

MEDALS AND MEMORIES: Feathers, Fur and Hide

Character Education

- Distinguish between instinctual, learned and voluntary behaviours
- Explore the motivations for going beyond minimal expectations
- Develop a broader understanding of service

Facts

- Pigeon 1060 of the Royal Canadian Air Force flew many successful missions from submarines
- Of the 30,000 messages sent by the American Pigeon Service, 96% reached their destination
- The Royal Air Force (RAF) estimated that one in seven forced down airmen owed his life to a pigeon

Before the Reading

- List all the good and bad characteristics of pigeons
- Bird-brained, stool pigeon, etc. What other phrases or sayings do you know that have to do with birds? What do they mean?
- Tell any stories that you know that have to do with birds; list any songs. What do the birds stand for in these stories and songs?

Reading # 1

Feathered Warriors and the Meaning of Service

The feathered warriors of WWI and WWII made significant contributions to the Allied war efforts. **Mary** served with the Allied Forces for five years in WWII during which time she was wounded 22 times; she died in action. A wounded **G.I. Joe** flew 32 km in 20 minutes to save 1000 British lives. In WWI in Alsace-Lorraine, a grievously wounded **Mocker** provided the location of punishing enemy guns so that artillery could silence them. Before his last fateful flight, Mocker had completed 52 missions.

For their extraordinary efforts these three received among them a Distinguished Service Medal, a Croix de Guerre

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People's Dispensary for Sick Animals
PDSA Dickin Medal

Another Look at Monte Cassino

At the beginning of 1944 during the battle for Monte Cassino on the outskirts of Rome, a company of Nepali Gurkhas and British troops were pinned down on Hangman's Hill, a rock outcropping near the monastery

on the hill. American bombers dropped food and water for them, but, much of it fell into German hands. Cut off from their lines for nine days, the situation seemed hopeless. Finally three British volunteers, each with a haversack containing an American homing pigeon, set off by three different routes to try to penetrate the German lines. One man was pinned down by machine gun fire, but, the other two managed to get through. All three men sent messages about their routes to headquarters. That night Allied guns provided the fire to clear an escape route along the safe paths the scouts had identified. Three men and three pigeons saved the day.

and three PDSA Dickin Medals, the equivalent of the Victoria Cross. In WWII nearly 250,000 military pigeons served with British, American, Australian and Canadian forces in Italy, Greece, North Africa, India, Middle and Far East. The homing pigeon unit in the U.S. Army Signal Corps contained more than 3000 soldiers and 150 officers who cared for 54,000 military pigeons and deployed them for reconnaissance, espionage and search and rescue missions.

A British bird, called **White Vision**, provides an example of how homing pigeons aboard RAF aircraft enabled search and rescue. In October 1943 a Catalina Flying Boat with radio and engine failure ditched in the sea off the Hebrides. The search was called off when thick mists made locating the plane impossible. Nine hours after the plane was stranded, White Vision set off with the plane's location. Flying almost 100 km over rough seas against a headwind of 40 kph and a visibility range of 180–270 metres, White Vision delivered her message. The search resumed and all 11 crew members were rescued.

During WWII, 717 pigeons brought back news of downed planes. Pigeons carried maps, photographs and cameras. Britain's Secret Service MI5 trained pigeons for espionage and kept them in secret lofts in Dover. These avian spies were parachuted behind enemy lines from bombers with instructions for resistance fighters to write messages with significant intelligence. Dodging bullets and German falcons, the birds returned their coded messages to Bletchley Park, home to Britain's code-breakers. The MI5 flock brought back film of the V1 flying bombs being built in German factories; they also brought back reconnaissance for D-Day landings.

Pigeon espionage took on an interesting twist when birds wearing the tags of captured German pigeons became double agents and managed to infiltrate Nazi lofts. When the Germans unsuspectingly used the British birds, they flew home carrying their intercepted messages with them. Captured German pigeons were even put to work breeding English pigeons for the war effort. The most famous German prisoner of war, named **Kaiser**, was captured by American forces in the Battle of the Meuse in 1918. When Kaiser died at 32 years of age, he had contributed many intelligent, fast and beautiful descendants.

