



# The Extraordinary Gertrude Bell

Classroom activity 4

KS3-KS4



# 4

## GERTRUDE BELL AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN THE MIDDLE EAST



World War I broke out in August 1914 just a few months after Gertrude had arrived back from her journey to Arabia. She began World War I by working for the Red Cross, but in November 1915 she was asked to go to Cairo along with archaeologists and others, to make maps for the army. The group became the Arab Bureau, responsible for military intelligence in the Middle East. As one of the few people who knew the desert and its people, Gertrude was very useful.

Following the British occupation of Baghdad, Gertrude moved to the city in 1917 and had a key role in the new British administration. After WWI, the British Government was determined to establish the borders of the new Iraq. Gertrude Bell was deeply involved in this process. She was the first woman to write a 'white paper' for parliament: it was published in December 1920, and summarized the situation in Mesopotamia from 1914 until 1920. She attended the Paris Peace Conference in 1919 and in March 1921 she attended the Cairo Conference with Winston Churchill, who wanted to find a solution for Iraq. Bell was instrumental in the choice of Prince Faisal as the new king of Mesopotamia and in drawing the new borders of Iraq.

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### RESEARCH TOOLS:

- Discover Gertrude Bell Research website: [click here](#).
- Read Gertrude Bell Comics: [click here](#).
- Watch the introductory video: [click here](#).

- Read what Gertrude said about her work in Boulogne: [click here](#) and [here](#).
- Follow the preliminaries of the Cairo Conference through Bell's letters home: search the Gertrude Bell Archive here: <http://www.gerty.ncl.ac.uk/> → Click on Letters → Select Year **1921** → Select letters from **March**.
- Discover what Gertrude Bell thought about the role of Britain in the Middle East in a letter written in 1920 to her father: [click here](#).
- Dan Snow explains how WWI started: [click here](#).
- Schools WWI on BBC: [click here](#).

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#### FURTHER READING:

- Jackson M. P. and Parkin A. (eds.), 2015, *The Extraordinary Gertrude Bell*, Tyne Bridge Publishing (opens a pdf file): [click here](#).  
See especially chapter 7, Mark Jackson and Emma Short: *Gertrude Bell and the First World War*.
- Paris, T.J. (1998) 'British Middle East policy-making after the First World War: the Lawrentian and Wilsonian schools', *The Historical Journal*, 41(3), pp. 773–793. [Click here](#).

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#### CLASSROOM ACTIVITY:

Ask your pupils to draw a map of the Middle East before and one after WWI. What has changed? Then discuss with your pupils about the consequences of the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the role of Britain in the Middle East after WWI.

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#### LINKS TO THE CURRICULUM:

History.

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#### KEYWORDS:

WWI, the British Empire, Middle East, Iraq, Cairo Conference, Winston Churchill.