



Full view of USS Beaver with camouflage paint

Online Collections Database, 1991.31.6, www.theworldwar.org/research/database. National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

The Art of Deception: Camouflage & Dazzle Ships in WWI

Recommended Grade Levels: 5-8

Course/Content Area(s): Social Studies

Authored by: Caitlin Moury, National WWI Museum and Memorial Teacher Fellow

LESSON OVERVIEW:	In this lesson, students will be introduced to the concept of camouflage generally, learn how “dazzle ship” camouflage was invented and implemented during World War I, read a letter about another type of camouflage from the perspective of a soldier, and finally practice creating camouflage of their own.
OBJECTIVES:	<i>Students will:</i>
	• Understand camouflage by exploring its applications in military contexts, its use in clothing and nature, and its historical significance. • Analyze examples of camouflage, engage in a creative camouflage activity, and reflect on their learning.
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:	National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework Standards: D2.Eco.2.3-5. Identify positive and negative incentives that influence the decisions people make. D2.His.16.6-8. Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past. D2.His.16.3-5. Use evidence to develop a claim about the past. D2.His.17.3-5. Summarize the central claim in a secondary work of history.
TIME NEEDED:	One and a half 50-minute class periods
INTERDISCIPLINARY:	Connections could be made to animal camouflage in science class.
PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:	• Causes of World War I • Countries involved & allies • Familiarity with terms “U-boat” and “unrestricted submarine warfare”
MATERIALS NEEDED:	• <i>Dazzle Ships</i> by Chris Barton & Victo Ngai • WWI & Dazzle Ships Slideshow • Camouflage Primary Source Analysis • Camouflage Activity & Reflection • Pencils/Pens • Whiteboard and markers • Projector and screen (for visual aids) • 3x5 notecards (1 per student) • Art supplies (colored pencils, markers, paint, etc.)

LESSON

INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

Introduction to [Camouflage Slideshow](#) (5 minutes):

1. **(Slide 2) Define Camouflage:**

- Define the term in four contexts:
 - **Military Camouflage:** Disguising personnel, equipment, and installations to blend with surroundings.
 - **Clothing/Materials:** Patterns or materials used for disguise, like army camouflage uniforms.
 - **Natural Camouflage:** Animal adaptations that blend into their environment, e.g., polar bears blending with snow.
 - **Actions/Devices:** Strategies or tools designed to disguise or mislead.

Activity: Turn & Talk (3 minutes):

1. **(Slide 3) Prompt:**

- Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss:
 - What examples of camouflage have you seen or noticed?
 - Are these examples from nature or manmade?

2. **Guiding Questions:**

- How do these examples help blend in or mislead?
- What characteristics make them effective?

3. **Share Out:**

- Have a few pairs share their examples with the class.
- Record some examples on the board, noting if they are natural or manmade.

4. **(Slide 4) Discuss:**

- Why might camouflage be used in wartime?
- Where might it be easy to camouflage military objects? Where might be more difficult?

See, Think, Wonder Activity (5 minutes):

1. **(Slide 5) Instructions:**

- For each image (slides 6-8), students will jot down:
 - **See:** What do you observe in the image?
 - **Think:** What does the image make you think about?
 - **Wonder:** What questions or thoughts do you have after viewing the image?

2. **Discussion:**

- Discuss observations and insights as a class, focusing on how the camouflage works in each image. (slides 9-12)

3. **(Slide 13) Transition:**

- Discuss:
 - Where were the camouflaged items you just saw located?
 - What might be difficult about camouflaging something on a moving body of water?

DIRECTIONS:

Reading and Discussion: *Dazzle Ships* (15 minutes):

1. **(Slide 14) Read *Dazzle Ships* by Chris Barton & Victo Ngai**
2. **(Slide 15) Discussion Questions:**
 - What problem created a need for ship camouflage?
 - How did Wilkinson solve this problem?
 - How did the king respond to the idea of dazzle ships?
 - Who actually painted the dazzle ships?
 - How did the dazzle ships work?
 - Were the dazzle ships a success?
3. **(Slide 16-19) Observe and Discuss:**
 - Take students through the images of real dazzle ships and ask:
 - i. What can the story of Dazzle Ships teach us about creativity and innovation?
 - ii. Can you think of a modern situation that might require this sort of creative solution?

Camouflage Primary Source Analysis (20 minutes):

1. **(Slide 21) Read Excerpt:**
 - Distribute and read the excerpt from James E. (Ned) Henschel's letter.
2. **Questions:**
 - What different kinds of camouflage does James Henschel discuss?
 - How is he using the term "camouflage" differently than you might expect?
 - Based on the letter, what has his war experience been like? Use specific examples from the letter to support your response.
3. **Writing Response:**
 - Students write a 5-8 sentence paragraph answering the questions.

Camouflage Activity & Reflection (20 - 30 minutes):

1. **Instructions:**
 - Choose a location in the classroom or school where you will attempt to camouflage your notecard.
 - Observe the spot: note the light, color, and texture of the area.

- Plan how to camouflage your notecard using the materials available. Consider techniques from the “Dazzle Ships” and the slideshow.
- 2. **Camouflage Creation:**
 - Use art supplies to camouflage your notecard. Ensure it is not easily noticeable from 1-3 feet away.
- 3. **Scavenger Hunt:**
 - At the end of class, participate in a scavenger hunt to find and identify camouflaged notecards created by classmates.

POST-ASSESSMENT:

Camouflage Final Reflection (Slide 22)

- 1) Identify and explain three key ideas you’ve learned about camouflage during World War I. Please refer to an idea from the [primary source letter](#), an idea from *Dazzle Ships*, and finally one from the [slideshow](#).
- 2) What did you learn about camouflage from designing your own camouflage for your notecard? Was this an easy or challenging task? What would it be like to camouflage something much larger?
- 3) Finally, why was camouflage important during World War I? Why was the “Dazzle Ship” camouflage so revolutionary? Why is “outside-the-box” thinking so important during wartime?
- 4) Write Reflection: Students complete the reflection in 3-5 sentences for each question.

MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS

- Complexity of questions can be modified or simplified for different student needs.
- Students may work in pairs or in larger groups on activities.

Bibliography:

American "Whippet" Tank [Photograph]. (n.d.). World War I Museum and Memorial.
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

Barton, C., & Ngai, V. (2017). Dazzle ships : World War I and the art of confusion. Millbrook Press.

Black and white photograph. Signal Corps #27266 [Photograph]. (n.d.). National World War I Museum and Memorial. <https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

Black and white photograph. Signal Corps #4225. [Photograph]. (n.d.). National World War I Museum and Memorial. <https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

Muller, E. (n.d.). U.S.S. Siboney [Photograph]. National World War I Museum & Memorial.
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

Moser, N. (n.d.). A Ship with Troops on Board [Photograph]. National World War I Museum & Memorial.
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>

Henschel, J. E. (1917, December 20). [Letter].
<https://collections.theworldwar.org/argus/final/Portal/Default.aspx?lang=en-US>