Some pigeons were trained to fly at night; some went along with paratroopers and submarines to photograph the enemy's fleet strength and targets for attack. Feathered service was not, however, one-sided. S.S. Chief

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Mon Cher Ami

October 4, 1918, the American 77th Infantry Division of 500 men was down to just around 200. The men were trapped in a small depression on the side of a hill and surrounded by enemy

soldiers. Major Whittlesey had unsuccessfully sent out several pigeons to tell his commanders where the division was. When the American command, not knowing exactly where the 77th was located, started dropping big shells right on top of them the Major sent for his last bird, Cher Ami.

The Germans saw Cher Ami rising out of the brush and opened fire. For several minutes Cher Ami rose through the hail of bullets, but then, he was hit. The doomed American infantrymen looked on in despair as their last hope started to plummet to earth. Then somehow miraculously Cher Ami spread his wings and started to climb and climb—out of the reach of the enemy guns. When the wounded bird reached his coop, the soldier that answered the bell wire he had tripped found him lying on his back covered in blood. He had been blinded in one eye and had a hole the size of a quarter in his chest. Attached to his almost severed leg was the silver canister with the life-saving message.



Croix de guerre

Dedicated medics saved Cher Ami's life but couldn't save his leg; they did carve a small wooden leg for him. When the one legged hero was well enough to travel, General Pershing, the commander of the

U.S. Army personally saw him off. The French presented Cher Ami with a Croix de guerre with a palm leaf. Cher Ami had saved 194 lives.

Heinrich Himmler, a well-known pigeon fancier, used pigeons for what was intended to be pre-invasion intelligence. When birds, probably dropped off in baskets by high-speed boats or submarines, were seen winging from England towards France, MI5 tamed and trained its own counter force. The National Pigeon Service Special Section, "Birds of Prey", set up an airborne net of peregrine falcons over the Scilly Isles off the Cornish coast early in 1942.

In March 1944, knowing that the Allied invasion was imminent the Germans started their own pigeon counter measures. They parachuted hundreds of supposedly British pigeons over France with a packet of English cigarettes as proof of their bona fides and instructions that the English required the names of local patriots. The trick didn't work as genuine British birds came with the message to only use a nom de plume and with a copy of the most recent edition of a London-based newspaper. The Free French network of secret agents had also warned of the German "stool pigeons" advising their people to smoke the cigarettes and eat the pigeons.

Remembrance Day allows us to consider and be thankful for the sacrifices of the men and women who fought for the freedoms we enjoy. Let us remember as well the feathered friends who saved many lives through their service to the Allied cause.

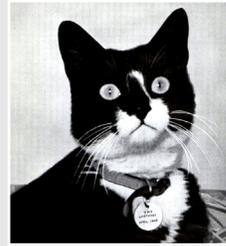
After the Reading

- What parts of this reading did you find funny or surprising and why?
- Look up the locations of the Hebrides and Scilly Islands. Why would they be important to Britain's defences? Does Canada have any islands of strategic importance?
- Which of the pigeons in this reading was the most heroic? What points did you consider to determine what is heroic?

Extensions

- Disney's 76 min movie *Valiant* (2005) is based on the information in this reading and makes an excellent follow up
- Research the story of *Bletchley Park* and the code breakers. Refer also to "Women with Secrets" in the Women in War section of this website to read about Canada's decoders
- Pigeon training sometimes involved motivation through hunger; some male pigeons homed faster if

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The Nine Lives of Simon the Cat

