

INK IN THE LINES

This education resource is designed for Secondary and senior Secondary students. It can be used to support school visits to the exhibition *Ink in the lines*, but is also suitable as a stand-alone resource. Further information, including *Australian curriculum* links, is available at www.awm.gov.au/schoolsink. The views and opinions expressed by veterans are their own, and contain strong language.

Many members and veterans of the Australian Defence Force have tattoos, and while their reasons for getting tattooed are as varied as the people themselves, self-expression and belonging play a part.

They also share a common purpose in getting inked: to remember.

IDENTITY & BELONGING

We don't have family crests and that in Australia, but to me the Skippy badge was probably the closest thing ... if I'm going to be buried, I'm going to go with the Skippy badge on my heart - Brian



AWM2019.289.316



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To me it's a reminder every day. You don't need to look through photos, you can just look at your arm and go, "Ah, I remember that" - David

Australian military veterans are people who have served in the Australian Army, Royal Australian Navy, and Royal Australian Air Force. Many veterans use tattoos to identify themselves as part of a group or community. Whether the tattoo represents a ship they served on, their service medals, or a set of dog tags, the veteran proclaims their pride in their identity as a serviceperson, and consolidates their service-related experiences in their tattoo.

INVESTIGATE SYMBOLS OF SERVICE

Watch this short video



<https://youtu.be/Ge9giZ-c6-8>

1. Research the history of one symbol depicted in the tattoos, such as the regimental Skippy badge, soldiers' cross or anchor. Has the meaning of the symbol changed over time? Why might the design continue to be popular with veterans? Does the symbol have different meanings for different groups?
2. Tattoos are a conversation starter. Consider the veterans that are represented in the exhibition. Using the imagery in their tattoos as a starting point, brainstorm five questions you could ask them to find out more about their service and experiences.
3. How do you think the reasons for getting a tattoo might differ between the veteran community, and the general population?
4. Reflect on a significant community or experience in your life, for example a sports team or family event. What symbols would you choose to identify your chosen group, or to represent your memories, and why?

Draw or write your response

MATESHIP & FAMILY

It's hard to explain the feeling of when they come back ... just so relieved and happy to see them - Christine



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As well as recognising families consisting of parents, partners, children, and immediate relatives, veterans often have tattoos dedicated to their military family. Some have one collection of designs dedicated to family at home while another is dedicated to military family. Sometimes distinguishing between these types of tattoos is impossible, because the two are inseparable. Regardless, the importance of family, whether at home or away, can be vital.

REFLECT

Watch this short video



<https://youtu.be/IDQT8WIKWHY>

1. Some members of the defence community have chosen tattoo designs that include imagery related to past conflicts, including the First and Second World Wars.

a. Choose one personal story from the exhibition and list differences and similarities of their experiences compared to those of Australians in the past. Evaluate a variety of sources to inform your research.

b. Identify values that have endured in the veteran community, and give examples of how they are represented in the tattoo designs. Do these values correlate to Australia's national identity?

2. Consider this statement from navy veteran Tanya, "My husband is a submariner. So I think in an eight year period, we spent four years apart. And some of that was me over in Afghanistan". Write a letter, diary entry or creative response from the perspective of a deployed serviceperson or their loved one during their deployment. What will you include, or omit, and why?

3. Some veterans have mottos or phrases inked into their skin. How do these words connect to the images around them? Why might some veterans have chosen words from foreign languages? Think about your family or friendship group, and create a motto that reflects your values or experiences.



THE IMPACT OF SERVICE

Many veterans have witnessed or experienced emotional distress as a result of their service. Some will relive traumatic events in vivid memories and nightmares, and may become overly alert and detached from the people and activities they love. These symptoms are sometimes a sign of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and can lead to conditions like depression and anxiety.

The term "moral injury" is increasingly used to refer to the impacts of exposure to traumatic events that damage an individual's moral beliefs. While related to PTSD, it is distinguishable from it, and may cause suffering where PTSD has not been diagnosed.

With professional support, people who suffer from these conditions can manage their symptoms and feel better. Some veterans find comfort in activities like sport or art-making. Afghanistan veteran Paul describes how tattoos helped following his diagnosis of PTSD:

It was like therapy, it made me feel something at least. That's the first step you know, you're getting out of the house, you're going to a tattoo shop, and you're talking to people. You're starting to re-engage and actually getting out of the house.

