

## Lesson 3: World War II and civilians



War Memorials Trust

**Background:** This is the third in WMT's series of lessons about World War II for primary schools. It continues the theme of looking at how the war affected different groups of people and events that are now remembered through war memorials, especially as the war moves beyond living memory. This lesson focuses on the impact of the war on civilians, and particularly the impact of the Blitz and air raids. Pupils will learn about how life changed for civilians during the war, what happened during the Blitz and what the effect on the civilian population of the places involved, as well as how some memorials commemorate these events.

**Suitable for:** Key Stage 2

**Learning objective:** Pupils will learn:

- what happened during the Blitz and the impact of this on the people involved
- about memorials in the UK that commemorate civilians

**Learning outcomes:** Pupils will be able to:

- understand what the Blitz was and the impact it had on people's lives, particularly on London

**Resources:** WMT 'WW2 civilian memorials' information sheet.

**Introduction:**

**Why were civilians involved in World War II?**

- Remind pupils of the idea (covered in the first lesson in this series) that World War II was a 'total war' and what this means.
- Explain that this war, more than any other, affected the whole population not just those in the armed forces. Discuss who this included – evacuees (covered in the previous lesson) those who did war work (such as air raid wardens and those who worked in munitions factories for the first time, for example) and ordinary people – civilians.
- Explain what was meant by the 'Home Front' and how ordinary people were encouraged to do whatever they could to support the war effort.

**Suggested teaching points and activities:**

**What changes did civilians experience during the war?**

- Discuss/brainstorm what ordinary life would have been like for civilians at the start of World War II. What jobs did people do? What were their homes like? Some points may have come up in earlier lessons so you can revise these and start to think about pupils' other ideas. Children could be split into groups to focus on a particular aspect of daily life.

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- Children should understand some of the restrictions and hardships faced by people at home after the outbreak of war. As well as separation from families due to fighting and evacuation, food shortages (partly due to food supplies into the country being limited) led to rationing; some activities were curbed by the blackout (the use of blackout curtains to prevent lights from buildings being seen from outside; with the aim of stopping enemy bombers knowing where to hit) and people generally faced more hardship and made more sacrifices than they were used to and were expected to do so without complaint because it was for the war effort.

### **What happened during the Blitz?**

- Explain to pupils what we mean by the word ‘blitz’ (it comes from a German word meaning lightning) and what actually happened, including:
  - Bombers aimed to destroy British factories and industrial areas to reduce productivity
  - Key landmarks and residential areas were also targets, with the aim of reducing morale.
  - Sirens were used to alert local people that a raid was imminent (you can find recordings of this online) and people were encouraged to use air raid shelters (there is some more information about these in the accompanying information sheet).
  - Many civilians died during air raids and many communities suffered from losing homes and businesses.
- There are various ways you could teach this information and the approach you choose may depend on what area your school is in (if it is an area that was affected by the Blitz there may be places to visit or specific local resources you could use). As with other lessons in this series, there are various possible cross curricular links with this topic, especially with literacy and war-based fiction, and you may wish to extend this lesson and take time to teach other curriculum areas as well.
- There are various online resources that may be helpful for teaching pupils of this age about the Blitz.

### **What evidence is there locally of the impact of the war on civilians?**

- When they have developed an understanding of what happened during the Blitz, pupils should consider how we know about these events and what reminders of such important events and their impact remain evident now.
- As above, there may be specific evidence in your locality that you can use at this point to look at the impact the Blitz had on the local community.
- You could visit a local war memorial to see if any of the names on it are those of civilians (there is guidance on researching names on war memorials with pupils in WMT’s ‘Researching names on a war memorial’ lesson plan).
- There are details of various memorials that commemorate civilian casualties on the accompanying ‘WW2 civilian memorials’ information sheet. If you do not have a similar memorial near your school your pupils could choose one of these to find out more about. Some of them, such as the Kennington civilians’ memorial, have basic information about the events that led to the memorial being erected and pupils could find out more about these.

### **Conclusion**

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The impact of World War II on civilians provides a slightly different perspective to the usual study of war memorials. Draw together what pupils have found out and summarise how this fits in with our knowledge of World War II as a 'total war.' You could compare the experience of civilians and the memorials to them to that of those fighting.

### **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 consider the age and maturity of pupils when deciding how much information about air raids and the nature of the Blitz to include. This plan has been written with Upper Key Stage 2 in mind.

### **Ideas for further work**

- While this lesson does largely focus on the Blitz, because this is what is commemorated by war memorials, it does refer to other ways in which the war impacted on civilians too and you could extend the lesson by exploring these in more detail. For example, you could get pupils to work out how much they would get in rationed food and do various activities around this and wartime recipes.
- There are more ideas for exploring some of the war memorials in this lesson, or others in your locality, in WMT's other lesson plans and resources at [www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary](http://www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary).

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