Simon was a stray cat on Hong Kong's Stonecutter's Island until he was taken on as a mascot for the British Naval frigate HMS Amethyst. Simon's

playfulness amused the ship's crew—especially when he fished ice-cubes out of a jug of water. Things became serious for Simon in 1949 when The Amethyst headed up the Yangtze River was bombarded by artillery fire killing 17 men including the captain. Simon was sleeping in the Captain's cabin when it took a direct hit from a shell. With whiskers and eyebrows burnt off, fur singed, gashes in his back and legs and punctured lungs, the little cat was not expected to survive. Simon's amazing survival and recovery revived the spirits of the demoralized crew, especially as the grounded ship was soon invaded by hordes of rats. During the three months the ship was stranded, Simon took on the task of protecting the ship's dwindling food supplies. He waged intense war on the rats and hunted down as many as he could. When Simon wasn't on rat-catcher duty, he and the ship's terrier dog played with and comforted their weary shipmates. Commander Kerans in his recommendation for the PDSA Dickin Medal wrote, "... Throughout the incident Simon's behaviour was of the highest order. One would not have expected him to survive the shell that had made a hole over a foot wide in diameter in a steel plate. Yet, he did and after a few days, Simon was as friendly as ever. His presence on the ship was a decided factor in maintaining the morale of the ship's company."

they saw a rival male introduced into their coop. Some people would argue that homing pigeons acted only on instinct. How do human motivation and heroism differ from what these birds achieved?

- Pigeons could fly on average 322 km in WWI. They could fly on average 965 km in WWII. What percentage of increase is this and how do you account for this astounding increase of flight range in 20 years?

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Before Readings #2 and #3

Character Education

- Explore how the technologies of war change animal and human behaviour and evaluate if these changes are beneficial to human character development
- Differentiate between animal and human service to mankind
- Discuss the role of training in character education

Facts

- During WWI, eight million horses died on all sides; 2.5 million were treated in veterinary hospitals of which two million returned to active duty
- One German infantry division in Normandy in 1944 had 5,000 horses; the Soviets used 3.5 million horses during WWII
- Rin Tin Tin was the puppy of German war dogs found in an abandoned German war dog station in Lorraine, France
- PDSA Dickin medals were awarded to 18 dogs; eight dogs from the War Dog Unit in the Pacific Theatre of WWII received U.S. Army Commendations

Before the Readings

- From the Trojan horse to Black Beauty and from Rin Tin Tin to Benji, stories of horses and dogs are always popular. Compare your favourite horse and dog stories. Who's the best and why?
- The horse in George Orwell's *Animal Farm* keeps saying, "I will work harder". Why are horses linked to hard work?
- List the skills dogs have displayed throughout history? (For what have they been used?)

Reading #2

Cavalry's Last Hurrah: Horses in World War I and II

At the beginning of WWI Britain and Germany each had a cavalry force of 100,000 men expecting to engage in genteel but fervid encounters. By the end of the war, eight million horses had died on both sides. Some horses were ripped apart by machine gun fire; others were exploded by shells, but most died from exposure, disease or starvation as they hauled men, ammunition and equipment. The trench warfare of WWI changed the ways wars were waged. The last great cavalry charge of WWI took place March 30, 1918. The German spring offensive of 1918 had advanced towards Amiens in France. They had smashed

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Canada's Canine Hero "Sergeant Gander"

PDSA Dickin Medal Award citation: "For saving the lives of Canadian infantrymen during the Battle of Lye Mun on Hong Kong Island in December 1941."

As a black 60 kilo family pet chasing planes on the Gander airstrip, Pal the Newfoundland

dog, was a nuisance. As a playful mascot for the Royal Rifles of Canada Regiment, the newly-named Gander was a joy; he learned to drink draft beer and even showered with the men. When the regiment shipped out with "C Force" to defend Hong Kong in fall 1941, "Sergeant" Gander was on board.

On three documented occasions Gander engaged the enemy. When the Japanese landed on the beach near Lye Mun, Gander faced them down with frightening barks and nipped at their legs. On another occasion he charged at the enemy when they neared a group of wounded soldiers. Seeing a ferocious bear-like force bearing down upon them, the surprised Japanese quickly changed routes. In a final act of bravery December 19, 1941, Gander, who knew what grenades were, rushed to pick one up that had landed next to a group of seven Canadian soldiers. The grenade exploded in his mouth as he was carrying it out of range; he died instantly. *i*

Sgt. Gander's August 15, 2000, Dickin award was the first for a dog in 55 years. During the award ceremony in Ottawa at a gathering of veterans, Fred Kelly, the soldier responsible for Gander's care in WWII, had with him another Newfoundland dog to represent Gander, the brave Canadian mascot-soldier.

