

Lesson 2: Evacuation during World War II



War Memorials Trust

Background: This is the second lesson in War Memorials Trust's Key Stage 2 World War II unit. It focuses on the war's impact on young people through the policy of evacuating children to safer areas. The lesson starts by examining the details of this policy and why it was necessary but it also aims to encourage pupils to consider the impact of this on young people – who were probably a similar age to the pupils themselves – and to understand what evacuation would have been like for children their age. There is a lot of potential with this subject for cross-curricular work and you may want to extend your teaching around this into other lessons and subject areas.

Suitable for: Upper Key Stage 2

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- What evacuation was and why it happened during World War II
- To explore and understand what evacuation was like for those affected

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- Explain why there was a policy of evacuating children during the war and what this involved.
- Investigate and explore the impact and legacy of evacuation through a study of war memorials

Resources: Images/written accounts of evacuation; 'Manchester evacuees memorial' information sheet; images of other memorial types from WMT online gallery.

Introduction:

- Recap the learning that took place in the previous lesson when pupils learned an overview of what happened during World War II.
- Remind pupils that one of the key events they were introduced to was the evacuation of children, and that this is the focus of this lesson.

Suggested teaching points and activities:

What was evacuation and why did it happen?

- For children to understand what evacuation would have been like they need to understand what actually happened, so the first part of the lesson should teach them why evacuation was necessary and what it involved.
- There are various ways of doing this and what you choose will depend largely on the location of your school and the age/ability of your class.
 - War Memorials Trust's 'Manchester evacuees memorial' information sheet gives information about why and how evacuation happened. Older children could read this or read/listen to other accounts from former evacuees (there have been

War Memorials Trust 14 Buckingham Palace Road London SW1W 0QP

Telephone: 020 7233 7356/ 0300 123 0764

Email: learning@warmemorials.org **Website:** www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org

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various films of testimonies made as the war has been commemorated in recent years) and feedback what they have found out.

- Younger children could use images/film and more simple accounts to learn about what happened when children were evacuated. There are many resources available from various organisations and online – you may want to use www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links to find suitable material.
- Posters from the time encouraging parents that evacuation was safest for their children, and encouraging children to co-operate, can be found online and used to discuss why evacuation was widely thought necessary.
- You may be able to find a former evacuee or someone who experienced it in some way who is willing to come and speak to your pupils about their experiences. Pupils can prepare questions in advance and put together an interview.

What was it like to be evacuated?

- Having learned the key facts about evacuation, pupils should focus on the impact that the experience had on the young people involved.
- Remind pupils that many of the children evacuated were their age or younger and were evacuated a long way from home, often without their family – there is information about numbers in different regions in the ‘Manchester evacuees memorial’ information sheet.
- Discuss with children what they think the experience of being evacuated would have been like. This could be done through a role-play technique or group/paired talk.
- Introduce them to some of the information about what it was like for evacuees from the information sheet, especially the ideas around evacuees being selected, possibly separated from peers and the negative feelings and experiences that may have arisen because of this.
- There are various ways of getting pupils to reflect on this information. They could write imaginary letters home or diary entries in role as an evacuee. Drama and role play can be used to explore life as an evacuee. Pupils could think about what evacuees were able to take with them – what would they take if they were being evacuated today? How would it be different to the experience of children in 1939?

Remembering evacuation

- Focus on the images of the memorial in WMT’s ‘Manchester evacuees memorial’ information sheet.
- Encourage pupils to discuss the messages in the memorial – both the images and the words ‘I was a stranger and you took me in.’ Tell them the history of the memorial and how it was presented to the community by a former evacuee – what does this imply about the experiences of evacuees – were they all negative?
- Compare the memorial to others that pupils may be familiar with, such as a local one, which commemorate individual people involved in the fighting (examples can be found in WMT’s online gallery of war memorials at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org). This is a good example of how war memorials vary – in design and in who/what is remembered.
- As well as the written work suggested above, pupils could produce art work around this topic, such as designing an alternative memorial – perhaps to commemorate evacuees going away if your school is in an area where young people were evacuated from. If you have been able to talk to a former evacuee, or have used testimonies from former evacuees, encourage pupils to reflect on their experiences as well as what they themselves have learned from the images and other sources of information used.

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Conclusion:

- You may have used more than one lesson to cover this topic and therefore want to bring together the key points and reflect on any written or creative work pupils have produced. Do they think evacuation of young and vulnerable people was a good thing? Why/why not?
- There were also other ways in which young people were affected by the war – mainly by older family members being involved in fighting. Images of children are often included on war memorials with mothers, to represent grief for fathers, brothers and other relatives. This idea can be used to link to the next topic which looks at the impact of the war on civilians.

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:

- You will need to make sure that the subject matter is not unsuitable for your pupils.
- Younger pupils may require support accessing historic accounts from evacuees and may find audio-visual material such as film clips more suitable than written accounts.
- Some pupils may need more support considering the emotional impact of evacuation and what children may have felt.

Ideas for further work

Literacy:

- There are various children's novels that deal with the subject of evacuation and you could build your literacy scheme of work around these and teach these lessons as part of that unit. This could lead to pupils producing their own, similar stories or plays about the war and evacuation.
- When completing the activities suggested above, literacy techniques such as role-play, writing letters or diaries may all be helpful in exploring the feelings of evacuees.

Citizenship/PSHE: This work could also be used to reflect on pupils' relationships with those around them and how they would feel moving away from home.

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