

## **'A POEM FOR SARAH' AIR RAID WARDEN POETRY LESSON PLAN:**

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE FOR TEACHERS:**

The poem is not an actual WW2 from the time, but rather a reflection on it from my modern day perspective, as inspired by the photo of the female Air Raid Warden included in this pack and also the character of **Sarah**, the mum of the fictional family in the guided reading pack from this site.

I always write under the pseudonym John Birchall as it is my middle name and is also a tribute to my Father (of the same name) who is a published poet in his own right. It is not intended to be a literary masterpiece but rather an honest response to looking at the photo, containing the obvious rhythm of the repeated "Air Raid Siren .." line to provide a structure for the pupils' own writing. There is also some alliteration and of course you are quite welcome to substitute the poem for a different one of your own choice where you feel it is required, in which case the other resources can still be used to support this approach.

I hope you enjoy using it,  
Darren (aka Mr B)

### **ANALYSIS NOTES:**

#### **Structure:**

- 6 stanzas / 4 lines each
- Repeated opening line for first five stanzas and decreasing line length in each stanza to simulate an air raid siren

#### **Language and explanation of terms used:**

- No full rhyme apart from the repetition
- Some alliteration: "rushes through rubble/fairy-light firebombs"
- Some half rhyme: "ghost/dust; fade/says"
- FIREBOMBS: The German incendiaries were often called "Firebomb Fritz"
- TEDDY –BEAR STONES: A reference to either the wallpaper of the girl's bedroom or the shape of the bricks as they have fallen
- WHITENED GROUND: ashen/dust covered ground

## LESSON SEQUENCE:

### PUPIL SPEAK OBJECTIVES:

To learn what it was like to take part in a rescue in the WW2 Blitz as per our character Sarah Howarth, the Mum of the family and an ARP Warden  
To learn how to plan and write a poem in the style of the author

### GENERAL NOTES:

This lesson has enough resources with it (+ **SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**) to cover two or three lessons (see **FURTHER ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS** below). However for the purposes of this planning it has been condensed into just the planning and writing stage of the poem, be it individually, in pairs or as a whole class.

### INTRO:

#### PART 1 (10-15 min): Guided (keyword) writing

- Show pupils the BLITZ PHOTOPACK, either whole class or with copies on tables.
- Allow some discussion time with the following key questions:
  1. What is happening in the photos?
  2. What difficulties would the rescuers face?
  3. How would it have felt to have been both the rescuer and the trapped person?
  4. + any other questions the pupils can devise themselves
- Ask pupils to come up with a list of keywords relating to the situations depicted in the photographs and list these on the board

#### PART 2 (10 min): listening and responding

- Explain that we are going to listen to a poem that was written by an author who looked at a similar photograph (but don't show photo **PC6** yet)
- Ask pupils to imagine what the photograph might look like in their minds
- Provide all pupils with the **PC1: RESCUE 1940 PUPIL COPY** and play the audio of the poem
- Discuss the poem afterwards using these headings: *Content and meaning/Structure/Rhythm/Language*
- Show pupils the inspiration photo **PC6** and discuss how it relates to the poem

### PUPIL TASK (or as guided writing): (20-25 min)

#### Drafting your poem:

In pairs or alone, choose a Blitz Photo to write about using the same structure with the opening "Air Raid .." lines, including the final stanza opening line "The air raid sirens die and fade", making sure you use the keyword list generated earlier

### PLENARY:

Pupils take turns to read back their work to the class, holding up the photograph that inspired them

### DIFFERENTIATION OPTIONS:

- **PC2-PC4: POEM WRITING FRAMES, FROM MOST ABLE TO LEAST ABLE**
- High/lower ability pairings

### FURTHER ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- Use the supplementary resources relating to Thomas Alderson to run a compare and contrast lesson
- Write a newspaper article about Thomas Alderson as per The London Gazette article
- Draw/paint/collage a Blitz rescue scene

## **PUPIL COPY: PC1**

### **Rescue, 1940 (a poem for Sarah)**

The air raid sirens throb and hum  
As she rushes through rubble,  
Moving like a ghost  
In clouds of dust