Listen to August 11, 2000 CBC Radio Archives with Fred Kelly and Jeremy Swanson from the Canadian War Museum at http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/veterans/topics/1039-5847/

i "Dog-Roll of Honour" PDSA Dickin Medal: the animals' VC, www.pdsa.org.uk/page309_2.htm



General Jack Seely and Warrior, by Sir Alfred Munnings in 1918 in the National Gallery of Canada

the British line and taken more than 100,000 prisoners. The Allies took their stand at Moreuil Wood. General Jack Seely astride his short-legged, independent-spirited but kindly gelding **Warrior** was at the head of a force of 1000 horses from the Canadian Cavalry. These men, who his grandson described as an, "assorted bunch of ranchers, clerks, expats, Mounties and Native Americans,"ⁱⁱ demonstrated their mettle that day. Of the 12 signal group soldiers who were to plant pennants for the Royal Flying Corps to aim at, five died trying. When seven pennants, bearing the Canadian "C" were planted, General Seely led the charge.

The German advance was halted at Moreuil Wood, but, a quarter of the men and half the horses were lost. The mighty horse Warrior survived. Like a cat, Warrior had already had many lives. In 1915 Warrior was unscathed when a shell cut the horse beside him in half. A few days later Warrior had just left his stable when a shell fell on it. In 1917 he'd been frantically dug out of mud at Passchendaele. Only three days before Moreuil Wood, he'd been trapped beneath a shattered beam. The drive, to have Warrior represent the brave horses of WWI with a PDSA Dickin medal, continues to this day.

Ironically, although cavalry was considered unsuited to modern warfare by the end of WWI, the Germans used 2.75 million horses in WWII, even more than they had used in WWI. The British relied on horses in the rough terrain of Italy and the Middle East. In the Far East, the US Army's only cavalry unit challenged the Japanese invaders of Luzon. With the help of Philippine Scouts, they held off

ⁱⁱ Brough Scott "The mighty Warrior, who led one of history's last-ever cavalry charges", *Telegraph*, March 23, 2008

two armoured and two infantry regiments during the invasion of the Philippines. In North Africa Gen. George S. Patton lamented, "... had we possessed an American cavalry division with pack artillery in Tunisia and in Sicily, not a German would have escaped."ⁱⁱⁱ

"A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse ..."
(*Richard III*, by William Shakespeare)

Reading #3

- Dogged Determination: Man's Best Friend Goes to War

- Dogs were used in WWI as sentinels, ambulance dogs, scouts and messengers. They were even used to lay communication wires. As an estimate of their numbers, one section of the Societe Nationale du Chien Sanitaire in Paris trained over 1,500 dogs. A battalion of Chasseurs in the Vosges which had a particularly intelligent animal sentry did not lose a single man whereas the previous battalion, *sans chien*, lost seven sentries in three days.

- WWI ambulance dogs could search the battlefields at night to find men who had been passed over. Trained to retrieve a helmet or other personal object, the dogs would lead the ambulance men back to the fallen soldier. WWI messenger dogs were ideal for trench warfare as they were smaller targets and faster than human runners.



Although the PDSA Dickin Medal was not awarded until WWII, some dogs were decorated. The bull terrier **Sergeant Stubby**, who served with the US 102nd

Infantry, stands out for his many honours among which were: three Service Stripes, the Purple Heart and the Republic of France Grande War Medal.

Stubby participated in four offensives and 17 battles; at one point he was under constant fire, day and night for over a month. Even after being wounded by a German grenade and felled by poison gas, once healed Stubby returned to active service in the trenches. He learned to warn of poison gas attacks, located wounded soldiers in no man's land, alerted his fellow soldiers of incoming artillery and captured a German spy in the Argonne. After the war, the much-feted Sgt. Stubby, met three presidents and received the Humane Education Society's Gold Medal from General Pershing himself.

