

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

THE GREAT DEBATE



Recommended for

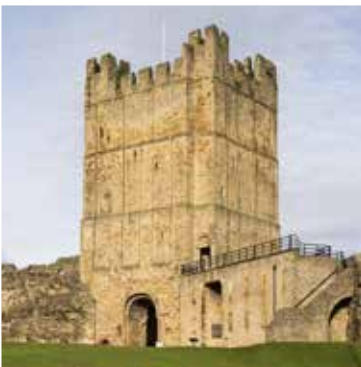
KS3 & KS4 (History, English)

Learning objectives

- Through debate, explore and discuss alternative perspectives about conscription and the treatment of conscientious objectors during the First World War.
- Construct arguments using critical analysis of sources in their historical context and wider knowledge, and explain these arguments clearly to an audience.
- Understand how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, discerning how and why different interpretations of the past have been constructed.

Time to complete

30 minutes



The cell block at Richmond Castle.

SUMMARY

Approximately 20,000 men in Britain appealed for exemption from military service in the First World War after conscription was introduced in 1916. This debating activity will help students to understand different attitudes towards conscription and conscientious objection during the First World War, and some of the consequences of the policies that were introduced.

Split your students into teams who will be working together to approach different sides of a question about conscription and conscientious objection (some examples are suggested below). They should start by using the source material in this Learning Pack, and the suggested websites on **page 48** to research attitudes towards conscientious objection during the First World War.

DEBATE TITLES:

- *The Military Service Act gave conscientious objectors a fair means of participating in the war without going into battle.*
- *Conscientious objectors were unfairly treated.*
- *Negative attitudes towards conscientious objectors were reasonable and to be expected during wartime.*

Remind your students that, in a debate, they need to research, justify and deliver an argument that may not be representative of their personal views. The object of a debate competition is to provide the most convincing argument, based on evidence and tackling all the points of the opposition.

A key component of historical debate is the use of sources to support the claims. Through their exploration and analysis of sources, encourage students to think critically about the sources' provenance and purpose. Sources can provide evidence in lots of different ways, and can be used to prove both sides of an argument and alternative interpretations of past events.

Continued...

Useful research websites:

The Historical Association runs a Great Debate competition each year, and produces a helpful guide with tips including speech writing and hints for delivery:

www.history.org.uk/getinvolved/categories/907/info/3638/creating-the-debate-public-speaking-guidance

Look at our website for information about conscientious objectors:

www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/richmond-castle/history/attitudes-to-cos/

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Students can use their debate speeches and research to write a discursive essay answering one of the questions above. To add challenge, they could answer from the opposite side of the question from which they argued. Alternatively students could recreate a dramatic monologue to present their view, or even write a play script showing a debate between characters during the First World War.