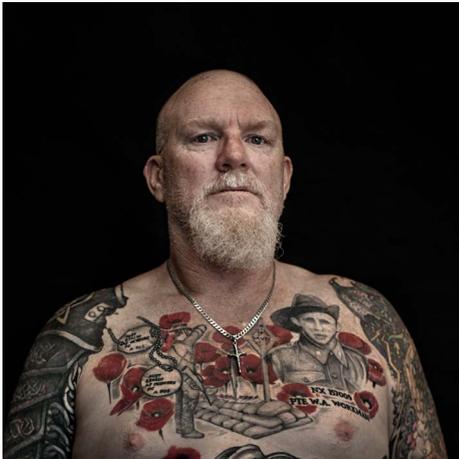
If you or someone you know needs assistance, tell a teacher or trusted adult. You can also contact:

Lifeline: 13 11 14 or Beyond Blue: 1300 224 636

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LOSS, GRIEF & COMMEMORATION

Every time it hurts, I'm here to say it hurts. I've got mates who aren't here. It sort of evens it out - Adam



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AWM2019.289.712



AWM2019.289.719

Most people get a tattoo for a game of footy. We get a tattoo to commemorate our service, our mates, our careers ... those we serve with. Still serving - Kevin

Many veterans have experienced traumatic or life-changing events, some of which are followed by a difficult reintegration into society, dealing with challenges to mental and physical health, strained relationships with family and friends, and navigating various administrative and medical bureaucracies. These events and experiences can find positive expression through tattoos that embody profound experiences of loss or transformation, or memorialise lost friends.

COMMEMORATE

Watch this short video



<https://youtu.be/agj2nClw3IU>

1. Memorials can take many forms, including commemorative tattoos.

a. Research memorials in your local area, what do they commemorate, and how? Are there ceremonial traditions that they connect to? Do they represent contemporary servicemen and servicewomen? This website may assist in your search <https://placesofpride.awm.gov.au/>

b. Working in a small group, imagine you are a committee commissioning a local memorial for veterans of recent conflicts, peacekeeping or humanitarian operations. Identify the appropriate format, design, purpose, location and audience for the memorial. Use the personal reflections shared by veterans in the exhibition to guide your planning - how could you represent their stories?

2. Think about why it might be difficult for some veterans to visit places like the Australian War Memorial, or other memorial sites. Conversely, why might this be a positive experience for many veterans?

3. Reflect on how conflict and service is presented in tattoos throughout the exhibition. Are the portrayals positive or negative? How do the different artistic styles impact the representation of the subject matter? Would the meaning of the tattoo change if it was inked on another person? Give examples and explain your reasoning.

Write your response

HEALING

A transformation just happened after the tattoo got put on, and it's like an armour for me to say, "Wow. There is life after. You can recover. You just got to reach out and ask for help." - Elaine



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While being tattooed can itself be therapeutic, some tattoos are only possible once their wearers have accepted the past and moved on. But moving on is not the same as forgetting: pride in service plays a big role, and important – even painful – memories may be acknowledged, honoured, and transformed.

Elaine deployed to East Timor in 2000 and enjoyed mingling with locals: *The East Timorese are just so generous, especially the children.* After leaving the army, she got her first tattoo: a tribute to her Kokoda Track trek and *the four pillars at its summit, engraved with the words "courage", "endurance", "mateship", and "sacrifice".*



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CREATE

Make your own paper butterfly like Tony. Use patterned or plain paper, and decorate however you like. You can take your butterfly to enjoy at home, or you might like to share it with someone else.

Tony served in Borneo as an assault pioneer where he received a traditional tattoo from Iban trackers assisting his unit. While his tattoo is a lasting reminder of that time, his later service in Vietnam made a different kind of mark, impacting on his mental health and well-being. He can now speak frankly about the PTSD incurred during his deployments, and enjoys donating his time to the community, crafting these delicate paper butterflies for hospitals and doctors' surgeries.

[View instructions here](#)



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DID YOU KNOW?

Origami is the Japanese art of paper folding. In 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, and a two-year-old girl named Sadako Sasaki was one of thousands exposed to radiation. She was later diagnosed with leukaemia and, in hospital, set about folding 1,000 paper cranes. Legend said that anyone who did so would be granted a wish; Sasaki hoped to recover from her illness. Sasaki's wish was not granted and she died aged 12. Her spirit has since inspired many others to fold paper cranes, which have become a symbol of peace across the world.

www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Paper-Butterfly#Making-a-Pleated-Paper-Butterfly

Photography by Bob McKendry

To explore more stories from this exhibition, visit: www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/ink-in-the-lines

To access additional classroom resources, education publications, and information about onsite and outreach programs at the Australian War Memorial, visit: www.awm.gov.au/learn/schools