

Wartime Classroom

Educational support materials for groups participating in this activity

This pack contains information designed to support teachers whose classes are visiting the RAF Museum and participating in the Wartime Classroom Activity. It is intended to provide information and suggestions for class lessons before and after the activity. All the photos and diagrams are available for reasonable reproduction to help with teaching.

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Additional images from the RAF Museum's collections can be found online at <http://navigator.rafmuseum.org/>

Wartime Classroom

Educational Background to the Wartime Classroom Activity

Links to the Curriculum

Wartime Classroom relates to a number of key areas of the National Curriculum. This section of the teacher resource pack discusses the historical and social factors which provide a background to the activity.

The Second World War

The Second World War for Britain started in 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. There were two opposing forces comprised of a variety of countries. The Allied forces included Britain, Poland, France, China, Russia, India, Yugoslavia, United States, Lithuania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Burma, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Norway and Latvia. The Axis forces included Germany, Japan, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Italy. The members of both the Axis and Allied forces changed throughout the war some countries joining later or leaving earlier.

Axis forces initially appeared to be winning the war as they successfully occupied most of Europe, however this stretched their resources thin and attempts to occupy further territory were successfully resisted, for example the Soviet Union was not defeated. Many of the occupied countries such as France and Belgium also resisted the Axis forces by sabotaging Axis bases and supply lines or helping allied air crew or prisoners of war to escape or evade capture.

The failure of the Axis air forces' campaign against the Royal Air Force during the Battle of Britain prevented the invasion of Britain and provided the Allies with a suitable location to assemble forces for the D-Day landings. D-Day (6th June 1944) was to result in the liberation of France from the Axis forces. This was the beginning of the end of the Second World War. The war finally ended in 1945 when Japan, the last surviving member of the Axis forces surrendered.

The Blitz

Although the Second World War did not begin until 1939, Air Raid Precautions began as early as 1938. The development of aircraft technology had led to the increasing threat of air assault and Britain began to take measures to combat possible attacks.

Britain began to clear hospitals ready for bomb victims, millions of cardboard coffins were made, 40 million gas masks were given out and people volunteered for the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) service.

It was not until the summer of 1940 that German night bombing raids on Britain started and the Blitz began. The first major daylight raid on London occurred on 7th September 1940. 350 bombing aircraft and 650 fighting aircraft were used to attack important areas such as London's Docks and oil refineries, in this raid. The bombing lasted all through the night until 8th September, killing at least 400 people and injuring 1600 others. The Blitz continued until May 1941 when Germany turned her attention to Russia.

A siren sounded to warn the people of a possible air attack (an Air Raid). When you heard the siren you had to find shelter as quickly as possible.

Remember that it was not just British cities that were attacked during bombing raids. The Royal Air Force (RAF) attacked German cities including Berlin, damaging buildings, destroying schools and killing citizens.

Air Raid Shelters

During September 1940 approximately 177,000 people in London, were living underground, using stations on the London Underground as shelters.

Two, more common, methods of air raid protection were the Anderson Shelter and the Morrison Shelter.

The Anderson Shelter was built outside in the garden. It was made out of corrugated iron and was half buried in the garden and covered with 40 - 50 cm of soil. Over 20 million Anderson Shelters were built and each shelter could hold up to 6 people. They were not very big and so could get quite cramped, but they offered some security against the bombs that could be travelling in their direction.

The Morrison Shelter was used in the home. It was a strong metal mesh box which people could hide in. They would often keep it in the living room where it could be used as a table when it wasn't being used as a shelter.

The Blackout

Britain was blacked out on 1st September 1939, two days before the outbreak of war.

Everyone had to cover their windows and doors at night with heavy black out curtains, cardboard or paint to prevent any glimmer of light from escaping and aiding enemy aircraft during their bombing raids. This is because the bright lights of the city would make any city or town an easy target for bombs.

Street lights were switched off or dimmed and shielded to deflect their light downwards. Traffic lights and vehicle headlights were fitted with slotted covers to deflect their beam down to the ground.

The number of road accidents increased because of the reduced street lighting. A number of measures were taken to try and prevent these accidents:

- White stripes were painted on the roads and on lamp posts.
- People were encouraged to walk facing the traffic.
- Men were advised to leave their shirt tails hanging out so that they could be seen by cars with dimmed headlamps.

People were also injured in accidents during the blackout because they could not see in the darkness. Many people were hurt tripping up, falling down stairs or bumping into things.

