

A dark, atmospheric illustration of a city skyline at night. A large, bright full moon is in the upper left corner. The sky is filled with dark, billowing smoke or clouds. The city buildings are silhouetted against the dark background. The title text is centered in the upper half of the image.

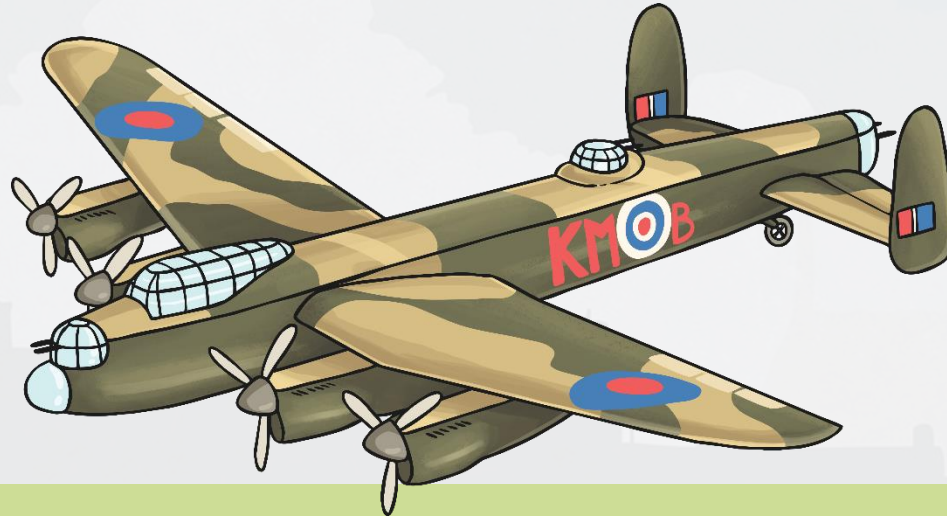
All About the Second World War



When Was the Second World War?

It is 80 years ago since the Second World War began in 1939. The war lasted for six years and finished in 1945.

It was the last worldwide war, which involved many different countries fighting in many different parts of the world, and caused the death of over 40 million people.

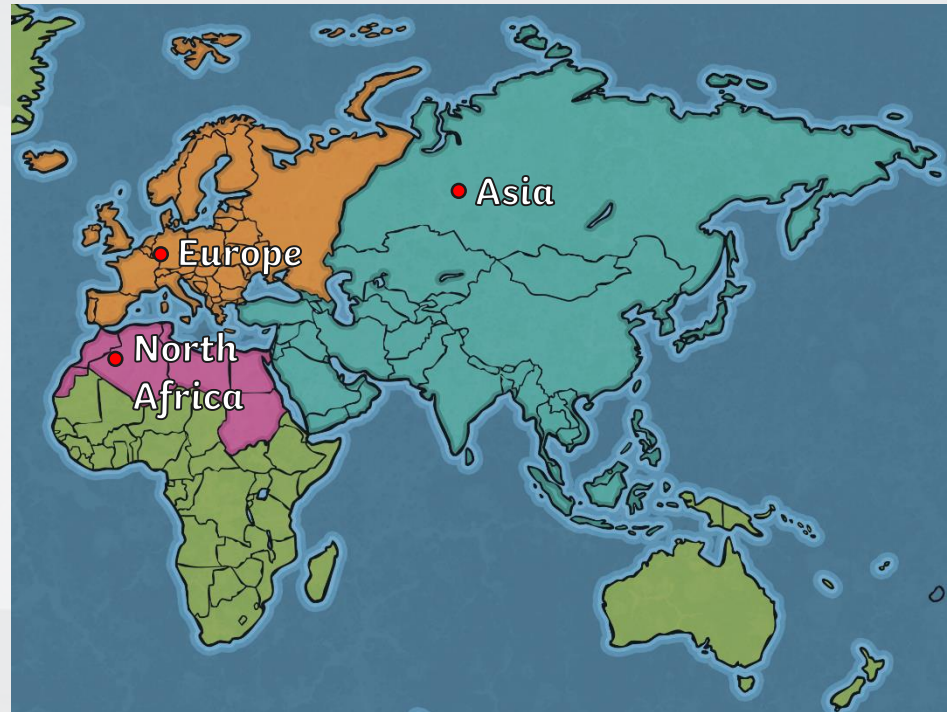


Is there anyone in your family who can remember the war? Perhaps they were a soldier or a civilian. Do they have any stories to tell you?

