

Lesson 5: The end of World War II and Remembrance



War Memorials Trust

Background: This is the last in WMT's series of lesson plans that focus on teaching World War II through a study of the memorials that commemorate the events and people involved. To conclude the unit, the lesson looks at how the end of the war came about and what happened in the immediate aftermath in terms of commemoration and remembrance. This is then compared to how remembrance is different today, including the fact that subsequent conflicts are now also included in remembrance. The lesson ends by bringing the subject up to date by looking at recent significant anniversaries of the World Wars and asking pupils if events such as these should continue to be remembered.

Suitable for: Key Stage 2

Learning objective: Pupils will learn:

- when and how the war ended
- how it continues to be commemorated today

Learning outcomes: Pupils will be able to:

- know when the war ended
- look at recent events to understand how the war continues to be remembered today

Resources: Lessons for learning about local memorials from WMT, WMT timeline cards

Introduction:

What do we now know about World War II?

- Use the start of the lesson to recap what has been learned so far. Depending on the activities you have chosen to do this may involve discussion, questioning pupils or reviewing other work done.
- Ask pupils when World War II ended. If you have been using WMT's timeline showing when the World Wars were (or another version with additional events your class knows) this can be used for reference.

Suggested teaching points and activities:

What happened at the end of the war?

- Give pupils a brief overview of what happened in the final months and weeks of World War II and how the allied achieved victory. Explain what happened on D-Day (6th June 1944) when allied forces landed in France to begin liberating Europe through to Germany's surrender in May 1945.

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- Look at how people at home celebrated the end of the war on VE Day. There are various online resources to support this which can be found through www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/links. You could choose to stage a similar celebration in school, which incorporates aspects of daily life then that pupils have learned about, especially if you are teaching this topic at a time that coincides with the anniversary of the end of the war.

What happened to people after the war had ended?

- Discuss what difficulties people may have faced after the initial celebrations of the end of the war were over. Pupils should understand that things did not go back to 'normal' straight away – what problems do they think the people they have learned about in previous lessons might have faced?
 - They should consider how evacuees would have felt going home – for some after a long time away from their families
 - They should understand that many civilians had lost their homes, friends and relatives (refer back to the lesson on the Blitz for details on how the war affected civilians). Explain that many lived in temporary or prefabricated housing
 - Many women who had taken on new jobs during the war had to give them up afterwards
 - Those fighting came home after a long time away and for some settling back into 'normal' life was hard.

How was the war remembered shortly after it had ended?

- Briefly review what pupils already know about Remembrance Day and its origins – there is information about this in WMT's 'Introduction to war memorials' unit at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org/primary. They should understand that the tradition of Remembrance began after World War I and what events generally take place and when.
- Explain that during World War II the focus was more on fighting the war so remembrance traditions declined, and that after the war commemorations on 11th November were less central to people's awareness and people were keen to focus on the present, so participation in Remembrance services declined.
- Look at some examples of war memorials – you could visit a local one or use pictures from WMT's online gallery at www.learnaboutwarmemorials.org. Discuss how, after World War II, most communities added the names of locals who died in that war to existing World War I memorials.

How is the war remembered and commemorated now?

- There have been many events in recent years commemorating both World Wars. The centenary of World War I and the deaths of the last veterans of that conflict and the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II have all received wide coverage. Discuss with pupils what this tells us about how people 'remember' these conflicts now – do most people think it is important to commemorate these conflicts when fewer and fewer people have any real memory of them?
- Question pupils about whether they think it is important that they – as a younger generation – consider it important to continue to commemorate the wars. Why/why not?
 - Pupils should in particular understand the amount of time since the end of the wars and that this means they are increasingly beyond living memory. Your timeline can help demonstrate this and how old people who lived through the wars

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now are or would be. Explain that this means that our first-hand knowledge of the wars is fading and that therefore it is important to keep up the practice of Remembrance so that subsequent generations can continue to learn about the wars and the people involved.

- You could extend this idea to explaining to pupils that we also need to care for war memorials because these are one of the few remaining tangible links to that period of history. The importance of war memorials is covered in WMT's 'Introduction to war memorials' unit, particularly the 'What are war memorials?' and 'Why are war memorials important?' lessons. You may wish to use further lesson time to teach these.

Conclusion:

- Review the ideas about World War II that the pupils recorded at the start of this unit and compare to their current knowledge.

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.

- Some pupils may need support understanding the chronology of events referred to in the lesson, the amount of time that has passed since the world wars and the impact of this on how people think of the wars now. The use of timelines and comparing the periods of time involved to lengths of time pupils may find more familiar (e.g. referring to it being during their great-grandparents' lifetime) may help this.
- More able pupils may be able to focus in more depth on learning about the events at the end of World War II leading up to Germany's surrender.

Ideas for further work

- The issues around the nature of remembrance and commemoration could be expanded using WMT's 'Introduction to war memorials' unit which covers issues such as the history, importance and design of war memorials.
- You could also look at examples of memorials that have had more recent additions to them from post-World War II conflicts and teach pupils about some of these and how we know include other conflicts in Remembrance Day.

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