

# SENDING MESSAGES

## General Post Office Engineers

Communicating with troops on the front line is vitally important in any war. During the First World War, General Post Office engineers were specially trained to set up, maintain and operate telephones on the front line. This allowed quicker, more regular contact between troops and army headquarters than in previous wars.

## Watch out!

Telegrams alerted the navy to the presence of the enemy. In the famous Battle of Heligoland one message said,

*'Bear round sharp to starboard and you'll catch them'.*

In the battle that followed, the British navy sank four German ships.



◀ Two soldiers, one standing on the other's shoulders, are attempting to use a telephone on the front

Steady chaps!



©The Postal Museum, 2010-04/23/2

## It's official!

Every Saturday, a telegram giving up-to-date news of the war was sent from London to every telegraph office in Britain. It was printed out and displayed in Post Office windows for everyone to read on Sunday morning.

► **Mr Pike Pease, Assistant Post Master General, inspects the boys and congratulates them on their smart appearance**



©Royal Mail Group Ltd 2014, courtesy of The Postal Museum, illustration from St Martin's Le Grand, 1917, POST 92

## Boy messengers

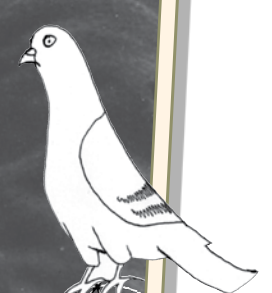


Boys, as young as 14, delivered telegrams to soldiers' families. They often delivered the tragic news of a son, brother, father or husband, killed in action. These telegrams earned boy messengers the nickname of 'angels of death'.

## Pigeon post

Carrier pigeons were used to carry messages to and from the front line where telephone lines did not exist. The army used about 22,000 pigeons during the war and only two percent of birds failed to return.

▼ **Belgian agents care for pigeons in Flanders**



**Overview of the lesson:**

This lesson makes pupils aware of how some messages were sent by Morse code during the First World War.

*Pupils use Morse code to send a message like soldiers did in the First World War.*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Made Morse code transmitters (see page 6)
- ◆ Understood that Morse code transmitters use simple electrical circuits
- ◆ Identified and named basic parts e.g. wires, bulbs, switches and buzzers
- ◆ Found out that before the electronic age people invented different methods of sending a message e.g. flashing mirrors, smoke signals etc
- ◆ Discovered that modern telecommunications can send messages very quickly over vast distances
- ◆ Explored archival images of General Post Office engineers setting up systems to transmit messages

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **English, ICT:** Making up secret codes
- ◆ **English:** Developing drama and role play by reading stories based on the idea of sending secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum online collections to find out more about secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Exploring other ways of sending signals e.g. light houses
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating messages in music e.g. Inspector Morse theme, drums patterns and durations
- ◆ **Maths:** Looking at mathematical patterns in codes; investigating distances to see how far messages could be transmitted

**To do:**

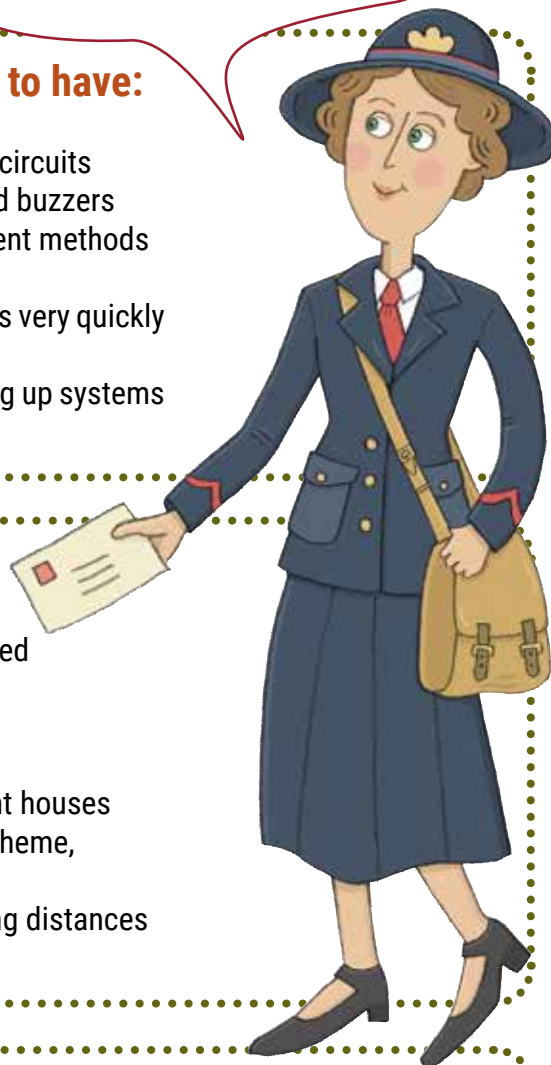
- ◆ Assemble Morse code transmitters
- ◆ Make a second room available for transmitting messages

