

Teachers' guide 6: Winston Churchill



War Memorials Trust

Background: This teachers' guide is designed to be the last in the series about World War II from War Memorials Trust. Rather than focus in detail on the events of the war, this last guide focuses on one of the leaders most often associated with the conflict: Winston Churchill. The 50th anniversary of his death was commemorated last year in 2015 and this guide aims to give an overview of his career during the conflict and look at why he was so popular and still thought of today as one of history's greatest Britons. The suggestions below are guidance only and you will need to adapt them to suit your class and curriculum and possibly spread the activities over more than one lesson. There are many other resources available that analyse Churchill's role as wartime leader which you may find useful.

Suitable for: Key Stage 3

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- To understand Winston Churchill's impact as a leader during World War II

Key information

- Winston Churchill was born on 30th September 1874 at Blenheim Palace, the seat of his grandfather, the Duke of Marlborough.
- After attending Harrow and Sandhurst Churchill enlisted in the cavalry and received a commission in 1895. He saw military service throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and acted as a war correspondent and writer.
- He also held various political positions during the early twentieth century, including Home Secretary and First Lord of the Admiralty. The latter position continued until the Gallipoli Campaign of World War I when Churchill departed from government, returning later as Secretary of State for War.
- During the 1930s Churchill was a prominent voice warning about Nazi Germany (Hitler came to power in 1933). When World War II broke out in 1939 Churchill was once again appointed First Lord of the Admiralty and then became Prime Minister in 1940 following the resignation of Neville Chamberlain.
- Churchill is arguably best known and remembered for his actions during World War II. He was an inspirational leader and is especially remembered for some of his speeches, particularly during 1940 to 1941 when Britain suffered the Blitz and Dunkirk and before the turning points of the war from 1942 onwards
- His most famous speeches include the *We shall fight on the beaches* speech of 4th June 1940, in the aftermath of the Dunkirk invasion (which is covered in depth in War Memorials Trust's 'Teachers' guide 2' in this series); the *This was their finest hour* speech on 18th June and the *Never was so much owed by so many to so few* speech of 20th August 1940.
- Through these speeches Churchill gave British people hope, motivation and courage.

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- Despite being so popular during the war Churchill's Conservative Party lost the 1945 election and he became Leader of the Opposition. He returned to being Prime Minister in 1951 until 1955. On his death in 1965 he was given a state funeral.
- Churchill has retained his popularity and reputation over the fifty years since his death, and has often been regarded as one of the most influential people in history.
- There are various memorials to Churchill, some of which indicate his enduring popularity and respect. These include a statue of him in Parliament Square, London and inside the Palace of Westminster. There is also a memorial stained glass window, depicting many wartime features such as a Spitfire and a gas mask, in the church where he is buried in Oxfordshire and a memorial garden at Blenheim Palace, his birthplace and ancestral home.

Suggested teaching and activities

1. These teachers' notes can either be used as a standalone lesson teaching pupils about Churchill as a significant historical figure, his part in the war and his legacy, **or** information from this can be used in conjunction with the other teachers' guides in this series, such as on Dunkirk.

If you choose to teach a lesson on Churchill this could focus specifically on his actions at wartime leader. Pupils could examine the factors that led to Chamberlain's resignation and why Churchill took over – why was he the right person at the time? Another aspect they could look at is what made Churchill so popular among the general population during the war but how and why he lost the election in 1945 – were his leadership qualities only suited to the unusual circumstances of the war? What was the 'mood' after the war in 1945 and why did this lead to a change of leadership?

2. One of the things Churchill is best remembered for is his skill in delivering wartime speeches. Pupils could look at examples of these and consider what was said, how Churchill delivered news through them and how they would have made listeners feel – was Churchill someone who boosted morale during the war? Audio of some speeches are available online and these could be used alongside text to help pupils analyse them and their impact.
3. Churchill died over 50 years ago but is still seen by many as one of the greatest Britons and best Prime Ministers in history. The 50th anniversary of his death was widely marked in the UK. Using what they have learned about him and about the events of the war, pupils could be asked to decide if he deserves those titles, and if not, why they think not.
4. Linked to this, another activity could focus on memorials to Churchill and what they tell us about his ongoing reputation and legacy. Pupils could design their own incorporating what they have learned about him. Many memorials to Churchill are of the more traditional type, e.g. sculptures of him, whereas other memorials are more modern or take different designs. This could help pupils understand more about the different types of war memorials – a theme running through these resources – and how memorials to individuals, especially leaders, differ from those to many people collectively.

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