MYTH OR RECORD?

A free Waterloo lesson · Teacher page · Ages 10–16 · About 45 minutes

LEARNING AIM

Pupils learn that not every famous story about the past is supported by evidence. They sort six well-known claims about the Battle of Waterloo (18 June 1815) into **record** (supported by evidence from the time) and **myth** (invented or repeated later), and explain how a historian could tell the difference.

LESSON PLAN

Starter · 5 min. Ask: *How do we know anything about a battle that happened over 200 years ago?* Collect ideas: letters, diaries, reports, maps, paintings, memories written down later.

Key idea · 5 min. Explain that a **record** was written at the time or rests on good evidence, while a **myth** or **tradition** is a story repeated later with no first-hand source behind it.

Main task · 20 min. In pairs, pupils use the pupil sheet. For each claim they tick Record or Myth and write one reason. Encourage them to ask: *Who would have written this down, and when?*

Reveal · 10 min. Go through the answers below. Ask which surprised them most and why the myths might have spread.

Plenary · 5 min. Each pupil writes one sentence: *A historian can tell a myth from a record by...*

ANSWERS

1. MYTH. Almost certainly invented after the battle.

2. MYTH. It was fought around Mont-Saint-Jean, Hougoumont, La Haye Sainte and Plancenoit. Waterloo was Wellington's headquarters and gave the battle its British name.

3. RECORD. He landed on 1 March and reached Paris on 20 March. At Laffrey the soldiers sent to stop him joined him.

4. MYTH. British and King's German Legion troops were just under half. Hanoverians, Dutch-Belgians, Brunswickers and Nassau troops made up the rest.

5. RECORD. No square was broken by the charges, though artillery hit the squares hard.

6. MYTH. It is not in his dispatch of 19 June. It comes from a later tradition of quotations.

GOING FURTHER

Ask older pupils to find out why Cambronne's reply became famous anyway. The **Junior Edition** (ages 10–13) and **Student Edition** (ages 13–16) of *Waterloo 1815: The Last Day* turn the whole battle into lessons like this one.

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MYTH OR RECORD?

Pupil sheet · Be a history detective

Some famous stories about the Battle of Waterloo really happened. Others were made up or changed long after. For each claim, tick **Record** or **Myth**, then give one reason.

1 Cambronne answered the call to surrender with a famous one-word reply. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

2 The battle was fought in the village of Waterloo. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

3 In 1815 Napoleon got from the coast of France back to Paris without firing a shot. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

4 Wellington commanded a British army. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

5 The great French cavalry charges never broke an Allied infantry square. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

6 Wellington's line about a battle lost and a battle won comes from his official dispatch. ☐ Record ☐ Myth

Because… _____

_____

MY CONCLUSION

A historian can tell a myth from a record by _____

_____

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