

PRESENTATION SPEECH

OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE ERASMUS + PROJECT

During the English lessons of the current year, our class the 5ALS of Liceo Scientifico Albert Einstein, actively joined the Erasmus + KA2 project and offered its contribution.

As everybody here knows it is an international project where different schools of different countries, and therefore speaking different languages communicate and work together to share Knowledge and reflection.

Sharing and analyzing differences, as well as singling out similarities is therefore not only a privileged aim of foreign language learning, but one of the most valuable added value of taking part in international projects and multilingual reflection.

We are now going to illustrate the steps of our research project and share the reflection it fostered

As you may understand right from the title **the project privileged aim** is

***to know, study and analyse historic events and documents about WWI
to foster and promote a message of peace.***

In particular, our class contributed to the general aim **following different steps** that raised our awareness about what a conflict like a World War may mean.

STEP 1

We started from a survey meant to collect information about the perceptions of the First World War and the role of women during the conflict.

That is why we decided to interview people from different generations in order to know more about their perceptions on the First World War and the role women played and compare them.

The data collected refer to: **our classmates' perceptions, as well as their parents' and grandparents'.**

The survey was carried out both with individual and group activities which helped us test and improve our team work competence.

Our task was not confined to data collection; we also classified data according to the most frequent key words resulting from the survey.

We later arranged data into **different presentation formats** that **range from key words tables, to histograms to end with pie charts** since, in our opinion such formats offer the opportunity to make the most frequent data of our investigation immediately accessible and therefore more suitable to straightforward communication.

In spite of age and generation difference, **our findings show that most of the interviewed, perceive the conflict as an unjust and brutal and dramatic event or series of events with lots of innocent lives waste.**

And, as for the role of women, the data collected show women's role was perceived and considered relevant because:

- First their work, as well as their work of care, was the one that allowed family survival they
- Second it also provided support to the soldiers at the frontline.

STEP 2

We later moved to the second step of our work which **consisted in the textual work of analysis of different text types** in order to

- **gain a wider perspective on the themes object of our study** and, last but not least
- **personally interact with the perceptions of the war conveyed by they who experienced the atmosphere of the conflict and the conflict itself from a closer and more personal perspective.**

In view of reaching our second objective we analysed the following poetical texts that belong to the so-called English "War Poetry":

- Rupert Brook, *The Soldier*
- John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*
- Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*
- Siegfried Sassoon, *They*
- Siegfried Sassoon, *The Glory of Women*

The analysis of the compositions made us **understand the feelings and concrete perceptions of the intellectuals** of the time.

On one hand, there were those who **promoted the war through propagandistic and patriotic poems** like Rupert Brooke, who did not really experience life in the trenches in first person.

His poem *The soldier* mainly relies on **radical patriotism** and rather conveys **the image of an ideal, heroic soldier, one who is ready to die for his homeland and, as a result, gain an eternal life in heaven.**

On the other hand, the poets who directly took part in the conflict and therefore had **a first-hand personal experienced of the war**, wrote poems denouncing **the monstrous waste of young lives.**

For instance, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon **did nothing to hide the cruel reality of the war and sharply criticized those who magnified it as a way to gain honor and glory**, and their condemnation does not reach the reader simply in a rational and cognitive way. **The use of language and especially the stylistic choices on the sound level convey the tragic idea in a more convincing way than any news section or narrative report.**

Also, **poetry criticized those women's attitudes meant to gain celebrity from their partners' participation in the war and praised and boasted mainly the outward image of a conflict that was magnified only on promotional and nationalistic grounds.**

In short, the deepest message conveyed by War Poets is in line with the results of the survey we carried out among the different generations.

All poems convey a message which shows **war** mainly as **a means of death and destruction, and there is no argument that can justify it.**

To conclude the more literary section of our study, **we turned to the analysis of fiction** and namely we read and analysed D.H. Lawrence's short story The Fox since it lends itself to put into focus women's life during the conflict.

It is a short story mainly about Banford's and March's life.

They are two young women who tried to make a living on their own. They experienced running a farm alone in the English countryside of Berkshire during the Great War. Even if, one day a soldier coming from the war appears on their farm and matters change dramatically.

On the denotative level, **the short story narrates and describes the effects of the war in the countryside.** Indeed, **the war provides a background to the story:** a contest of restrictions in the use of electricity, lack of food and misery compelled people to face hard living conditions.