Gas Attacks and Gas Masks

Gas was a very nasty weapon that could be dropped from aeroplanes. There were several types of gas and they were all poisonous. Many soldiers had been gassed during the First World War. It was feared that if gas was dropped on Britain it would kill many men, women and children.

The Government decided that it would be a good idea to issue everyone with their own gas mask. 40 million gas masks were given out. These masks were made of rubber and were easy to put on but had to fit tightly around the face to prevent gas from getting in. They were not very comfortable and would quickly steam up inside. There were special ones for children, made of red rubber. They were made to look like Donald Duck or Mickey Mouse; even so, children did not like them very much as they were uncomfortable.

Poisonous gas was detected by painting the tops of pillar boxes yellow with a special kind of paint that would change colour if there was any gas in the air. This would act as a warning to everybody in the street. Gas masks had to be carried at all times in their cardboard case. Some cinemas would not let a person in without their gas mask. However, the Germans did not drop any poisonous gas and soon people tired of carrying their gas masks.

Evacuation

It soon became apparent that some parts of the country were going to be attacked more than others, mainly cities such as London and Coventry. Plans were made for children living in these areas to be sent to safer parts of the country (and sometimes even other countries). This process was known as evacuation. Children below school age had to stay with their mothers whether they were evacuated or not, but those children old enough to attend school were strongly advised to be sent away. Evacuation was not compulsory.

The families that took in children from the evacuated towns and cities were known as foster families. When the evacuated children arrived they would have a health check and then foster parents would collect them to take them to their new homes. This would be the first time that many children had been to the countryside. The children would write back home to let their parents know that they were alright and to tell them their news. Foster parents would be paid 8s 6d (about 43p) per week for every child that they looked after.

Rationing

Before the Second World War, Britain imported about 55 million tons of food a year from other countries. After the war was declared in September 1939, the British Government was not able to import the same amount of food from abroad as German submarines started sinking British Merchant ships. There was a worry that this would lead to shortages of food in the shops so the Government decided to introduce a system of rationing.

Everybody was issued with ration books. Ration books contained coupons that shopkeepers clipped out of the books when people bought food and other items. This controlled the amount of an item people were able to buy. Sometimes even if you had the correct coupons, you would not be able to buy everything you wanted because the shop would have run out. This led to huge queues outside shops when items such as sugar were in stock.

The Dig for Victory campaign was introduced at the beginning of the war to encourage the whole of Britain to change their gardens into small allotments. Britain was transformed in only a few months; its gardens, flowerbeds and parks were dug up to plant vegetables and fruit.

It was not just food that was rationed; petrol, furniture and clothing were also restricted.

Some rationed items such as petrol, clothing, meat and furniture were available on the Black Market. The Black Market was an illegal supply of rationed items, which did not require coupons or a ration book, but was often quite expensive. Outlets ranged from extra meat from the butcher, to items sold out of a suitcase in an alleyway or bought from a man in the pub. The Black Market had similar supply problems to the shops and often had nothing for sale.



Result of a German flying bomb attack on a row of semi detached houses.



Evacuees at a train station carrying their belongings wrapped up in paper parcels.



Result of an RAF air raid on a Gestapo headquarters in Denmark. You can see fire crews trying to control the blaze.



This accidental damage happened during the successful destruction of the Gestapo headquarters in Copenhagen, when a Mosquito crashed into the French School, Jeanne d'Arc killing 100 nuns and school children.

Wartime Classroom

Activities for the classroom

Links to the Curriculum

Wartime Classroom relates to a number of key areas of the National Curriculum. This teacher resource pack is intended to provide some suggestions for classroom activities for a variety of subjects.

History Activities

Activity: Think about the way you are taught in school now; compare it to the way you were taught in the role play part of your Wartime Classroom activity. Do you prefer modern teaching methods or would you rather learn by repetition and copying? How would you feel if your teacher used the cane today?

Activity: Try to put yourself in the place of an evacuee. What items would you put in your suitcase and how many of each? Use the resource sheet at the end of this pack to find out what items the government required children to take. Would you want to take more? What would you take if evacuated today?

Research: During the Second World War people often had to Make do and Mend because of rationing. What different ideas did people think of? Can you think of any others? Does your family Make do and Mend today? Can you think of anything similar to this idea that we do today e.g. recycling?

Research: What happened in your local area during the Second World War? Were there any bombing raids? Can you find any buildings that have survived the Second World War? Try talking to some of your community's older people; do they have any memories of the Second World War?

