Over the Line 2016
Writing activity 11

This week – on Friday 1 July – it is the centenary of the beginning of the Battle of the Somme. The First World War’s Battle of the Somme was one of the most hideous battles in history. Terrible mistakes were made. Tens of thousands of men were killed.

At the beginning of the First World War young men were encouraged to volunteer and fight for their country. As the war went on they were put under enormous pressure to join up. Eventually they were forced to fight unless they had a good reason not to.

To fight meant to put themselves in huge danger in the trenches, on the seas and in the air on primitive aeroplanes. They would have known that there was a chance they’d not return home and would die in some far flung foreign field.

Talk about that in class. Look online at posters and copies of the letters men were sent to persuade them to fight.

Now imagine if you received a letter asking you to go to the recruitment office tomorrow morning. How would you feel? What would you be thinking? Would you go? Would you ask to be excused? You are a young man, your life ahead of you. You have everything to lose. But, also, you might be excited. You might want to go to war with lots of other men. Many did feel like that.

Write a diary entry about how you would feel and what you would think.

(This is not an easy thing to do and hopefully we will never really know how it felt for those men. But this is a first step to help us try to understand what they went through.)

If you'd like to see Tom Palmer’s story about a Premier League Footballer deciding whether he should volunteer or not, see this link: https://issuu.com/barringtonstoke/docs/call_of_duty/1?e=2213880/7442461