

Lesson 1: Introduction to World War II



War Memorials Trust

Background: This is the first lesson in the series outlined in the accompanying 'Key Stage 2 World War II topic planning.' It is intended to be used to introduce pupils to the background to World War II so that they understand the context of the following lessons. It will cover key facts about the war and its main events, which will be examined in more depth throughout the rest of the unit. You may wish to use two lessons to cover this content – one to teach the key information and one to reflect on the importance to continuing to learn about the war before moving on to the remaining lessons. This unit of work may complement other areas of the curriculum and some suggestions for other work that may be linked are given in the 'Ideas for further work' section below.

Suitable for: Upper Key Stage 2. Some elements may be suitable for Lower Key Stage 2.

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- The key facts about when World War II began and the main events of the war
- That the war affected many people and had a lasting impact

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Explain when World War II happened
- Describe the key events of World War II and important people involved.

Resources: WMT timeline cards; range of images and clips depicting WW2 and life at that time; 'What do I know about World War II?' pupil resource sheet.

Introduction:

What do we understand about World War II?

- Introduce pupils to the fact that they will be learning about World War II in this and subsequent lessons. If relevant, highlight how this may link with other curriculum areas (see ideas below).
- Discuss what pupils already know about World War II. This could be done through whole class discussion, paired or group talk and feedback or individual mind-mapping of ideas (a pupil resource sheet for recording ideas is provided). Feedback and notes on what pupils already understand and what they want to find out about the war could be used as the start of a display or working wall on the topic.

Suggested teaching points and activities:

What happened during World War II?

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- Having established pupils' current knowledge, explain that in this topic they will find out about when the war happened, what some of the key events were and who was involved.
- Show pupils either pictures or film footage (there are various suitable clips available online) of various aspects of the war that will be covered in later lessons. This could include material linked to evacuation, air raids, key events such as Dunkirk, as well as key people or groups involved (soldiers, children, women and key political figures such as Churchill). You will need to decide what material is suitable for your class, bearing in mind some images or footage may be upsetting for younger children.
- Pupils should examine this material and begin to draw broad conclusions from it about what happened during the war and who was involved. There is also space to note these ideas on the pupil resource sheet. You may wish to use prompt questions to steer pupils towards certain ideas – see 'suggestions for differentiation' below. By the end of the activity all pupils should have some awareness of key aspects of the war such as evacuation, rationing, the Blitz and blackout and some idea of the nature of ordinary life at the time.

When did World War II happen?

- Ask pupils if they know when World War II took place. Are there any clues about this in the materials they have just examined?
- Use War Memorials Trust's timeline cards to create a timeline showing when the war happened. This could be added to with events that pupils are already familiar with to increase their understanding of when things happened.

Why did World War II happen?

- Depending on the age and ability of your pupils, there is no need to teach them detailed information about the background to and causes of World War II. However, they should have some knowledge about the key countries involved, that Britain and her allies were fighting Nazi Germany and that Germany's leader, Hitler, had plans to invade more countries, dominate Europe and destroy certain groups of people, especially Jews.

Why is World War II important?

- You may wish to split the content of this lesson plan over two sessions, and teach this section in a different lesson to the points above.
- Pupils should understand that the World Wars, and in some ways especially World War II, were different to previous wars in scale and impact, and it is partly this that means we still remember and commemorate them.
- Explain/discuss how this war was not 'just' the armed forces fighting abroad, but that it involved ordinary people as well. Many men who had not previously served joined up to fight, women often worked in wartime related jobs and even children played their part, and that it is mainly these aspects of the war that this topic will focus on.
- Introduce the idea of war memorials – what are they? What do they help us do? (You may find some of War Memorials Trust's 'Introduction to war memorials' lesson plans and helpsheets useful for this.
- Explain that some memorials remember the people that were affected by wars in different ways and that pupils will look at some of these during future lessons.

Conclusion:

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- Recap the main points of the lesson to summarise what pupils have learned.

Suggestions for differentiation:

The activities in this lesson plan are suggestions only and teachers will need to adapt the lesson to take account of the needs of their class:

- Teachers should take into account the nature of the material they show to pupils and avoid images or film clips that are likely to be upsetting.
- Some pupils may need guidance analysing source material, and you may wish to ask questions to prompt them to think about what different images tell us about the war and life at the time. You could also group certain items, such as those that show evacuation, together, so that pupils focus on finding out about that issue rather than having to work out what is actually happening. More able children could be given a range of random material and asked to analyse it more widely for clues about what they show.
- When creating a timeline to show when the war happened, you may wish to add extra cards to this that show the current date, other events that your pupils may be familiar with, or dates more personally relevant to them such as the year they were born, when their parents would have been born etc. to give them an understanding of how much time has passed since the war. Creating timelines that show the war in a chronology of other events could be a useful mixed ability group activity, and these could also form a useful display.

Ideas for further work

- Literacy: This lesson plans provided here focus on the way World War II affected different groups and different aspects of daily life at the time. There are various fiction books suitable for the age group that could be read and studied alongside these lessons as part of your literacy curriculum.
- Local history: Depending on your school's location, this topic could be used as a way of looking at local history with your class. There are many war memorials to those who fought in World War II as well as to some of the other people covered in these lessons, and visits to some of these will help to give pupils a more personal understanding of the war's effect locally.
- There may also be opportunities to use these lessons as the basis for lessons in more creative subjects such as art or music.

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