

# “Mick didn’t like the sound of quitting...”

How do you keep up motivation levels with GCSE groups? With the added demands of an exam, many feel that Key Stage 3 fun and active learning has to go out of the window. Right? Wrong.

Preparing pupils for GCSE does not have to mean either death by sources or a dry drudge through content. Fun, activity and thinking helps lower attainers to understand and assimilate content. Where content is difficult and potentially ‘dry’, imaginative use of role-play or practical demonstration can work wonders. Ian Luff is right (TH 100, August 2000).

I wanted my pupils to understand why the Kaiser abdicated and what were the immediate problems facing Ebert. After initial background work about the creation of Germany, its growing importance in Europe and how the war was going badly in the latter half of 1918, we introduced Mick to the class... or should I say Kaiser Wilhelm.

Mick, a weak and usually low-attaining pupil, finds it difficult to write and, when he does, is extremely slow. Mick played the role of the Kaiser. He enjoyed the way he was sent out of the class to wait to be introduced to his people (the rest of the class), the way they stood, bowed or curtsied when he entered the room, and the way he was made to sound important and all-powerful... *but he didn't enjoy the fact that Germany was now losing the war!*



President Ebert welcomes Chancellor Stresemann into his new job.

I began interviewing the Kaiser by asking him questions about his feelings towards what he hoped would be a victorious Germany, and the recent allied successes. The class then came up with suggestions about what the Kaiser should do next – quit? or prepare to take one last chance at winning the war? Mick didn’t like the sound of quitting. Instead, he (with a little help from the teacher) came up with the idea of fighting back. With his people beginning to starve because of the naval blockade, he took the bait and ordered the sailors to attack one last time. After questioning the rest of the class, many felt that this was a good idea. Imagine their shock when the Kaiser then received a letter saying the sailors

have mutinied and that many German soldiers have joined the protests!

Whilst the Kaiser struggled to deal with this problem, he was told that this unrest is spreading. Many have had enough of the war. Workers are taking control of various cities. At this point we also introduced Pete (playing Ebert), an important politician in Germany, who goes to see the Kaiser to say that unless the Kaiser quits, he and his followers will join the protestors. (Aim for pace and maintaining interest here to secure motivation and excitement. There will be plenty of time to fill in the historical details later.)



The Kaiser abdicates and Ebert takes over.

The teacher informed the class that after the meeting between him and the Kaiser, the Kaiser is going to quit. This caused a great reaction as pupils felt that the Kaiser was being forced to abdicate. To conclude we brought Pete and Mick together to tell each other formally what had happened, e.g. the Kaiser has to abdicate otherwise the Allies will continue the war and run the risk of revolution. Faced with some shouting from the class of 'Leave!', 'Get out!', 'Stay!', 'Don't go!', the Kaiser was sent out of the classroom to reside in Holland.

Follow-up lessons saw Ebert (Pete) sitting in the hot seat, facing all sorts of difficult problems. Many of the other pupils who were simply the crowds in previous events, played the leaders of the Spartacists. Ebert now had the problem of how to deal with them, and how eventually, having considered the options, he felt forced to rely on ex-soldiers.

Best of all, after classwork on what kind of treaty the Germans were expecting, Ebert went around the class reassuring everyone that the treaty would be fair and reasonable. We then sent Ebert out of the classroom to go to Versailles to hear what are the terms of the treaty. When he returned to the class (Germany) he told them the terms he has signed (a pre-prepared piece of paper...with his signature on it). Ebert was forced to read the terms of the treaty to his classmates and received wonderful howls of derision and shouting: 'Bring back the Kaiser' and (without any prompting) 'We have been stabbed in the back!'



Mr Smith with one of his Year 10 classes who, in the course of the German unit will have taken part in a number of putches, seen a world wide depression and witnessed the rise of Germany!

Practical demonstrations work wonders. When blended with a variety of other teaching approaches it adds depth of understanding to evidential work or extended writing.

Just one last thing, don't forget to bring Mick back in!

**Phil Smith, Head of History,  
Coney Green High School  
(11-16 comprehensive) Bury.  
All pupils' names have been changed.**