

Teacher Guide World War Two

World War Two remains the biggest conflict the world has ever seen, and a pivotal moment in British history. Partnering with the Imperial War Museum, BBC Teach has created this series of short films, drawing on world-class archive and incredible eyewitness access to make classroom resources that educate and entertain. Whether it's hearing stories from people who lived through the war, or seeing footage of what life was like for people of the time, this series uncovers key events and topics of the war and brings it to life for a new generation of pupils.

These short films offer a comprehensive overview of World War Two. They are aimed at pupils aged 7-11. Drawing upon archive footage, eye-witness accounts and the expertise of war historians, we have aimed to produce short films that are engaging, educational and easy to digest.

Each short film is structured in three parts:

1. Narration supported by archive footage that chronicles a key moment in the war
2. An eye-witness account of the aforementioned 'key moment'
3. A 'Did You Know?' section informing pupils an intriguing, less well-known fact about the 'key moment' in question.

OVERVIEW OF THE WAR

World War Two was the conflict between the Allies (led by Britain, the US and the USSR) and the Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan).

Driven in part by national tensions following World War One as well as economic difficulties during the Great Depression, Hitler and the Nazi party were able to take over the German state and enact their nationalistic and anti-Semitic agenda, which would eventually culminate in the Holocaust.

Coming so soon after World War One (then known as 'the war to end all wars'), many people in Britain were reluctant to enter more fighting. However, the aggressive Nazi invasions of swathes of Europe, as well as their persecution of Jewish people and other groups, made war impossible to avoid.

From a British point of view, the war continues to be seen as being primarily a European-centred battle between the Western allies and Nazi Germany. But World War Two was a truly global conflict, with separate but linked foundations in Asia. These originated both in the Japanese view of its world position after World War One and in the consequences of European colonisation in Africa and Asia. This meant that many countries around the world

were drawn into the war both in Europe and in Asia. By the end, over 50 countries had been involved.

After six years of fighting, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan and Fascist Italy were eventually defeated. Around 100 million people had fought, and 70 million had died, if you include all war related deaths, including those who died from starvation and disease. Of those, 15 million were soldiers, 20 million were Russian civilians, 15 million were Chinese, six million were Jews and over four million were Poles.

TIMELINE OF THE WAR

Lead-up

1914

World War One begins. Britain, France and their empires, as well as eventually the USA, fight against Austria-Hungary and the German Empire in Europe and the Turkish Empire in the Middle East.

1918

World War One ends, with the defeat of Austria-Hungary, the German Empire and the Turkish Empire.

1919

At the Treaty of Versailles, it is decreed that Germany must accept responsibility for starting the war, give up most of its armed forces and part of its territories in Europe, as well as its colonies in Africa. It must also pay huge reparations.

1921-23

War debts, combined with mismanagement by the German government of its economy, including the printing of money to try to balance payment of these reparations, resulted in crippling hyperinflation.

1929

Following the Wall Street Crash, a worldwide Great Depression begins. The US demands repayment of the crucial loans it had made to Germany and stops buying German goods to protect and support its own industry. German unemployment rises to six million by 1933, causing poverty and widespread food insecurity.

The radical and disaffected National Socialist German Workers' Party (known as the Nazis) exploits political disaffection in Germany with this dire situation and ongoing bitterness about the Treaty of Versailles. It goes from winning 2% of the vote in 1928 to becoming the most popular party in 1932, though they never achieve a parliamentary majority under fair elections.

1933

Nazi leader Adolf Hitler is appointed Chancellor of Germany, giving the Nazis control of the government and state including the police. By targeting and intimidating political opponents, they pass the Enabling Act, allowing Hitler to pass laws without parliamentary support.

This creates a legal Nazi dictatorship, and consolidates fascist power within the Nazi state. Other political parties are outlawed, the army pledges allegiance to Hitler, and the first concentration camps are established.

1937

Japanese forces invade mainland China from Manchuria, which Japan has occupied and controlled since 1931. This begins a bitter and costly war between China and Japan.

1938

In March, the Nazi army marches into Austria and takes control of the state. This is called the Anschluss by the Nazis, or the 'joining'.

In September, the Munich Agreement is passed, with Britain, France and Italy agreeing that Germany can take a part of Czechoslovakia (which was not invited to the talks), in order to avoid greater war. The Nazis go on to take all of Czechoslovakia.