**Success criteria****By the end of the project**

- ◆ All will have increased knowledge of how some messages were transmitted in the First World War
- ◆ All will be familiar with the Morse code
- ◆ Most will have developed their understanding of electricity further
- ◆ Some will want to find out how other messages were transmitted

**Key terms**

Morse code  
Transmitter



## ACTIVITY

1

## MAKE A MORSE CODE TRANSMITTER

**Morse code**

Morse code was used to deliver important messages during the First World War. It uses electrical signals to send messages based on short and long sounds or flashes of light that represent all the letters of the alphabet.

**WORK THIS OUT!**

--- / --- / . - - / . . . / .  
 . - - / --- / --- / .

**Did you know?**

Samuel Morse, an American, invented the Morse code in 1838.



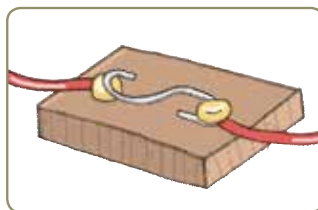
©Courtesy of BT heritage and archives

◀ A Morse key transmitter

**Make this Morse code transmitter and send secret messages from one room to another!**

### Step 1

Make 2 switches (see diagram) but bend the paper clips up in the air above the drawing pins.



### Step 2

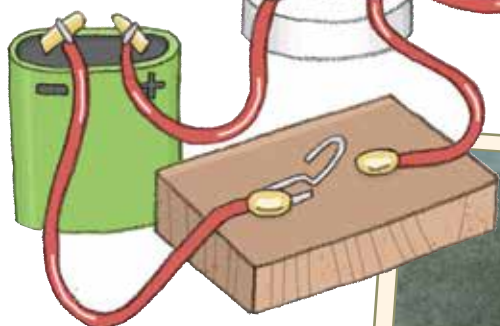
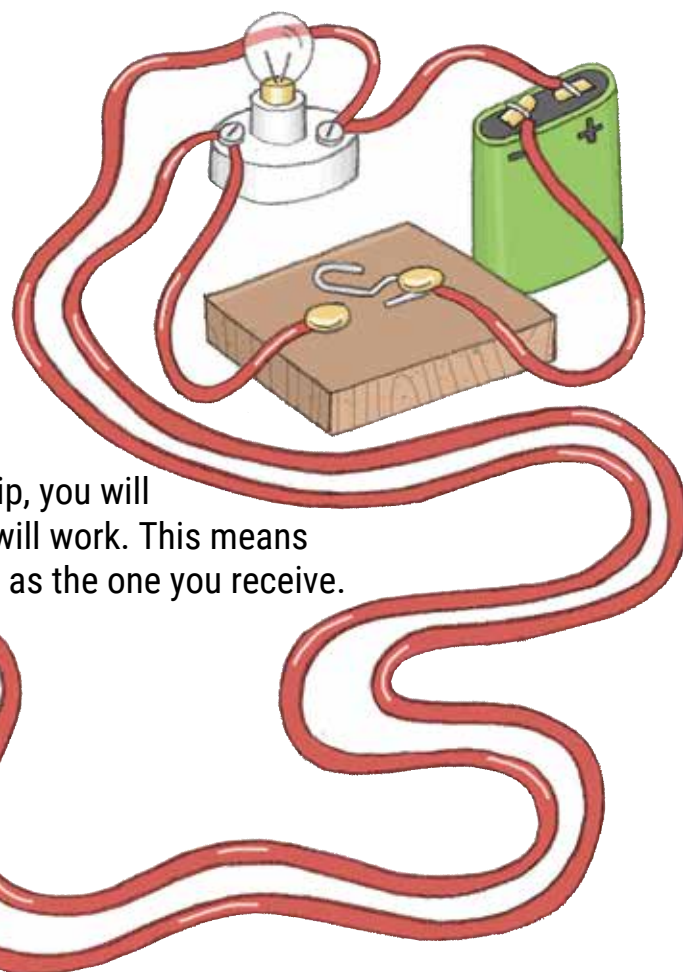
Connect the batteries and bulbs at the ends of the 2 long wires (see diagram).

