

VE Day



Aim

To commemorate the 80th anniversary of Victory in Europe Day 'VE Day' on 8 May and to consider what life was like in the UK in the years immediately after World War Two.

Context

'VE Day' stands for 'Victory in Europe Day' - marking the end of World War Two in Europe. The War didn't finally end though until 15 August, with the surrender of Japan - known as 'VJ Day', or 'Victory over Japan Day.'

2025 marks the 80th anniversary of the original 'VE Day'. There are plans for beacons and 'Lamp lights of peace' to be lit around the country, and for there to be street parties and other commemorative celebrations.

When Nazi Germany finally surrendered to the Allies on 7 May 1945 it marked the end of six long years of fighting in which the UK suffered approximately 450,000 deaths - of which about 70,000 were civilians.

On 8 May Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a radio address in which he said that *'we may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead.'*

Churchill's words were prophetic - toil did indeed lie ahead. Many towns and cities had been devastated by bombing, and in London as many as 1.5 million people had been made homeless. The rebuilding programme was immensely expensive and consequently taxes were high.

Rationing, which had been introduced during the War, continued after it ended. Rationing of flour did not end until 1948; clothes

not until 1949; petrol not until 1950. Rationing of sugar and butter remained until 1953 - eight years after the end of the War.

A new approach to healthcare and social care was needed. The National Health Service was established in 1946, making medical treatment for all free at the point of delivery. In the years following the War the new government introduced a number of measures - such as the National Insurance Act - which formed the basis of 'cradle to grave' social care.

Gradually the country began to recover: the 1950s were a period of economic growth, with ownership of consumer goods - such as television and fridges - becoming much more widespread.

Possible discussion points before watching the video

- Are pupils aware what is significant about 8 May 2025?
- Are any pupils aware of relatives who lived through the War years? Are there any family 'memories' about them?
- What do pupils know of the terrible cost of the War in terms of human lives lost? (You may wish to share that although there is no way to know for sure how many people died, estimates have been made of 15 million killed in combat and as many as 45 million civilian deaths).

The video

Historian Shalina Patel meets Jess and Norma - a social media phenomenon. Jess is Norma's granddaughter and carer and - despite the difference in their ages - they are best friends. They generate often humorous and upbeat content documenting their time together and post it to social media, where they have amassed over 3 million followers.

In the film Norma is interviewed about her memories of the end of the War and post-war Britain. Norma was 11 years old when the War ended in 1945. Some of the topics she covers are:

- VE Day
- rationing
- food and cooking more generally
- the 'Blitz spirit'

Shalina then quizzes Norma and Jess about their knowledge of the post-war years, with a game of 'True or False?':

- Winston Churchill announced the end of the War with a TV address (False – it was a *radio* address)
- The late Queen – then Princess Elizabeth – secretly joined the crowds celebrating on the streets of London (True – along with her sister, Margaret)
- Clothing vouchers were called 'Fashion Tokens' (False – they were called 'Clothing Coupons')
- VE Day celebrations were streamed online so that everyone could join in (False!)

Possible discussion points after watching the video

- Why is it important that we remember events from the past?
- The War years, and the period which followed immediately after, was a difficult time for many people in the UK. Yet people who remember it often do so with fondness and refer to the 'Blitz spirit'. Why do you think this is?
- What should we remember about the generation who lived through the War years? How should we commemorate them?

Bringing the assembly to a close

Some possible reflections on VE Day:

- The end of the War brought huge relief for the people of Britain after six years of fighting in which many families had suffered bereavement or had experienced other trauma, such as being bombed.
- Today VE Day is an opportunity to remember not only a significant historical event but to remember the sacrifice that

was made by that generation.

- VE Day 80 will be the last commemoration to include a significant number of people who can remember the original event.
- It's also an opportunity to remember that we still live in a world where wars are common and that it is the responsibility of everyone to strive for peace.

Links

- [BBC Teach: VE Day teaching resources](#)
- [History of the BBC - VE Day broadcasts](#)
- [Carers First - Jess and Norma](#)

Possible assembly framework

1. Entry

Play the video 'The sights and sounds of VE Day. *[In 'Resources' on the web page]*.

2. Introduction

Can anyone tell me something significant about today / *[name the appropriate day]*? What's special about it? *[Gather responses. Establish that the day is VE Day]*.

What is special about VE Day? Why are we marking VE Day? *[Gather responses. Establish that VE Day marks the end of World War II in Europe - thus the end of the War for Britain]*.

So VE Day marks the end of World War II in Europe. It's the day after the formal surrender of Nazi Germany. It's called Victory in Europe Day because the War actually continued for a further three months, with fighting in Asia between the USA and Japan.

[This year is a particularly special VE Day, because it's 80 years since that first celebration in 1945]. 80 years is a very long time, but there are still people who remember the very first VE Day back in 1945. And we're going to mark VE Day by hearing from someone who remembers that very first VE Day in a short video. The video also considers life in Britain in the years immediately after the War.

Perhaps you'll already know the person...because the video features Norma - who was 11 when the War ended – and her granddaughter Jess, who is also Norma's carer. And together Jess and Norma are a bit of an internet sensation. They like to post content about their friendship across generations to social media – and they've amassed over 2 million followers.

3. Play the video

The final words are: 'Thank you. It's been lovely.'

Duration: 5min 10sec

4. After the video - time to talk

An opportunity to discuss pupils' responses to the video. You could also have your own game of 'True or False?' here based on information from the video.

5. Bringing the assembly to a close

Today we've heard the memories of someone who remembers not just the relief of that first VE Day in 1945, but also the challenges of the years which followed - such as shortages of food, housing and other key resources. Life in those post-war years wasn't easy. People had to dig deep – be resilient. But gradually they started to build a better future – a better future which we all share today.

So when we think about that generation, let's remember their courage, their determination and their sacrifice. But let's also remember that we still live in a world where there are wars and conflict, and where it is up to each and every one of us to strive for peace.

6. Exit

Play your chosen music as pupils leave.