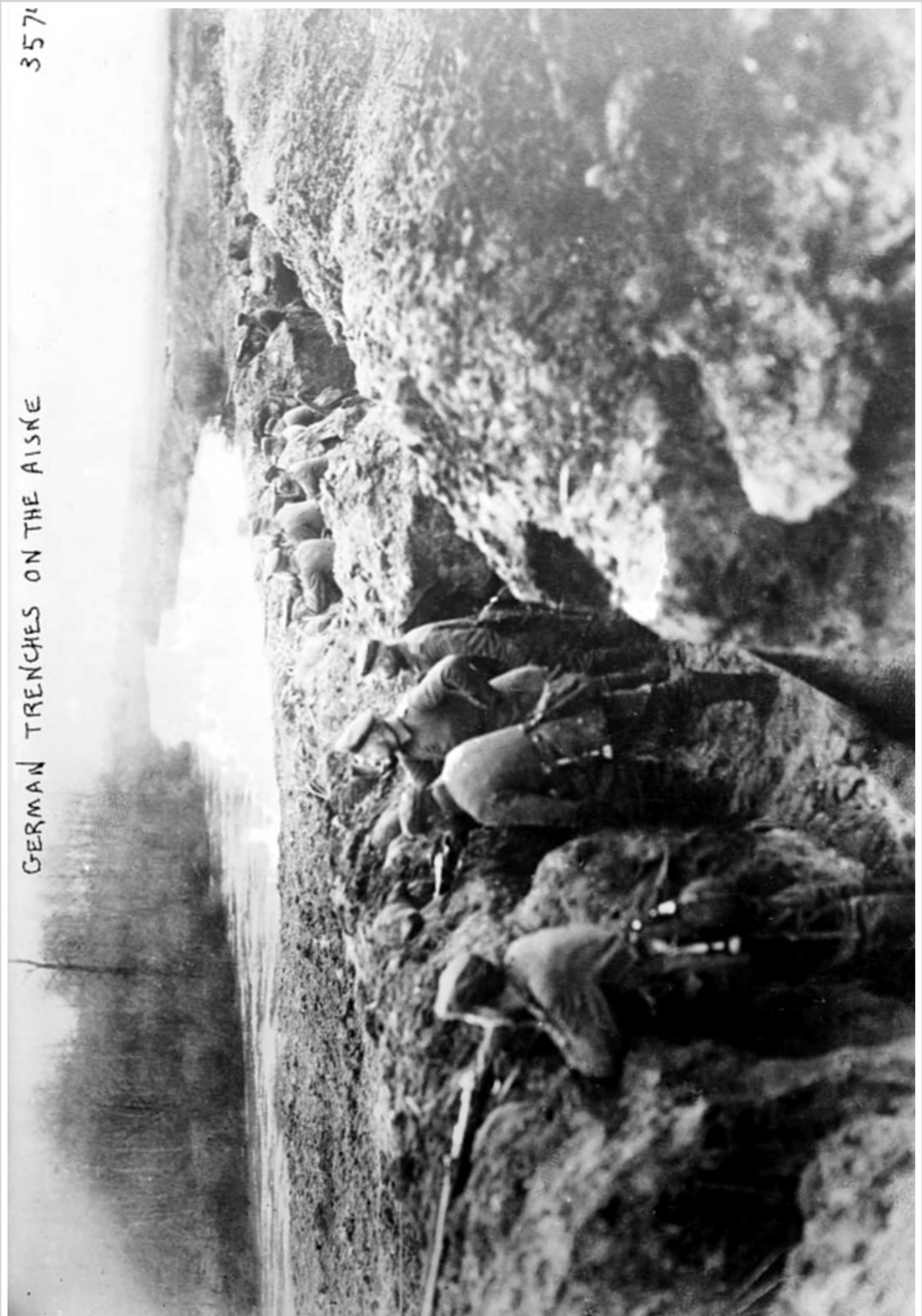
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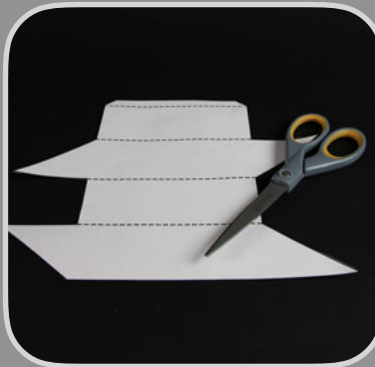
Make a Periscope



Looking over the top of trenches was incredibly dangerous. Enemy snipers were very skilled at spotting soldiers and could pinpoint and kill someone who had left themselves open to attack very quickly. In order to keep themselves safe, soldiers used periscopes to peer over the top and keep an eye on the enemy. Follow the instructions to make your own periscope.

Equipment:

- Scissors
- Ruler
- Biro
- Template (on card)
- Two mirrors
- Glue
- Tape or sticky tac



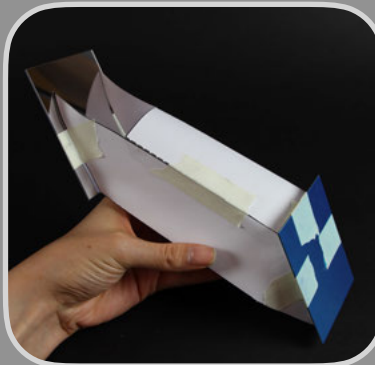
Cut out the template.



Score along the dotted lines using a ruler and a biro.



If you are decorating your periscope, do this part now. Then, stick your periscope together using tape and/or glue.



Stick your mirrors so that they are on the slanted part of each end. This can be fiddly so you may need a partner to help you.



Look through here!

Test your periscope. Try peering over the edge of a table to see what you can spot or ask a friend to write a secret message for you to read using the periscope.