Activity: Look at the jobs people could do on the Home Front during the Second World War e.g. Fire Watching, Women's Land Army, Air Raid Warden, Women's Voluntary Service or the Home Guard. Would you like to do any of these jobs? Why?

English Activities

Letter Writing: Write a letter to the person who led your activity or to the Education Team at the RAF Museum, to tell them how you felt about your trip and what you learnt.

Creative Writing: Write a first person account of what it feels like to live during the Second World War. Why not write about how you felt during a recent air raid or how your life has changed since being evacuated.

Letter Writing: Write a letter to your parents as if you have been evacuated from home. Think about how you would feel living away from home and what sort of things you would want to tell your parents.

Role Play: Act out an evacuation scene. Themes could include parents saying goodbye to children, children meeting their foster families for the first time, children attending their first day in their new school or children being sent back home after being evacuated.

Art Activities

Activity: Draw or paint a picture showing the damage done in a bombing raid. Try to convey how you feel about air raids. Did your perception change after the Wartime Classroom activity?

Science Activities

Activity: Look at how aircraft fly. What are the forces involved? Try designing a paper aeroplane.

Activity: During your Wartime Classroom activity you were asked to get under the desks to protect you from the air raid. Investigate the physical properties of wood and other materials to find out how much protection the desks would have given you. Would you have been better protected if the desks had been made of a different material?

Maths Activities

Activity: Try doing some addition and subtraction sums using the British pre – decimal money system. There is an explanation of this system included in this pack.

Wartime Classroom

Additional Resources

Dear Mother,
I thank you for the satchel
and other things you sent me. We
have been having many air-raids
(I think 48) since we have been
back. Many bombs have dropped
around us. Please tell Dick this
when you see him. A few minutes later
we heard guns, machine guns, and
the air was full of sound. We
thought we might see the fun,
so we went to where we could
see the sky. We saw little white
specks moving about and suddenly
my friend said "look up there",
and we did. Well, we saw a
plane, coming down just as
it was coming.

Redham,
Parley,
Sussex,
8. 9. 40.

Excerpt from an evacuee's letter to his mother describing his emotions on witnessing a battle between aircraft. This letter is held in the RAF Museum's document archive.

WARTIME MONEY

Coin	Written Notation	Common name	Decimal Equivalent	Modern Value
Farthing	¼d	Farthing	1/8p	5p
Halfpenny	½d	Ha'penny	¼p	10p
Penny	1d	Penny	½p	21p
Three Pence	3d	Thrup'ny Bit	1½p	62p
Six Pence	6d	Tanner	2½p	£1.24
Shilling	1s or 1/-	Bob	5p	£2.49
Florin	2s or 2/-	Two Bob Bit	10p	£4.97
Half a Crown	2s 6d or 2/6	Half a Crown	12½p	£6.22
Ten Shillings (note)	10s or 10/-	Ten Bob Note	50p	£24.88
One Pound (note)	£1	Pound	£1.00	£49.75
Guinea (N.B. this coin was not in use but many prices were written in guineas.)	1Gn or £1 1s or £1/1s or 21s	Guniea	£1.05	£52.24

2 farthings	=	1 halfpenny
2 halfpennies	=	1 penny
12 pennies	=	1 shilling
2 shillings	=	1 florin
2 shillings and 6 pennies	=	half a crown
2 half crowns	=	1 crown
2 crowns	=	10 shillings
20 shillings	=	1 pound
1 pound and 1 shilling	=	1 guinea



EVACUEE'S SUITCASE

Each child was allowed to take one suitcase with them when they were evacuated in addition to their gas mask case. The government recommended that children take a certain number of items. The items were different for girls and boys.

Girls were told to take the following items in addition to what they were wearing:

- 1 vest
- 1 pair of knickers
- 1 petticoat
- 2 pairs of stockings
- 6 handkerchiefs
- 1 slip
- 1 blouse
- 1 cardigan

Boys were told to take the following items in addition to what they were wearing:

- 2 vests
- 2 pairs of pants
- 1 pair of trousers
- 2 pairs of socks
- 6 handkerchiefs
- 1 pullover or jersey

Many children also took an extra pair of boots or shoes, washing things such as flannels and a towel, a comb for their hair and a packet of sandwiches or some fruit for the journey. A teddy bear or another favourite toy was also often included in an evacuee's suitcase.