The War

1939

After months of rising international tensions, on 1st September Germany invades Poland. Millions of British children are immediately evacuated in the expectation of war. Two days later, Britain and France declare war on Germany. Poland is brutally torn apart.

The lack of direct military conflict in Western Europe until May 1940 means this first period is known in Britain as the 'Bore War' or 'Phoney War'.

1940

To combat growing shortages of food, rationing is steadily introduced in the UK.

Germany invades Denmark and Norway, and then overwhelms Belgium, the Netherlands and France with its tactic of Blitzkrieg - lightning war.

British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain resigns, and is replaced by Winston Churchill.

Hundreds of thousands of British and French troops are rescued from beaches around Dunkirk and ports in western France. France is divided into two - one part known as Vichy France a puppet state under a right-wing French government, the other controlled directly by Germany.

Following the successful defeat of France, Hitler starts planning an invasion of Britain. Before this can take place, the RAF and German Luftwaffe fight a titanic battle for control of the skies over southern England - the Battle of Britain. The RAF narrowly holds off the Germans and the Nazi invasion is postponed.

However, the Luftwaffe gradually begin to bomb key British cities, in what becomes known as the Blitz.

1941

The Blitz continues in Britain until May, though other bombing continues throughout the war.

To support the failing Italian armies, German forces are moved to North Africa. This is followed by a German invasion of Greece and what was then Yugoslavia.

In one of the most important developments of the war, the Germans launch an overwhelming invasion of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Red Army is driven back into Russia, and Nazi and Soviet forces become locked in a four year battle that will eventually decide the outcome of the war in Europe.

Frustrated by their deadlocked campaigns in China, the Japanese decisively extend the war across the region to seize the resources they need to keep on fighting. On 7th December, Japanese planes preemptively strike the US navy base of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii to cripple the American Pacific fleet. In response, the US joins the war. At the same time the Japanese launch attacks on European colonies across South-East Asia.

1942

The Japanese, allied with Nazi Germany, continue their aggressive expansion. Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma and Singapore (all ruled by the British at the time) are forced to surrender after the Japanese attack all within quick succession.

The Japanese also go on to take over the Philippines and the Dutch East Indies, and continue to expand across China. But by the end of the year, operations led by US forces start to inflict some defeats on the Japanese for the first time.

German troops also began to suffer during the fierce Soviet winter and then in North Africa after being defeated by British and Imperial forces in the Battle of El Alamein.

News of the mass murder of Jewish people also begins to reach the Allies in the west, leading governments to pledge to track down the perpetrators.

1943

Soviet forces defeat German troops in the Battle of Stalingrad.

In July, after defeating German and Italian forces in North Africa, Allied armies invade Sicily before moving on to southern Italy. At the same time, Soviet forces inflict a serious defeat on the Germans at Kursk in Russia. The balance of initiative and power now swings from the Germans to the Soviet armies on the Eastern Front.

By the end of the year, Mussolini, the leader of Fascist Italy, has been removed though Germany seizes control of most of the country, including Rome.

In the Pacific arena, US forces launch two simultaneous advances to push back the Japanese, one across the chain of islands leading towards Japan and a second with US and Australian troops through New Guinea towards the Philippines.

1944

In June, after heavy fighting, Allied forces defeat Germany in southern Italy and liberate Rome.

The following day, the Allies successfully return to Western Europe by beginning the D-Day landings. As retaliation, the Germans start launching V-1 rockets against Britain, causing widespread damage and fear. Moving inland, the Allied armies drive the Germans back through France until in August Paris is liberated.

At the same time, Soviet forces launch a series of devastating attacks in the Eastern Europe, forcing the Germans west towards their own borders.

The capture of the Mariana islands in the central Pacific allows the Americans to begin preparing for a sustained bombing campaign on Japan. British and Indian troops finally defeat the attempted Japanese invasion of India and prepare to push south through Burma.

1945

As advancing Soviet troops liberate concentration camps such as Majdanek and Auschwitz, the extent of the Holocaust becomes clear.

Soviet troops advance on Germany from the East, while the other Allies advance from the West. The Russians reach Berlin on 21 April, and Hitler commits suicide on the 30th, two days after Mussolini has been hanged.

Germany surrenders on 7 May, and the following day becomes known in the west as Victory in Europe day.

