

World War Two



The Second World War (also called World War Two or WWII) was the most deadly conflict the World has ever seen. It brought into conflict the countries of the Allies (France, Great Britain, USA and the Soviet Union) and the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan). By the end of the conflict, over fifty million people had been killed, including six million Jews in the Holocaust, and the political and social organisation of the World had changed forever. The end of the war saw Communism growing in the east and a significant shift in power towards the USA in the west. The Second World War is one of the most significant events in history, and its influences are still felt in life today. One positive legacy from the horror of WWII was the creation of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Main Events

1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Germany Invaded Poland. Britain and France <u>declared</u> war on Germany.	British forces <u>evacuated</u> from Dunkirk in Northern France after France is invaded. France surrenders to Germany. Battle of Britain / <u>Blitz</u> begins.	Germany invaded Russia. The USA entered the war when Japan attacked them at Pearl Harbour.	Mass killings begin at <u>Auschwitz</u> , a Nazi concentration camp in occupied Poland. Other camps had been established prior to this.	German Army defeated at Stalingrad by the Russians.	D-Day – allied invasion of occupied France.	Hitler committed suicide, Germany surrendered. Japan surrendered after the USA dropped two <u>atomic bombs</u> on its cities. United Nations formed. VE Day and the end of WWII.

What should I already know?

- Throughout history, many leaders and their armies have set out to invade and conquer other countries. This might be done for a variety of reasons e.g. getting more land for farming; wanting to take the natural resources from another country; taking back what was previously yours or taking revenge for being invaded; or wanting to spread your culture and ideas. Often, it has been done for a mixture of these reasons. Remember, for example, the Vikings invaded Britain to gain wealth from their spoils and eventually to take land for farming and colonise the country (Y4); Alexander the Great invaded Persia as revenge for the Persians previously trying to invade Greece (Y5) and the Victorians built up the British Empire to control trade and wealth and to spread their ideals to people they felt would benefit from them (Y5). Other good examples includes the Roman Invasion of Britain (Y3).
- Empires often grew and then became weak when they were fighting on too many fronts – the Romans left Britain to self-govern when they needed more soldiers to defend other parts of the Roman Empire.
- With many notable exceptions (e.g. Boudicca in Y3, Cleopatra in Y4, Queen Victoria in Y5), in many periods of history, women have been generally viewed as less capable and important than men. Remember back to both Tudor and Victorian attitudes to women from Y5. WWII was a time when women's role in society shifted and they were called upon to play a huge role in the war.
- Military power, weapons (and the technology needed to make them) and strategy are important to win battles and wars. The Roman army was famously well-trained and had special tactics like 'the tortoise' which helped them to defeat other armies (Y3) whilst Alexander the Great inherited a powerful army from his father and is known as one of the great military strategists, which allowed him to defeat the Persian army even when his army was heavily out-numbered (Y5).

Conflict



In the decades after the First World War, Europe was still under threat of another great conflict. Germany had to give up land and was not allowed to have armed forces following World War One. Adolf Hitler, the leader of the Nazi party had come to power promising to rebuild the German army and soon invaded parts of Europe. Britain and France agreed to help Poland if it was invaded but that didn't stop Hitler. His army moved into Poland, and in September 1939, the Second World War had begun.

The German Army conquered France and the 'Low Countries' (Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg) in less than two months. Hitler then planned for an invasion of Great Britain which would have given him control over the whole of Western Europe but decisive events leading to the resistance against the Germans such as the evacuation from Dunkirk and the Battle of Britain meant that Hitler had to rethink his plans. The conflict involved some of the most famous battles in history, including the Battle of Britain between the British and German air forces, the Battle of Stalingrad where Russian forces defeated the invading Germans, and Pearl Harbour which was an American harbour which Japan attacked, bringing the USA into the war. WWII also saw the use of a powerful new weapon, the atomic bomb, which the USA used on two cities in Japan.

The United Nations

The United Nations (UN) is an international organisation that tries to resolve conflicts and create positive relationships between nations. Although created by 51 countries at the end of the war in 1945, with a shared commitment to avoiding another global war, two of its founding members, the USA and the Soviet Union, quickly found themselves in another conflict with each other. This Cold War didn't involve any actual fighting but was a period of dispute and tension that meant the possibility of a nuclear war became very real.

The UN is now made up of 193 nations and its Declaration of Human Rights has been translated into over 500 languages. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child (1989) is the most ratified document on human rights in the World.



Propaganda

Propaganda is type of communication used to influence the opinions of people to support a cause or belief. Historians agree that there have been many examples of propaganda throughout human history but it is most closely associated with WWII and its use by Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels as a weapon of war. Examples of propaganda include artwork, posters, speeches, films and the printed word. It was used all over the world though by both Allied and Axis forces.



