

Introduction

Six WWI Plays: No Man's Land is a set of six plays about women in World War I. They have been written with GCSE and BTEC drama groups in mind: they also work well with Key Stage 3 students. All of the plays can be performed by all-female casts, although there are parts that can be played by boys as well.

The plays are written for casts of three to five, but casting is as flexible as possible and most of the plays can be performed by more or fewer students. This means that teachers can adapt the scripts to suit their particular needs. Note that full performance rights are included within the purchase price of this pack.

Putting a number of the plays together on one evening will make an interesting alternative to the usual school play. The setting of the plays has deliberately been kept simple to allow for ease of production and, apart from a few chairs, they require little in the way of props or scenery. Stage directions have been kept to a minimum so that students can make their own decisions about how the plays are to be staged.

As the centenary of World War I approaches, some schools may wish to run projects based around its events; these plays will fit well into these activities. They have obvious cross-curricular links with history and citizenship.

Other titles also available from Pearson Publishing include:

- *Ten GCSE Plays*
- *Ten More GCSE Plays*
- *Multicultural GCSE Plays*
- *Mini-Plays*
- *Ten Ghostly Plays*

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Play details

The Canary Girls

The Canary Girls tells the story of Emily, a young working-class woman, who leaves home for the first time to work in a munitions factory in London.

Victim Always Dies

Victoria leaves her middle-class home and volunteers as a VAD nurse. Members of the VAD or Voluntary Aid Detachment were called 'Vads'. Soldiers however invented their own nicknames for the Vads, including the derisory 'Victim Always Dies'.

Patriotism Is Not Enough

On the morning of 11 October 1915, Edith Cavell, a British nurse, was executed by the German authorities for spying. The play tells the story of her final three days.

Sylvia and Christabel

Sylvia and Christabel Pankhurst are best known for leading the women's suffrage movement. What is less well known are the vastly differing roles they had in World War I. Christabel was avidly pro-war, while Sylvia was a committed pacifist and social activist. This play tells that story.

The Turnip Winter

In a modern war, civilians on all sides suffer. Most British people are aware of the unsuccessful German attempt to use submarines to starve British civilians during World War I. What is less well known is that their submarine campaign was a belated response to the much more successful British naval campaign to starve German civilians – a campaign that was continued after the war ended. This drama documentary tells the story of one young Berlin woman's attempt to survive the years of starvation.

The Telegram Girl

This play tells the story of Eileen; it's a true story. She is not famous, she's just an ordinary person with a remarkable story. In 1985, Eileen recorded her memories for the Imperial War Museum. This play is based on that recording.

Patriotism Is Not Enough

A drama-documentary

The characters: Edith Cavell; Dr Edward Stoeber, German military prosecutor; Judge; Pastor Le Seur, German prison chaplain; Gaston de Leval, the American Legation's legal representative; Conrad, secretary of the German political department in Brussels; Sister Elisabeth Wilkins, a nurse; Reverend Gahan, an Anglican chaplain; Hugh Gibson, first secretary at the American Legation in Brussels; Baron von der Lancken, German civil governor in Brussels; General von Saubersweig, German military governor in Brussels.

(The play is written to allow for flexibility in casting and can be performed by five actors. In the script, the number in brackets immediately before a character name indicates which of the five actors should play which part. The style of the play allows it to be played by a mixed or all-female cast. Stage directions in the script are kept to a minimum so that any group performing the play can find their own performance style.)

Upstage centre are a chair and a small writing table. The actor playing Edith Cavell stays onstage until the end of the play, when she exits. The lights come up to reveal Edith Cavell sitting on a chair in the centre of the stage.)

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| Actor 2: | August the third 1914: Germany declares war on France and invades Belgium. |
| Actor 3: | August the fourth: Britain declares war on Germany. |
| Actor 4: | August the ninth: the British Expeditionary Force embarks for France. |
| Actor 5: | August the twentieth: Brussels evacuated as Germans occupy the city. |
| Actor 2: | August the twenty-second, Mons in Belgium: the BEF encounters vastly superior German forces. |
| Actor 3: | August the twenty-fourth: the BEF retreats back to France in the face of overwhelming odds. Many British troops are cut off and are stuck behind German lines. |
| Actor 4: | A British nurse, Edith Cavell, and a group of patriotic Belgians smuggle stranded British soldiers north to neutral Holland and from there they are able to get back to Britain. |
| (1) Cavell: | Edith Louisa Cavell was born on the fourth of December 1865 in a small Norfolk village. In 1898, at the age of thirty-three, she qualified as a nurse. In 1907, she was appointed matron of the Berkendael Medical Institute in Brussels, a school for the training of nurses. |