Fighting continues in the Pacific and South-East Asia, with US led forces pushing back the Japanese and bombing Japan itself. The bombing campaign culminates in the dropping of two Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the same time, the Soviet Union declares war on Japan and invades Japanese occupied Manchuria. This finally forces the Japanese to surrender on 14 August, with the following day becoming known as VJ Day (Victory over Japan day).

Aftermath

Between VE and VJ Days, the Labour party came to power in the UK in a landslide election victory, replacing Winston Churchill and promising social change, like the founding of the NHS and nationalisation of key industries.

In the years after the war, the US lent billions of dollars to Western Europe to help it recover, as much of it had been battle-zones or occupied.

The Soviet Union turned many countries in Eastern Europe into satellite states. These included Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Albania, and Czechoslovakia. Germany was divided into East and West Germany, with the Soviet Union keeping East Germany and the Western Allies sharing control of West Germany.

This division of East and West Germany laid the foundation for the Cold War, and the ideological war between American capitalism and Soviet communism.

Many countries which had been colonised were unwilling to return to their pre-war status quo, and many national independence movements sprung up across the world.

The UN was founded, adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and creating the Security Council to guard against future wars.

Some interesting facts that may inspire discussion points in class:

- These were the first words Neville Chamberlain spoke when announcing the war: "I am speaking to you from the cabinet room at 10 Downing Street. This morning the British ambassador in Berlin handed the German government a final note stating that unless we heard from them by 11 o'clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany."

- A study has found that children who grew up in WW2 became more intelligent than those born 15 years earlier. The theory is that rationing made those growing up in the war cut out rich, sugary and fatty foods, which had a positive impact on their growing brains.
- Despite calls for independence from Britain, a large section of India still identified with the British Empire on some level. This led to the formation of the largest volunteer army in history. Without conscription the British Indian Army numbered 2.5 million volunteer soldiers.
- At the peak of the Blitz, 177,000 Londoners slept in the tube system for safety.
- Buckingham Palace was almost destroyed. RAF Sergeant Ray Holmes spotted a German bomber heading in the direction of the palace, but Holmes was out of ammo to fire it down. So, instead he steered his aircraft straight into the enemy aircraft and rammed it with his wing.
- During the war, Britain built an incredible 132,500 aircraft and over a million military vehicles.
- On D-Day, the Allies wanted to land at low-tide as this would expose the beach mines and traps the Germans had placed. In order to do this, mathematician turned oceanographer, Arthur Thomas Doodson developed complex models and tide-tables that revealed the ideal time and date for the invasion to take place. His calculations determined that 5 - 7 June would have the best tide and moon conditions, which is why D-Day took place on 6 June 1944.
- Bletchley Park was the centre of British code-breaking during the war. Women were initially brought into Bletchley Park to provide administrative support. However, as the war advanced, women were increasingly recruited for their linguistics, physics and mathematical ability. Critically, women went from having their intellect dismissed, to ultimately playing a key role in code-breaking. Before the invention of electronic computers, "computer" was a job description, not a machine. Both men and women were employed as computers, but women were more prominent in the field.
- At the end of the war, there was an expectation that the important roles women played during the war were only temporary. The number of working women gradually declined to pre-war levels, while married women were barred from working in many jobs. However, over the course of the next 20 years, this continued inequality, despite the vital role that woman had played during the war, helped to inspire the Feminist movements in the 60s and 70s.

Imperial War Museum resources:

If you want to supplement these materials further, the Imperial War Museum has a large number of resources for teachers.

Through the 'We Were There' scheme, children can meet eyewitnesses who lived through World War Two, hearing what it was like and asking questions.

School groups can also book visits to any of the five museum sites, or book in learning sessions to explore objects and topics in greater depth.

In addition to their learning resources, the museum collections are searchable online. These include film, photography and audio resources, many of which are freely available to the public via the Imperial War Museum website.

General resources: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/resources>

We Were There:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/learning/sessions/we-were-there-ask-questions-about-conflict-london>

Information on booking visits or learning sessions:

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-london/groups/schools>

Search the collections: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections>

Children's books about The Second World War: Goodnight Mister Tom by Michelle Magorian; Carrie's War by Nina Bawden; Hitler's Canary by Sandi Toksvig; The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas by John Boyne; When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit by Judith Kerr; The Lion and the Unicorn by Shirley Hughes; I Am David by Anne Holm; Friend or Foe by Michael Morpurgo; Alone on a Wide Wide Sea by Michael Morpurgo, and Anne Frank's Diary.