### Step 3

When you touch the drawing pin with the paper clip, you will complete the circuit and both bulbs and buzzers will work. This means you can see the message you are sending as well as the one you receive.

### Step 4

To send a message use the Morse code.



► **British and French soldiers sending messages by Morse code**

Bet I could have done that just as quick!



**Overview of the lesson:**

This lesson uses the pigeon post to make pupils aware of different ways in which messages were transmitted during the First World War.

*Pupils recreate sending a message by pigeon across the sea and land!*

**Before undertaking this activity, pupils are likely to have:**

- ◆ Tried writing messages in as few words as possible without loss of meaning
- ◆ Thought about the weight and the type of container
- ◆ Considered how to attach a message to a container that a pigeon could carry

**Extension activities could include:**

- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Completing the Morse code activity
- ◆ **Science, D&T, English:** Exploring other ways of sending messages e.g. drums, light, semaphore, missiles and rockets
- ◆ **Science, D&T, English:** Comparing how urgent messages are sent today
- ◆ **English, ICT:** Making up and writing secret codes
- ◆ **English:** Developing drama and role play and reading stories based on the idea and dangers of sending secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **History:** Researching The Postal Museum online collections to find out more about secret messages in the First World War
- ◆ **Science, D&T:** Explore other ways of sending signals e.g. light houses
- ◆ **Music:** Investigating messages in music e.g. Inspector Morse theme, drums patterns and durations
- ◆ **Maths:** Looking at mathematical patterns in codes; investigating distances to see how far messages could be transmitted

**To do:**

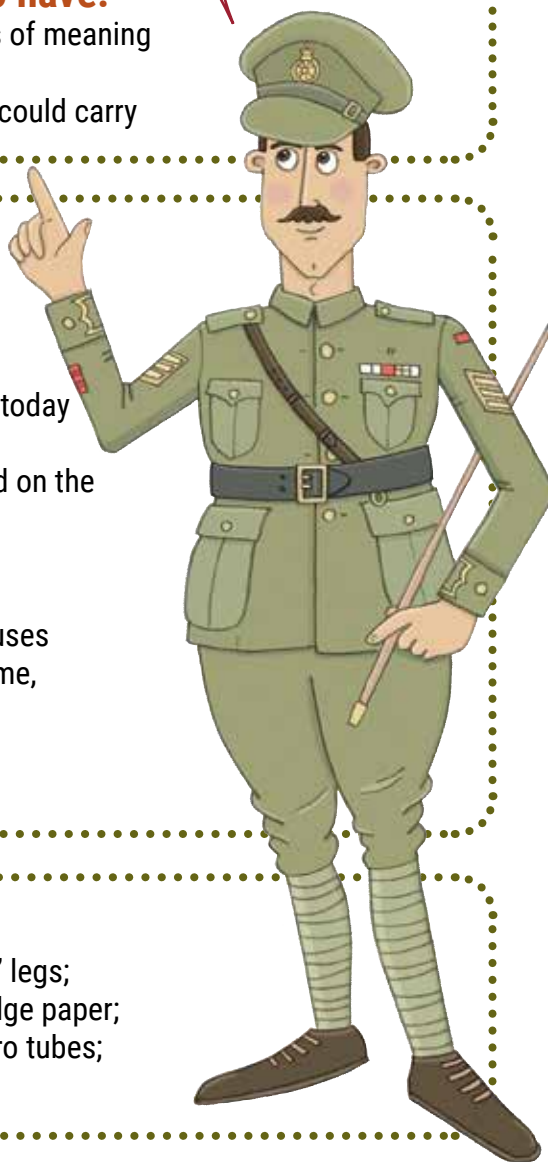
- ◆ Assemble material and equipment e.g. twigs to represent pigeons' legs; different weights of paper e.g. airmail paper, tissue, sugar and cartridge paper; different types of container for messages e.g. drinking straws, old biro tubes; materials to attach the message e.g. string, twine, thin wire

