



Year 6

WWII and The Holocaust

Reading Booklet

Lesson Series:

- 1. An Introduction to World War Two**
- 2. The Battle of Britain**
- 3. Bletchley Park**
- 4. The Holocaust**
- 5. The Home Front**

Name: _____

Class: _____

Lesson 1 - An Introduction to World War Two

On 1st September 1939, under Adolf Hitler's command, Germany invaded Poland sparking the beginning of WWII. Germany had already invaded Austria and Czechoslovakia.

Two days later, Neville Chamberlain, the Prime Minister of the UK, declared war on Germany. World War II involved countries from all over the world who either took sides with the Allied or the Axis Powers. The main Axis countries included Germany, Italy and Japan. The main Allied countries were the UK, the Soviet Union (Russia), France and the United States. The war took place between 1939 and 1945 and cost the lives of millions of people (estimates vary between 40- 85 million deaths worldwide).

The war took place all over the world. Early on, Germany's Blitzkrieg tactics destroyed Allied forces and they successfully conquered Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France. In 1940, Hitler set his sights on conquering Britain - codenamed Operation 'Sealion'. For the invasion to be a success, the Nazi's first needed to secure control of the skies and defeat the Royal Air Force (RAF). In July 1940, the German Air Force (Luftwaffe) and the RAF fought in the skies during the Battle of Britain and German bombers launched a huge bombing campaign on British towns and cities (known as the Blitz).

The Battle of Britain was Germany's first military failure. When the Japanese attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbour the US joined the war, and the Allied forces defeated the Axis Powers during battles all over the world. The US defeated the Japanese Imperial Navy at the Battle of Midway in June 1941, the Allied forces defeated the Axis at the second Battle of El-Alamein in Egypt, the Red Army (Russia) defeated German troops at Stalingrad and in June 1944, the Allied Forces successfully invaded Normandy (known as D-Day). By early 1945, Germany were on the verge of a military collapse. Hitler committed suicide on 30th April, Germany surrendered and the war in Europe ended (VE Day).



Lesson 6 - The Battle of Britain and The Blitz

After successfully conquering Holland, Norway, Belgium, France and Denmark at the beginning of the war, Germany turned its sights to Great Britain.

Hitler had first hoped to agree a peace settlement with Britain, but when Britain refused, he launched 'Operation Sea Lion'- his plan to invade Britain. In order to protect German ships crossing the channel from being bombed by the British Air Force (RAF), Germany's air force (the Luftwaffe) first needed to destroy Britain's RAF.

The Battle of Britain was the first battle to be fought entirely in the air. Germany had been banned from having an Air Force after the First World War, but this was re-established by the Nazi government and by 1940 they had one of the most formidable forces in the world. The RAF met this challenge with some of the best fighter aeroplanes in the world - the Hawker Hurricane and the Supermarine Spitfire. The German fighter planes were called the Messerschmitt and were less manoeuvrable than the Spitfires and Hurricanes. After a long series of battles between July - October 1940, the Luftwaffe were unable to defeat the RAF.

To try and force Britain to surrender, the Luftwaffe switched targets to towns and cities, targeting docks, factories and railways. From September 1940 to May 1941, London and other cities were bombed heavily. This was known as the 'Blitz', from the word 'blitzkrieg' which meant 'lightning war'.

Whilst this caused enormous destruction and took the lives of many citizens, it gave the RAF the time it needed to strengthen its position. The Luftwaffe, on the other hand, had suffered huge losses. Knowing that Britain was far from defeated, Germany retreated and focused efforts on invading Russia.

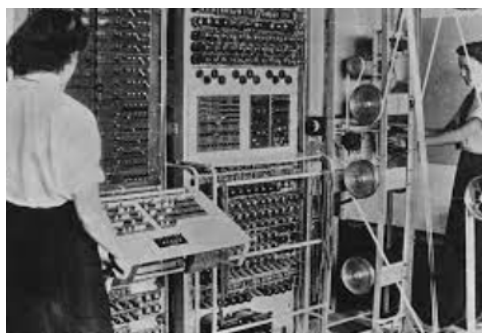


Lesson 3 - The Codebreakers at Bletchley Park

Bletchley Park was a cryptological establishment set up in Buckinghamshire by the British government. Bletchley Park played a vital role in helping the Allied Powers win World War II. By 1944, around 10,000 people were employed at Bletchley Park of which approximately 75% were women.