The Global War

The Second World War was fought on the continents of Europe, Africa and Asia, as well as in the air and on the sea.

The main Allied powers were the British Empire, France, America and the USSR (Russia). The Allies fought against Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan. Nazi Germany was led by Adolf Hitler.



How many people do you think would have been involved in the war?
Would anywhere in the world have been safe from fighting in the war?

The British Empire and Commonwealth

The British Empire and Commonwealth was an enormous community of land and people. It included many countries which had been a part of the British Empire.

When Britain needed help in the Second World War, it called upon the Commonwealth and British Empire to support its fight.



Can you list all 53 countries of the Commonwealth?

The British Empire in the Second World War

By the end of the war, over 3.5 million men and women from Britain and over 8 million people from the Commonwealth had contributed to winning the war. This included people working in the armed forces and civilians. Many of these people were not from Britain, but felt a need to fight for the British Empire.



Click on the dots to find out which areas of the British Empire contributed to the war.

The Start of the War

World War Two began in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. The British had promised to help defend Poland if she was invaded, so in September 1939, the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, declared war on Germany.

The British army was sent to mainland Europe to help prepare the fight against the Germans, and at home many preparations were made. Children were evacuated from towns and cities, and air raid shelters were built in back gardens.



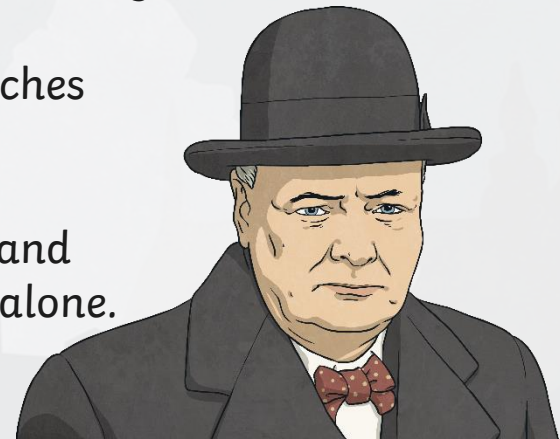
Britain Stands Alone

In May 1940, the German army struck Western Europe with its tactic of 'Blitzkrieg'. This meant 'lightning war' and involved a surprise and brutal attack from the air. This involved the air force to begin the attack followed by the army who would occupy the land with soldiers.

The "Blitzkrieg" was very effective and by May 1940, the Netherlands, Norway, Belgium and France had surrendered to Germany.

The British army had to be evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk and lost most of its equipment.

Winston Churchill became the new prime minister and vowed to fight to the end, despite Britain standing alone.



How important do you think the British Commonwealth would have been to the war effort in 1940?

The Battle of Britain

After defeating France in 1940, Hitler's next target was to invade Britain. In order to do this, Germany had to make sure she had control of the British skies. Germany had to beat Britain's air force, the RAF.

The Battle of Britain began in July 1940. Hitler was very confident of winning the battle as he controlled most of Europe and outnumbered British aircraft.



The Battle of Britain

The battle was fought in the skies, in dogfights, which could be seen by the people on the ground.

Despite having fewer pilots and aircraft, the RAF seemed to be winning. The Germans, therefore, changed their tactics from targeting aircraft to bombing the towns and cities.



The RAF used pilots from Britain, the Commonwealth, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Poland, France and the United States of America in the Battle of Britain!

The Blitz

The Blitz was the bombing of British towns and cities. It made being a civilian in Britain as dangerous as being a soldier overseas. Hitler's plan was to make British civilians demoralised so that they would demand peace.

On 7th September 1940, the first bombing raids began. The bombing attacks were very dangerous and frightening, but the people of Britain were determined to carry on as normal. London was bombed every night for 57 days.



The Blitz

Nearly every city was bombed.

When the Blitz ended in the summer of 1941, over 43,000 people had been killed and many were made homeless.



How do you think people felt during the Blitz?

The Home Front

Life for civilians during the Second World War was very difficult. Children were evacuated away from towns and cities to go and live in the countryside. Many men were asked to join the army. Women were needed to work in factories and on farms to support the war effort.

Britain imports a lot of its food from abroad and during the war this meant food had to be rationed so that the country wouldn't starve. Each person would receive a ration book to buy food and clothes from shops. Petrol was strictly rationed, as was hot water and coal.



Queen Elizabeth II served in the army during the war as a driver and mechanic.