Location

Countries involved in World War II



WWII was a truly global conflict. The Allies and Axis powers drew more than 30 countries into conflict. From its beginning in Western Europe, battles raged across Europe, around the Mediterranean, in Africa and the Middle East and around the Pacific.

People from a huge range of religions and races fought in the war. Many people today think that the contribution of many ethnic groups is overlooked by history and that their great sacrifices went unappreciated. From the 2.3 million Indians fighting in the Indian army, to the 500 West Indian fighter pilots in the RAF, to the lumberjacks from Honduras moving to England to share their skills as England could no longer import timber, to the South Asian road builders and miners, to the one million African soldiers - the war really did involve many heroes from all over the World, from many races and religions.

Society



In Britain, daily life changed completely as a result of the war. The Blitz meant children were evacuated from cities to go and live with families in the countryside for their own protection, women worked roles they hadn't traditionally done due to men being called up to the army, people had air raid shelters to go to when there were bombing raids and had gas masks at the ready, blackouts were imposed on major cities so enemy planes couldn't see where to drop their bombs, and rationing, where families were only allowed a certain amount of food, began in 1940 (and didn't end until 1954!).

Major towns and cities had to be rebuilt after the German bombing raids. The post-war years saw the introduction of a free National Health Service (the NHS).

Women in the 1930s were generally expected to look after the home and family but the war changed that. With so many men joining the army, women were needed to fill the labour shortage – many joined the military or worked in factories to produce essential war materials such as vehicles or munitions. Women also helped ease the shortage of farm labour (as Britain was in danger of running out of food!), performed nursing roles or were codebreakers at Bletchley Park.



Government propaganda urged women to aid the war effort. The key message was 'There's Not Much Women Can't Do.' By the end of the war, 450,000 women were in the military and at the peak of the war, over 17,000,000 women were in state-organised work. Even though women did the same jobs as men, in nearly all occupations they were paid less.

Key people in this unit:

- **Neville Chamberlain** – prime minister in England for the first 8 months of the war. Made a famous speech declaring war on Germany after they invaded Poland.
- **Winston Churchill** – prime minister in England after Neville Chamberlain resigned.
- **Adolf Hitler** – leader of Germany and the Nazi party.



Neville Chamberlain



Adolf Hitler



Winston Churchill

Other important people from World War Two:

- **Joseph Goebbels** – one of Hitler's closest associates and minister for propaganda.
- **Joseph Stalin** – Russian dictator who initially signed a nonaggression agreement with Germany but later supported the allies when Germany broke the agreement and invaded Russia.
- **Franklin Roosevelt** – president of the USA when it joined the war.
- **Benito Mussolini** – Italian prime minister who joined forces with the Germans during the war.
- **Sir Douglas Bader** – famous Spitfire fighter pilot who was eventually captured by the Germans but repeatedly escaped despite losing his leg in the airplane crash leading to his capture. His charity still provides support to the disabled.
- **Sir Barnes Wallis** - provides a local link to a famous part of WWII history! He was a scientist and engineer best remembered for inventing the bouncing bomb which was used by the Royal Air Force to attack dams of the Ruhr Valley in the legendary 'Dambuster' raid. He came up with the plans for the bouncing bomb whilst working just down the road at Burhill Golf Club! It had been taken over by The Ministry for Aircraft Production in 1940.

Artefacts

There are lots of artefacts that tell us all about life during WWII because it is still within living memory – that means that there are people alive today who were alive at the time! Because of this, we have a lot of personal memories of people who lived, or even fought in this global conflict.

Museums around the world are home to thousands of physical artefacts from WWII. These range from pieces of weaponry and technology, to items of clothing and maps.

Vocabulary

Atomic bomb	A bomb whose violent, explosive power is produced by splitting atoms.	Evacuated	Removed from a dangerous place.
Auschwitz	A complex of concentration camps operated in Nazi Germany and occupied Poland.	Holocaust	The deliberate mass murder of Jews and political prisoners by the Nazis.
Blackout	A nationwide effort to turn off all lights in towns and cities so German bombers could not be guided by the lights.	Military	Relating to or belonging to the armed forces (army).
Blitz	When a city (like London) was bombed heavily.	Propaganda	Communication used to influence the opinions of others.
Communism	A political belief system where individual people do not own land, factories, or machinery. Instead, the government or the whole community owns these things. Everyone is supposed to share the wealth that they create.	Rationing	Limiting the amount of food, water or fuel.
Declaration	Official announcement.	Resistance	An army (often illegal organisation) that rises up against an established authority.