On the connotative level, the short story focusses on the female figure and offers its readers a woman's perspective.

In particular, D.H. Lawrence goes deep into the relationship between man and woman and he develops the story around the opposition between the male and the female sphere. Therefore, **the fox reveals to be a key element of narration and becomes a symbol for the male gender.**

The fox will later be embodied by Henry, the soldier. The fox, as well as Henry, stands for the male dominance on the two women who are trying to be independent.

In the short story **the First World War can be considered a means or better one of the first steps towards women's emancipation.**

The conflict offered Banford and March the opportunity to occupy and replace man's position both in work and in the social fields, thus giving them a first taste of what independence may be like and signify.

STEP 3

The third step of our work was meant **to shift the focus of our research from the past to the present.** Indeed we had the opportunity to meet and interview Nicolò Giraldi, the writer of the novel-diary

"La Grande Guerra a piedi. Da Londra a Trieste sui luoghi del primo conflitto mondiale".

Nicolò Giraldi decided **to walk along the western frontline to retrace the most symbolic scenarios of the conflict.**

Along his ad-venture he said he was guided by his dead grandfather's voice. His grandfather had died during the war.

The novel is written in the form of a diary kept by Mr. Giraldi.

It focuses both on **the monuments reminding the Great War** but he was also interested in collecting the **memory preserved by those who now deal with sites of remembrance.**

They are figures who have received **the task to hand down from generation to generation something that has been felt significant to the point of needing transmission.**

‘Memory’ is the key word of Giraldi’s novel: it is the bridge between the past and the present. It is a reminder not to forget what has really happened.

THE FINAL STEP

Coming now to the conclusion of our report **we feel it particularly important to consider the choice made to end our project.**

We decided to go deep into the analysis of two poems written by the Laureate poetess Carol Ann Duffy and namely:

- Last Post
- The Christmas Truce

Both poems convey a message of mutual peace and universal brotherhood overcoming cultural and linguistic differences.

In her texts C. Duffey asks her readers **not to forget** what happened in order **not to waste the effort and the sacrifice of those who fought for peace**, and to **contribute to the effort of peace keeping and spread and scatter a message of PEACE over those places still torn apart by conflicts.**

SOME REFLECTIONS TO SHARE

The project we carried out has offered the occasion to reflect on **the precious value of the condition of peace we live in and are familiar with.**

We often **take peace for granted** but contemporary **reality daily reminds us this is often an illusion.**

Indeed our contribution has been an occasion to **become gradually more and more aware of the tragedy suffered by those people who are still afflicted by the war.**

Without any doubt, our research was **an occasion for a comparative analysis** of the perceptions of the war and the role of women conveyed by literature and the opinions expressed by the different generations interviewed.

**Close reading has also shown the war has been judged as
a terrible event that has meant no positive solution for any country.**

Indeed the conflict seemed only to have brutalized mankind, killed millions of young people and generated new and different problems.

Those problems have been illustrated by textual analysis and the graphic representations that aimed at making the research results immediately accessible and visible.

We want therefore to underline how **deeper awareness calls for action in favor of a new world** where the present and the coming generations **may be all one in the effort not to forget the atrocities of any conflict whatsoever**.

Up to now, **History does not seem to have taught mankind to leave conflicts fall apart human experience since a Second World War was fought** and **too many conflicts are still devastating the human community**.

Therefore coming to the end of our studying experience **we feel it important not only to share the results of our reflection but quoting Hamlet's words as well**. They invite

"to take arms against a sea of troubles "
and fight for a better world, one of mutual understanding and peace".

The weapons the present study suggests to reach our aim are forms of communication: that is listening, interaction, dialogue and, last but not least, sharing reflection.

The resolution for the future seems to be the exchange of complex ***"food for thought"*** one that has come to us through the lines of poetry.

This is the reason why the present work has comes to its conclusion once and again in the words of poetry

The aim of our work is to invite reflection and raise awareness that
war is death.

Unfortunately you cannot give simple answers to complex questions and we all know

Nothing worthwhile is easy. ... The real things in life always demand a lot from us
(J. Winterson)

Through the project, we have meant not only to be **"seekers of memory"** but witnesses of a tragic history **that comes to surface through reading, analyzing and therefore learning not only to know others but at the same time ourselves**: we have learnt that active students are only those willing to learn not mere notions, data, **but digging deep into textual analysis in search for a concrete message, one useful for life, peace, freedom and self-fulfillment**.