



## THE SPITFIRE AND THE HURRICANE

In the Battle of Britain Hall the Spitfire and Hurricane are close together. This sheet will help you explore these two fighter planes with your class, looking at the similarities and differences between the Hurricane and also their role in the Battle of Britain.

### *Hurricane*

- The Hurricane was designed by Sydney Camm and it was the first Monoplane fighter that the RAF had. (Previous fighters had been bi-planes).
- The Hurricane was the principal fighter in the Battle of Britain, not the Spitfire as most people think. During the Battle of Britain there were 32 Squadrons with Hurricanes and only 19 Squadrons of Spitfires.
- Hurricanes shot down more aircraft than all other air and ground defences (anti aircraft guns) put together.
- The children's author Roald Dahl flew Hurricanes for the RAF during the war.

### *Spitfire*

- The Spitfire is probably the most famous of all the British planes used by the Royal Air Force during the Second World War.
- The Spitfire went into production in 1938 and 20,000 were built in various models by the end of the war.
- The Spitfire was a modern, up-to-date fighter to face the Luftwaffe in the Battle of Britain and capable of further development throughout the war.
- The Spitfire was a thoroughbred, fitting the pilot like a glove. Pilots who have flown both types in combat nearly always prefer the Spitfire.

You can see many differences and similarities by looking at the planes: What can you see?

### *Differences*

- Hurricanes had a wooden rear frame covered in fabric and the Spitfire was made completely of metal. It made it easier to repair damage to a Hurricane because the fabric could quickly be patched up but the Spitfire needed more skilled metal workers to fix it.
- A Spitfire could climb higher and turn faster because of its wing design.
- The Hurricanes guns are close together and close to the centre of the aeroplane which made a steady platform for accurate fire. The Spitfire has a thinner wing so the guns are further apart. The guns towards the ends of the wing could cause the plane to unbalance when they were fired.
- The Hurricane is easier to see out of when you are on the ground and coming into land. It is difficult to see out of the front of the Spitfire because it has a long straight nose and wings which are wider and positioned directly underneath the cockpit. The Hurricane's nose curves down so it is much easier to get a view of the ground in front
- The Hurricane was developed from earlier Hawker type planes and it stayed the same all through the war but the Spitfire was completely new and was developed and improved during the years of the war.

**Similarities**

- Both the Spitfire and the Hurricane were fighter planes.
- They both had the same engines and armaments during the Battle of Britain.
- Both had single seats.

**Follow  
Up  
Activity**

***Ask the children to decide which aeroplane they think was the best and discuss why.***

***The real experience: The following explanation is an outline of what it was like to fly a Hurricane or Spitfire?***

Consider telling the children this information whilst they look at the planes, if possible go and see the 'Our Finest Hour' sound and light show before telling this account.

When the signal went off to go into battle it took about 5 minutes for a squadron of Hurricanes or Spitfires to get airborne. Remember if you're in a Spitfire it's going to be more difficult to see where you're going! The pilot would have his right hand on the control stick and his left hand on the throttle. His thumb on the right hand would be over the button on the control stick that would fire the guns. His feet would be on the rudder bar to change the direction of the plane.

When the planes first got into the air they were at a disadvantage because the German planes of the Luftwaffe would be higher above them in a better position to attack, but both the Hurricane and Spitfire were more manoeuvrable than the German Messerschmitt.

Once in battle the aim was to shoot down the enemy's aircraft. The guns on the Spitfire and Hurricane were fixed in position so to fire the whole plane had to be aimed at the target to get a shot. For those few seconds your whole plane was heading straight towards the enemy and you only had enough ammunition on each sortie to fire for about 15 seconds. Remember it wasn't just you that was trying to shoot the enemy; the Germans were shooting back at you. It would take a lot of skill to swerve, dive and dodge the bullets of the Luftwaffe and many of the British pilots had very little experience in flying their aeroplanes.

Spitfires and Hurricanes worked together to shoot down the enemies. The Germans would send over Bombers with fighter planes to protect them. The Spitfires were best for engaging the Luftwaffe's fighter planes, like the Messerschmitt, whilst the Hurricanes went for the fleets of Bombers like the Junkers and Heinkels.

Once you'd achieved your goal it was back to the airfield so the ground crew could refuel and re-arm the planes. For the pilots it was now a case of nervously waiting for the next signal to go back to battle. It was a dangerous profession and many pilots were not lucky enough to return from the battle alive.

**Follow  
Up  
Activity**

***Imagine you are flying a Spitfire or Hurricane during the Battle of Britain – Write your own account.***