

Wisbech General Cemetery: Remembrance Assembly 2024

This year's theme for Remembrance Sunday is 'courage' and the focus is on the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and subsequent fighting that went on in 1944. The Wisbech General Cemetery has the headstone of one pilot who fought in the Second World War so this assembly will use him as much as possible to relate to the wider theme of courage.

The assembly for 2023 has information on what is recorded on CWGC headstones so is not repeated here. If you didn't use that assembly or just want to refresh your knowledge, then please take a look at it.

As with last year – you can adapt the assembly to suite your style and students. This has been written to assume you have the ability to talk to students in the assembly or class environment, so some of the questions might need to be in their heads rather than out loud if you are doing this in front of lots of children.

It has been left for you to decide colours, fonts and transitions – you know your students' needs.

Slide 1:

A word cloud of words that all mean similar things and link to courage.

Start with two simple questions and have students think about these words and what they mean. ('braveryousness' might not be a word but you could have fun with it if anyone spots it.)

Slide 2:

'Courage'

Explain that this is the 'focus' word and in this assembly you will talk about what it means, then link it to WW2 and a local story.

Slide 3:

Definition. Before showing the definition ask for pupils to come up with their own. This definition is from a primary school online dictionary.

Slide 4:

Learning the word 'courage'. This technique has been used in primary schools and you might be familiar with it. Doing 'something' with a new word will help make it more familiar. This could be done in the assembly and followed up afterwards in class.

Slide 5:

Ask pupils for examples of when they have shown courage in their lives, or if they know of someone who is courageous.

This will lead into the life of the WW2 pilot.

Being courageous is standing up for a cause, taking on a challenge, or facing fears, courage is essential to grow and thrive.

Nelson Mandela once famously said, "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

This quote reminds people that true courage is not about the absence of fear but the ability to push through fears and take action. After all, it is only human nature to experience fear. But it takes courage to make you do something even if you are afraid.

Slide 6:

Introducing RBL theme.

At this time of year people start wearing poppies to remember our armed forces who have fought and died to protect us and the values we believe in. The Royal British Legion wanted 2024 assemblies to explore the theme of 'courage' because 80 years ago the armed forces from many allied countries launched an attack on the north coast of France (Normandy) to try and take back the land from Nazi Germany and give it back to the French people who lived there. They showed tremendous courage – and that is why the word is the focus.

However, it is difficult to understand the sacrifice of so many so let's look at the story from one man, well a boy really. He was only 18 years old when he joined the RAF. His name is Jack Smith.

Slide 7:

Jack Smith

Read Jack's background out so pupils get to know something of his life before he joined the RAF. This is the story of a typical family. Nothing extraordinary.

Jack's background:

Jack's father, John Smith, was an elementary school master at Christchurch (near Upwell) mixed school, employed by the Isle of Ely Education Committee. John Smith was born in Wisbech in 1886, his father, Jack's grandfather was a tailor's cutter. His mother, Louisa Kitchen, was born in 1890 and at the time her father, James Kitchen, was a railway labourer. He would later become the publican of the West End Inn in Leverington Road, Wisbech (now Blues Restaurant). Before she married, Louise worked

as a shop assistant in a confectionery shop. John Smith & Louisa Kitchen married in 1914.

In 1921 John & Louisa were living in the School House in Christchurch.

Jack was born on 13 December 1921 in Christchurch, Cambridgeshire and appears to have been their only child.

In September 1939, Jack was living at 68 Ramnoth Road, Wisbech with his paternal aunt, Edith Brooks. He was still attending school. Edith was a widow. His father, now retired, was at 25 South Beach Road in Hunstanton. (No trace of his mother has been found in the 1939 Register.)

John Smith of 68 Ramnoth Road died on 1 November 1940, aged 54.

Jack's mother remarried, Alfred Leonard Mitchell, a butcher who lived in March, in 1941.

Jack's mother, Louisa Mitchell, died in 1982.

Next read out his service record and ask for pupils to put their hand up when they think Jack is showing courage. Pupils might put their hand up for things like:

- He joined the RAF
- He was a pilot
- His type of flying was more dangerous than most

Jack's service:

Jack Smith was a pilot in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. He served in 174 Squadron which was formed at RAF Manston (near Margate and Ramsgate in Kent) on the 3rd of March 1942 with 17 Hurricanes and eight pilots. Its initial role was ground attack and fighter bomber. The bombing attacks being against German shipping.

Jack's service number would indicate that he enlisted in May 1940, when he was 18 years old. (These numbers were allocated to Uxbridge, Gloucester & Penarth.)

Jack flew a Hurricane MK IIb Airframe BP653 AIR 81/16098. (Image on slide.)

The life expectancy of a fighter pilot was four weeks. The most dangerous were the first and last five trips. During the whole war, 51% of aircrew were killed on operations, 12% were killed or wounded in non-operational accidents and 13% became prisoners of war or evaders. Only 24% survived the war unscathed. (Information on WW2 fighter pilots taken from IWC website).

Jack died in a training flying accident at the age of 20 on the 1st July 1942. He flew into the ground in low cloud at Whitfield, north of Dover. Low flying was very dangerous, more so over water as height was difficult to judge.

Slide 8:

To conclude the assembly there is a photo of Jack's headstone along with that of his uncle's (details below).

Jack's maternal uncle, Percy Kitchen, died in WWI on 18 May 1915, aged 19. He is also buried in the WGC with a CWGC headstone. Percy lived at 8 Prospect Place, Wisbech.

Both of these are in the Wisbech General Cemetery. His uncle, Percy, died in WW1, Jack in WW2. You could speculate as to whether Jack joined the RAF because he wanted to emulate his maternal uncle. We'll never know for sure.

Jack showed tremendous courage. Jack conquered any fears he had of flying and fighting the enemy.

As you wear your poppy this year, or as you reflect on the sacrifice made by our armed forces, remember the courage of one young man.