- Actor 5: At 4pm on Wednesday August the fourth 1915, Edith Cavell and the rest of the group were arrested by the Germans.
- (2) Stoeber: (*To the audience.*) On Thursday October the seventh 1915, she was brought to trial. The military prosecutor was Dr Eduard Stoeber. (*As Stoeber.*) Edith Louisa Cavell, you are charged, together with other persons, with treason as outlined in paragraph 90 of the military penal code of the German Imperial Army. Your offence was to conduct soldiers to the enemy. Do you understand the charge?
- (1) Cavell: I understand.
- (2) Stoeber: The charge is that between November 1914 and July 1915 you did shelter British and French soldiers and that you also helped Belgian and French men of military age to escape to neutral Holland. Is that correct?
- (1) Cavell: That is correct.
- (2) Stoeber: Why have you committed these treasonable acts?
- (1) Cavell: At the start it was simple, I was confronted by two English soldiers whose lives were in danger. I thought that they would be shot by the German army if I did not help them to escape.
- (2) Stoeber: Miss Cavell, the German army does not shoot prisoners of war.
- (1) Cavell: One of them was wounded; I am a nurse. I felt that I had no choice but to help them.
- (2) Stoeber: How many men have you helped?
- (1) Cavell: About two hundred.
- (2) Stoeber: Do you realise that helping these two hundred men has been to the disadvantage of Germany and to the advantage of the enemy?
- (1) Cavell: My aim was not to help your enemy but simply to assist those men who asked for my help. I am a nurse and it is my Christian duty to aid those in trouble. As you are no doubt aware, as a nurse I have treated all the wounded men in my care without reference to their nationality. I have treated English, French, Belgian and German wounded impartially and to the best of my ability. When someone, anyone, comes to me for help, I will give it.
- (2) Stoeber: Miss Cavell, you are a British nurse working here in Belgium under the protection of the International Committee of the Red Cross. Is that correct?
- (1) Cavell: Yes, that is correct.
- (2) Stoeber: Are you aware that article seven of the Geneva Convention states that the protection of the Red Cross is forfeit if used as a cover for any belligerent act?
- (1) Cavell: I did not commit a belligerent act; my motive was simply to help those in need.

- Actor 5:** Stoeber's questioning of Edith Cavell lasted no more than ten minutes. The Germans were in a hurry and all thirty-four members of the escape ring were tried on the same day.
- (2) Stoeber:** *(To the audience.)* At eight o'clock on the morning of the following day Stoeber began his summing up. *(As Stoeber.)* We do not know for certain the number of soldiers and men of military age that the prisoners helped to escape. On her own admission Miss Cavell puts the number at two hundred. At this moment those men are fighting in France against the fatherland. How many of our brave soldiers will they kill? How many of our young men are dead as a result of the actions of these escaped prisoners? Edith Cavell was one of the ringleaders. She hid the fugitives, she gave them money and civilian clothes, took them to safe houses and handed them on to other plotters. She has confessed everything. The prisoners are guilty of treason and the penalty for treason is death. I call for the court to pass death sentences on the ringleaders and imprisonment with hard labour for the rest. Edith Cavell, do you have anything to say in your defence?
- (1) Cavell:** I have nothing to add.
- Actor 4:** Saturday the ninth of October. In a secret session, the judges made up their minds and delivered the verdict and the sentences.
- (5) Judge:** It is the opinion of this court that most of the prisoners were aware that they were conveying fugitive soldiers and men of military age to the enemy. It was their deliberate intention to send reinforcements to the hostile powers to the detriment of our own German troops. It is the judgement of this court that the conspirators be sentenced to death.
- Actor 3:** Sunday the tenth of October. The judgement and sentence were confirmed by Brigadier-General von Saubersweig, the German Military Governor.
- Actor 4:** Monday the eleventh of October at three o'clock in the afternoon. Edith Cavell was removed from her cell and was taken, along with the other accused, to the central hall of the prison where the sentences were read out.
- (Cavell stands.)*
- (5) Judge:** *(To Cavell.)* The sentences shall be as follows: Edith Cavell, Philippe Baucq, Louise Thuliez, Louis Severin and Jeanne de Belleville: death by firing squad. *(Pause.)* The sentences against Philippe Baucq and Edith Cavell to be carried out immediately.
- (3) Le Seur:** *(To the audience.)* That evening Pastor Le Seur, the German prison chaplain, went to visit Edith Cavell in her cell. *(To Cavell.)* Miss Cavell, I have something to tell you.
- (1) Cavell:** What is it?
- (3) Le Seur:** A date and time have been fixed for your execution.

- (1) Cavell: How much time will they give me?
- (3) Le Seur: Unfortunately, only until tomorrow morning. (*Long pause.*) Miss Cavell, I should like to offer you my services as a pastor. I can be at your disposal at any hour of the day and night.
- (1) Cavell: No, thank you.
- (3) Le Seur: Can I not show you some kindness? Please do not see me as a German, an enemy, but only as a servant of our Lord and Saviour, who places himself entirely at your disposal.
- (1) Cavell: Will it be possible to inform my mother in England, so that she might not learn of my execution through the newspapers?
- (3) Le Seur: You may rest assured that I will do everything that is in my power.
- (1) Cavell: Thank you.
- (3) Le Seur: I realise that I wear a German uniform and I am not of the Anglican Church, so I will understand if you feel that you cannot receive any spiritual help from me, but I do know the Reverend Gahan, the Anglican chaplain, very well. Would you like him to come and give you holy communion?
- (1) Cavell: I should like that very much.
- (3) Le Seur: Miss Cavell, it will be my unfortunate duty to stand by your side at the end. Would you prefer Mr Gahan to take my place?
- (1) Cavell: No, most definitely not, it will be much too heavy a burden for reverend Gahan. He is not accustomed to such things.
- (3) Le Seur: Ah, Miss Cavell, please allow me to render you a service. Instead of meeting you first outside on the firing range, I should like to come and fetch you here in your cell.
- (1) Cavell: That is most kind and thoughtful of you.
- (3) Le Seur: May God be with you in your hour of need. Goodbye, Miss Cavell.

(*Pause. They shake hands.*)

- (1) Cavell: Good night, Pastor Le Seur.
- Actor 4: The British Government could do nothing to help her. Pressure to save her could only come from neutral countries; at that time the USA was still neutral, so it was in a position to help. On the morning of Monday October the twelfth the American Legation in Brussels heard rumours of the proposed execution. At eleven thirty Gaston de Leval, the American Legation's legal representative, telephoned Herr Conrad, the secretary of the German political department.
- (2) Conrad: Herr Conrad speaking.
- (4) De Leval: De Leval here, American Legation.
- (2) Conrad: Good morning, what can I do for you?