The codebreakers at Bletchley Park were employed to intercept and decode the enemy's secret messages to provide intelligence which could be used for military advantage. Both the Axis and Allied Powers used codes to replace the words in a message with letters, numbers or symbols. Japan and Germany used a code creator called the Enigma machine to create 'ciphers' (a code that adds and replaces letters and numbers to disguise information). A team led by Dilly Knox at Bletchley Park, including Alan Turing, designed and built a code-breaking machine called a Bombe to crack the 'Enigma code'. By 1944 the world's first electronic computer was in use at Bletchley to help decipher messages between Hitler and his generals.

The intelligence gained at Bletchley was used successfully by the Allies to help win battles on land, at sea and in the air. For example, codebreakers made a vital contribution to D-Day as they were able to give details of German plans laid down by Hitler and the exact location of German troops in Normandy. Mavis Batey, one of the top female codebreakers at Bletchley, played a significant role in breaking the Enigma ciphers that led to the success of the D-Day landings in 1944.



Lesson 4 - The Holocaust

During World War Two, Hitler commanded that all Jewish people should be killed. Hitler used ghettos (neighbourhoods where Jews were forced to live), mass shootings, concentration camps and extermination camps and he succeeded in killing over six-million Jews.

This deliberate killing, or murder, of so many people is called genocide. Nazi Germany began building concentration camps in 1933. The aims of the concentration camps were to imprison any people perceived to be a threat, to force prisoners to work and exploit their labour. As a result of appalling conditions many people died without the attention of the public or any system of law.

People, who were prisoners in concentration camps, needed to be fit for work otherwise they would be killed. Many people who were sent to concentration camps were killed immediately because they were not useful for forced labour; this included women, children, disabled people and the elderly. Hitler also established extermination camps and their purpose was to kill large numbers of people in gas chambers.

This genocide is called The Holocaust and is remembered on Monday 27th January. The day marks the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau (a concentration and extermination camp) by Russian Soviet soldiers.



Lesson 5 - The Home Front

With tensions building in Europe, between 1938-1939, the British government began preparing for an attack at home. Two days before Britain declared war, the 'Blackout' began, where people were told to cover their windows and doors at night and streetlights were switched off (to make it harder for the Luftwaffe to see). This led to a rise in road traffic accidents. By September 1939, nearly everybody in the country had been issued a gas mask.

Britain was bombed heavily during the war leading to the deaths of approximately 60,595 civilians, and destroying many homes, workplaces and important buildings. Air raid sirens were used to warn people to find safety in an air raid shelter. 'Anderson' air shelters were built in people's gardens (made from corrugated iron) and in London, the underground was used as an air raid shelter. To escape heavy

bombing in targeted cities such as London, thousands of women, children, elderly and disabled people were evacuated to the countryside. As Britain was under attack of invasion, in May 1940 the 'Home Guard' was set up to be the last 'line of defence'. The Home Guard, originally called the 'Local Defence Volunteers', was made up of male volunteers between the ages of 17-65 who were usually unfit or ineligible to fight in the war. Their job was to defend key targets like factories, beaches and sea fronts and capture German pilots who were shot down. It wasn't just men who supported the war effort at home. Just like in WWI, women played a vital role working in factories and farms (known as the Land Army), as well as code breaking at Bletchley Park!

Due to food shortages, the government introduced rationing in January 1940 and a campaign was launched (Dig for Victory) to encourage people to grow food at home and in any spare pieces of land. Even the lawns outside the Tower of London were turned into vegetable patches! During the war, there were concerns that there could be thousands of German spies living in Britain. As a result, the government launched a campaign called, 'Careless Talk Costs Lives', encouraging people not to talk about the war in case they were overheard.