**Success criteria****By the end of the project**

- ◆ All will have increased knowledge of how some messages were transmitted in the First World War
- ◆ All will be familiar with the pigeon post
- ◆ Most will have developed their understanding of design restrictions required to send messages by pigeon post and the advantages and disadvantages of sending messages in this way
- ◆ Some will want to find out more about communications during the First World War

**Key terms**

Pigeon post  
Carrier pigeon

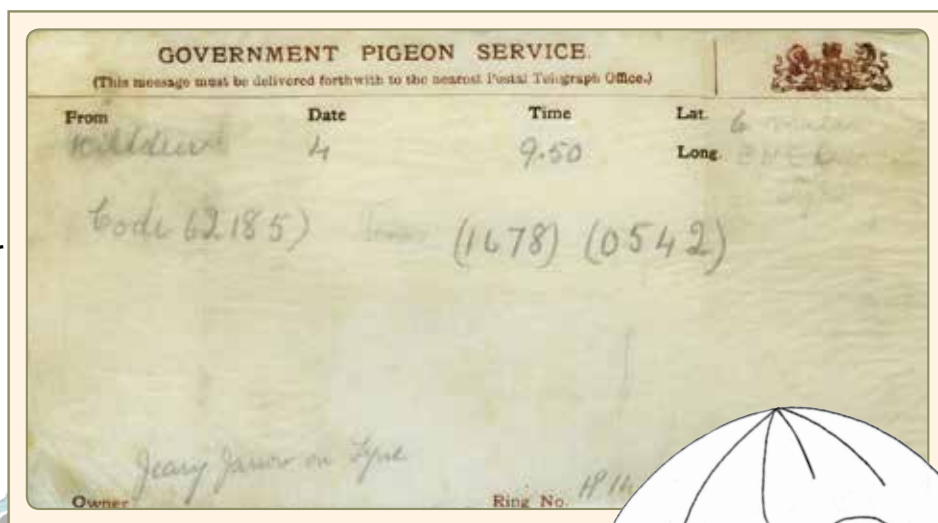


## Pigeons

Carrier pigeons were used to carry secret messages during the First World War. The birds were dropped by parachute. Agents collected the pigeons and looked after them until they had secret information to send home.

► This coded message was sent by pigeon post

© British Library Philatelic Collection - The Scott Collection. With permission.



**You are a secret agent living in France.  
You must send an urgent message back  
to London by pigeon post!**

### Things to think about:

Pigeons can't carry much weight.

Messages have to be short and written on small pieces of paper.

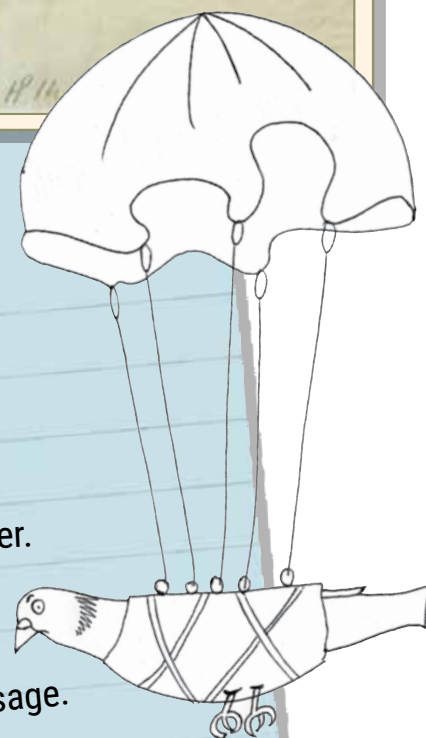
Messages are attached to the pigeon's legs.