The air raid sirens throb and hum  
As fairy light firebombs  
Make her shadow dance  
On curtains of smoke

The air raid sirens throb and hum  
As the delicate finger of her torch  
Feels for the trembles  
Of a child

The air raid sirens throb and hum  
As she taps at Teddy-bear  
Stones that used  
To be a home

The air raid sirens throb and hum  
As she stops, and puts  
A blackened ear upon the  
Whitened ground

The air raid sirens die and fade  
“Don’t worry now, I’m here,”  
She says

**John Birchall**

## WRITING FRAME: PC2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Rescue, 1940 (a poem for Sarah)

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

The air raid sirens \_\_\_\_\_

## WRITING FRAME: PC3

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Rescue, 1940 (a poem for Sarah)

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens die and fade

--

## WRITING FRAME: PC4

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Rescue, 1940 (a poem for Sarah)

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens throb and hum

--

The air raid sirens die and fade

--

**POEM INSPIRATION**  
**PHOTO: PC5**



## SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCE: THOMAS ALDERSON AND THE FIRST GEORGE CROSS: PC6

The George Cross is a special medal given only to Civilians. It is the highest medal for bravery that a civilian can get and the very first winner was a second world war Air Raid Warden called Thomas Alderson. Here are the details of how he got his medal.

Mr. Alderson was born in Sunderland, Co. Durham, during 1903. He was a Detachment Leader in the **ARP** (**A**ir **R**aid **P**recaution service).



Mr Alderson lived in Brindlington in Yorkshire during the Second World War Blitz in September 1940.

Together with other members of his section, he rescued many people trapped under the wreckage of demolished houses.

In just one of these incidents 6 people were trapped in a cellar beneath the debris of two 5-storey buildings which had been totally demolished. Thomas worked his way into this cellar by tunnelling 13 to 14 feet under the main heap of wreckage and for 3½ hours he worked in a cramped position, and managed to free all the trapped people.

The award of Mr. Alderson's George Cross was published in the London Gazette on 30 September 1940.

Thomas died in Driffield, Yorkshire, on 28 October 1965.

His George Cross is now displayed in the Imperial War Museum's Victoria & George Cross Gallery.



## **SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCE: THOMAS ALDERSON'S CITATION: PC7**

When a civilian wins the George Cross medal, their name is announced in a newspaper called 'The London Gazette' in an article called a 'citation'. This is Thomas Alderson's citation from the newspaper.

### **The London Gazette, 30<sup>th</sup> September 1940**

"A pair of semi-detached houses at Bridlington was totally demolished in a recent air raid. One woman was trapped alive. Alderson tunnelled under unsafe wreckage and rescued the trapped person without further injury to her.

Some days later, two five-storey buildings were totally demolished and debris penetrated into a cellar in which eleven persons were trapped. Six persons in one cellar, which had completely given way, were buried under debris. Alderson partly effected entrance to this cellar by tunnelling 13 to 14 feet under the main heap of wreckage and for three and a half hours he worked unceasingly in an exceedingly cramped condition. Although considerably bruised he succeeded in releasing all the trapped persons without further injury to themselves.

The wreckage was unsafe and further falls were anticipated; coal gas leaks were of a serious nature and there was danger of flooding from fractured water pipes. Despite these dangers and enemy aircraft overhead the rescue work was continued.

On a third occasion some four-storey buildings were totally demolished. Five persons were trapped in a cellar. Alderson led the rescue work in excavating a tunnel from the pavement through the foundations to the cellar; he also personally tunnelled under the wreckage many feet into the cellar and rescued alive two persons (one of whom subsequently died) from under a massive refrigerator, which was in danger of further collapse as debris was removed.

A wall, three storeys high, which swayed in the gusty wind, was directly over the position where the rescue party were working. This was likely to collapse at any moment.

Alderson worked almost continuously under the wreckage for five hours, during which time further air raid warnings were received and enemy aircraft heard overhead.

By his courage and devotion to duty without the slightest regard for his own safety, he set a fine example to the members of his Rescue Party, and their team work is worthy of the highest praise."