ⁱⁱⁱ Anna Waller "Horses and Mules and National Defense" Office of the Quartermaster General, www.qmfound.com/horse.htm

With the significant changes seen in warfare during WWI, dogs were at first deemed non-essential to the WWII war effort. By 1942 Colonel E.H. Richardson and Major James Baldwin had convinced the British military to set up the first War Dog School. In two years 7000 dogs passed through the training school, including the Alsatian **Brian** who became a fully qualified Paratrooper. Brian was attached to a Parachute Battalion and landed with them in Normandy.

Shortly after Pearl Harbour the American Quartermaster Corps started to train dogs as well. At first, most were allocated to sentry duty, over 3,000 being issued to the Coast Guard for beach patrols guarding against enemy submarine activities. When the U.S. went on the offence in the Pacific, the War Department authorized War Dog Platoons. These military dogs were pivotal in taking away the enemy's advantage of conducting ambushes and surprise attacks in the dense vegetation of Pacific Island jungles.



Among the canine heroes of WWII was **Chips** who served with the 3rd Infantry Division in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France and Germany. Shortly after landing in Sicily in 1943 Chips attacked a concealed German pillbox housing a machine gun. After what appeared to be a

vicious fight inside the pillbox, four enemy soldiers surrendered. The scalp wounds and powder burns Chips sustained indicated that the enemy had attempted to shoot him. Later that night, Chips helped capture 10 more enemy soldiers. The Silver Star for Bravery and the Purple Heart that Major General Truscott awarded Chips in the field were later overruled, but Chips, who died of complications from his war wounds, remained a hero in people's hearts.

Sergeant Soochow started his military career as a Marine Corps mascot in Shanghai in 1937. When his company headed to the Philippines in 1941, the popular Soochow was mascot to the entire regiment. Sgt. Soochow was in the foxholes with his soldiers during the siege of Corregidor and fought alongside them snarling and snapping at the enemy. When the island surrendered in 1942 Sgt. Soochow became a prisoner of war for nearly three years-keeping up the morale of his fellow internees. Grateful Marines organized a parade for Soochow's 9th birthday. Among Sgt. Soochow's medals were the Good Conduct Medal and the American Defense Medal and Ribbon.

In spite of the marvel of these canine combat heroics, the largest number of PDSA Dickin medals went to dogs like **Beauty, Jet, Irma, Thorn, Rex, Rip** and **Peter** who dug through the rubble of London during the blitz to rescue hundreds of buried civilians. Their dogged determination remains inspirational.

After Readings #2 and #3

- General Pershing and General Patton, both American Generals, were leaders in WWI and WWII. Who were Canada's top military brass in these wars? Describe one.
- What did you learn about horses and dogs in war that you didn't know before?
- Whereas the use of horses in cavalry declined by WWII, their use as beasts of burden increased. Is their service as beasts of burden less valuable?

Extensions

- Dogs today are trained to assist the blind, sniff out explosives and illegal drugs and track lost individuals. Make a list of all the things dogs are trained to do and pick one to research and describe the training involved.
- Research the dogs who won the PDSA Dickin medal for their work during the blitz. Describe instances where modern search and rescue dogs are used in the same way.
- The readings make reference to Shakespeare's *Richard III*, the *Trojan War* and *Rin Tin Tin*. Research the war that is featured in each case and about what they were fought. What were the most common causes of these wars and how do they compare to the causes of wars today?
- Other PDSA Dickin Medal recipients
<http://www.pdsa.org.uk/dickinmedal.html>

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Images

Columbas Audubon (Cher Ami, G.I.Joe) | Newfoundland Club of America (Sgt. Gander) | MaritimeQuest (Simon) | Connecticut State Military Department (Sgt. Stubby) | Military.com (Chips) | Wikimedia Commons (Croix de guerre) | National Gallery of Canada (Warrier)

Audio

- Listen to August 11, 2000, CBC Radio Archives with Fred Kelly and Jeremy Swanson from the Canadian War Museum at http://archives.cbc.ca/war_conflict/veterans/topics/1039-5847/