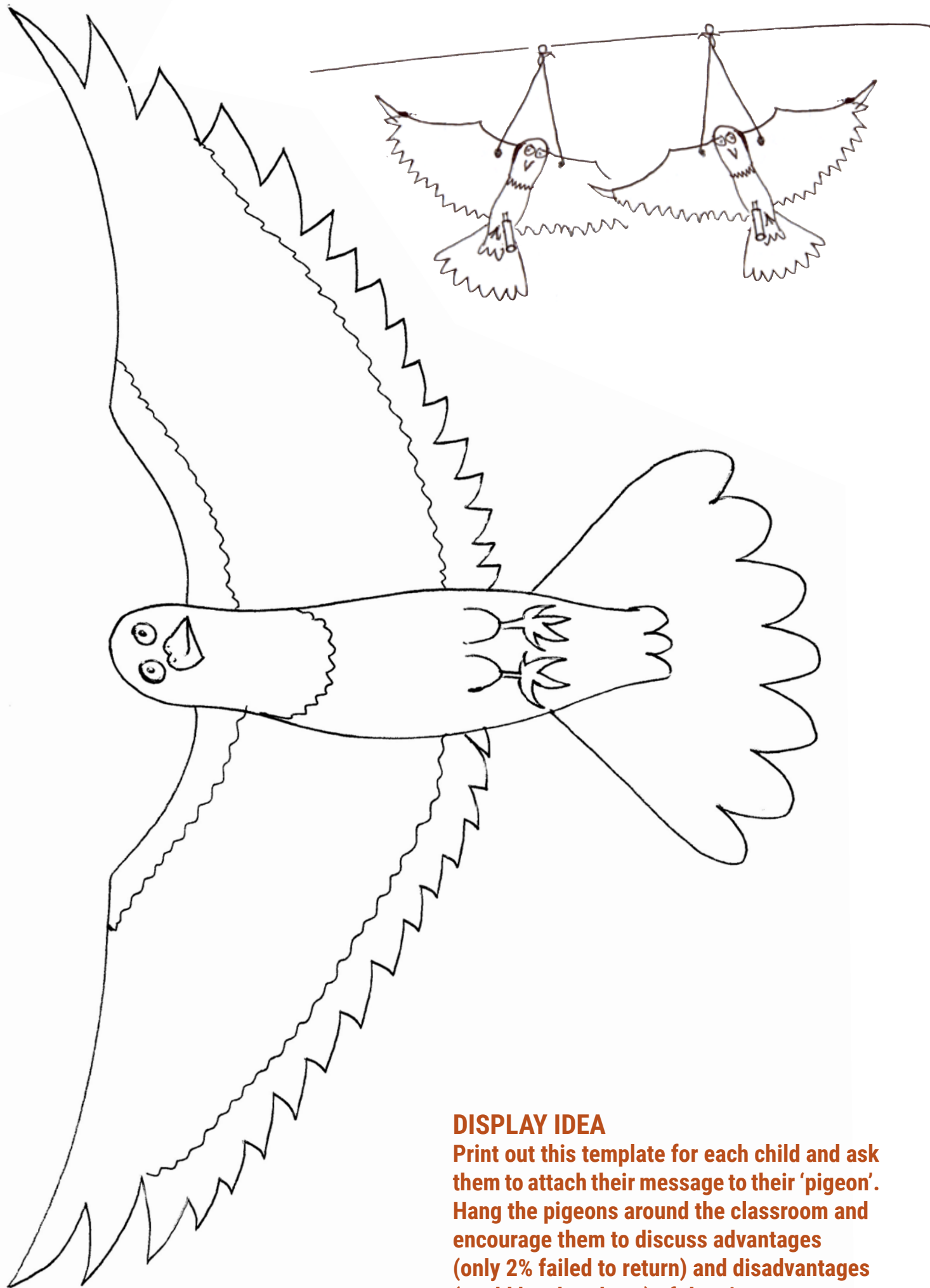
### What to do:

- ◆ Decide what important information to include in your message.
- ◆ Write your message. Include the date and time and who the message should go to. Remember to use as few words as possible.
- ◆ Choose the paper. Which is the lightest? Which can be folded up into the smallest space?
- ◆ Decide how you will attach the message to the pigeon's legs.

### Evaluate:

- ◆ Does your message contain all the vital information?
- ◆ Are there any words that could be cut out without losing sense?
- ◆ Is the message in the container light enough for the pigeon to carry?
- ◆ Is it fixed firmly to the pigeon's leg so that it won't drop off?
- ◆ Could you improve on your design?





### DISPLAY IDEA

Print out this template for each child and ask them to attach their message to their 'pigeon'. Hang the pigeons around the classroom and encourage them to discuss advantages (only 2% failed to return) and disadvantages (could be shot down) of the pigeon post.