

Unit I Why the War Began

Aims:	To consider reasons why the Second World War happened
Curriculum Links:	Literacy, Drama, Art & Design, CDT
Activities:	Key Question Find occupied countries on a map of Europe Timeline Interview: What do you remember about the war?
Resources:	A map of Europe

Teacher Notes

The events of the Second World War are some of the most devastating and terrible moments in our history as a nation. Many thousands lost their lives, were bombed out of their homes and lost loved ones who did not return from the battlefields of Europe. Although much of this book is devoted to life on the Home Front, it is hard to imagine teaching anything about World War Two without at least considering the possible reasons why it happened.

Most commentators trace the origins of the Second World War to the events following the First World War. After what is often called the Great War, world leaders decided that such monumental loss of life must never happen again. Paradoxically, it was the consequences of such a determination that precipitated the events that led to World War Two.

Germany had lost the war and her enemies decided that she must pay the price. At *The Treaty of Versailles* the world leaders decided that several restrictions must be placed upon the German race. Firstly, Germany would have to surrender large areas of land, specifically border territory known as the Rhineland. Secondly, restrictions were placed on her armed forces so that she must drastically reduce the size of her army and navy. Thirdly, Germany was made to pay heavy fines, called reparations, to opponents in the war. The cost of such fines crippled the German economy. It was against this backdrop that Adolf Hitler was able to take power. The German people hailed him as the leader who could throw off the shackles of *The Treaty of Versailles* and once again return Germany to its former glory.

When Hitler marched his troops into Austria and then Czechoslovakia almost unchallenged, the British people feared another war. The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, sought appeasement, but Hitler ignored all warnings and marched on into Poland. On 3rd September 1939 Britain declared war on Germany.

Activity 1

Curriculum Link: History

Objective: To find out about the events that led to World War Two

You could begin this unit by bringing in a Remembrance Day poppy. Talk about its meaning and origins in the First World War. If you don't have a picture of a war memorial, see the one on page 11 and use it to explain that there was not one, but two world wars. The poppy remembers all those who gave their lives, or who were hurt and injured in both world wars, and wars since. Read the **Key Question** passage and other sources to find out about why World War Two began. Use the **Think About** questions on page 11 to explore why many historians think the *Treaty of Versailles* was a major reason why a second world war took place. Using responses to the questions ask the children to write their own account explaining why the Second World War began.

Activity 2

Curriculum Link: Geography

Objective: To locate occupied countries on a map of Europe

This activity requires the use of a reliable atlas or map of Europe. It must be noted that the European map has undergone some considerable changes since World War Two, but this should not put you off altogether. The idea is to give a general impression of the march of the German forces into surrounding territory. You can explain to the children that some countries have changed their names or borders since the war, but avoid giving too much unnecessary detail which will only serve to confuse. Use the country names provided to locate places on the map on page 12 colouring occupied countries as suggested. Use the map to point out the added difficulty for an invasion force, namely the English Channel, which served to provide significant protection for Britain.

Activity 3

Curriculum Link: History

Objective: To place key events from World War Two on a timeline

Provide the children with a copy of the blank timeline and list of key events on pages 13 and 14. Use to locate the key events on the timeline. As the project progresses you can add further dates and events of your own. Using the same resource you can make an effective display by placing a timeline across a classroom display board. Show key events and dates in the war with children providing a short description of each event with illustrations for added interest.

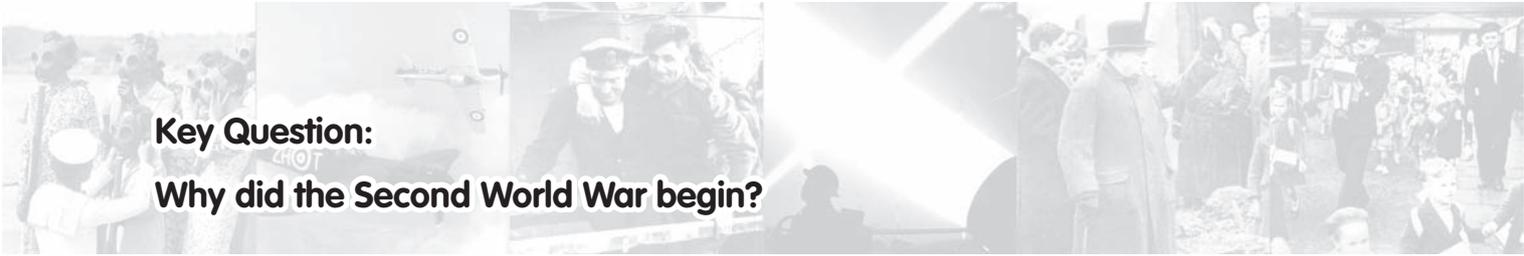
Note: Alternatively, it is possible to save this activity for use at the end of the programme when you have covered all the events.

Activity 4

Curriculum Links: History/Literacy/Speaking and Listening

Objective: To prepare interview questions for someone who remembers the war

This activity will, of course, depend on whether you are able to find someone who is old enough to remember the war, or is willing to come in and talk about their experience. Generally speaking, if you can satisfy the first of these conditions, the second tends to follow. (The British Legion may be able to help.) If you are not so fortunate an alternative would be to hot-seat the activity by “playing” the invited guest yourself. This is admittedly a rather second-hand experience, but can provide an introduction to the programme if you have done some research beforehand. Otherwise you can use the research questions to research accounts of wartime experiences via the Internet or in books. Encourage children to think of their own questions, or use the model questions provided to help you. Using the spider diagram provided on page 16, record the questions for the first page in your book about Children in Wartime.



Key Question:

Why did the Second World War begin?

If you look carefully, somewhere near where you live, you will be able to find a war memorial. It shows the names of all those who died in the Second World War, 1939 to 1945. However, more names will be there too: those who died in the First World War, of 1914 to 1918.

To find out why the Second World War began we must go back to the end of the First World War, sometimes called the Great War. At that time Germany had tried to build up its empire and countries like Britain, France, and Russia were all drawn into the conflict. The Great War caused terrible loss of life; millions of soldiers died and Germany was eventually defeated.

The world's leaders decided that such a war must never happen again. A special agreement was drawn up called *The Treaty of Versailles*. This made Germany pay huge sums of money for the damage caused during the war and took away some land. Germany would have to lose much of the armed forces too. This brought great hardship on the German people and, when a man called Adolf Hitler came to power, he was seen as someone to restore the fortunes of Germany again. Hitler ignored the Treaty and rebuilt his armies, and reclaimed the land that had belonged to Germany. He marched his troops into Austria and then into Czechoslovakia...and no one stopped him. Britain feared another war, but they knew that Hitler could not go unchallenged. The Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, warned Hitler that if he attacked Poland then Britain would declare war against him. Hitler ignored this threat and stormed into Poland. Britain was at war with Germany.

Using their method of Blitzkrieg, or "lightning war", the Nazi army soon occupied Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and France. Later, with major powers like Russia, Japan and America drawn into the fighting, the stage was set for another terrible World War.

Think about:

1. What is a War memorial?
2. What would you expect to see on it?
3. What were the dates of the First World War?
4. What were the dates of the Second World War?
5. Why was The Treaty of Versailles drawn up?
6. What did the Treaty say should happen to Germany?
7. Did the Treaty achieve what it was meant to do? Explain your answer.
8. Write a short paragraph explaining why Britain declared war against Germany.



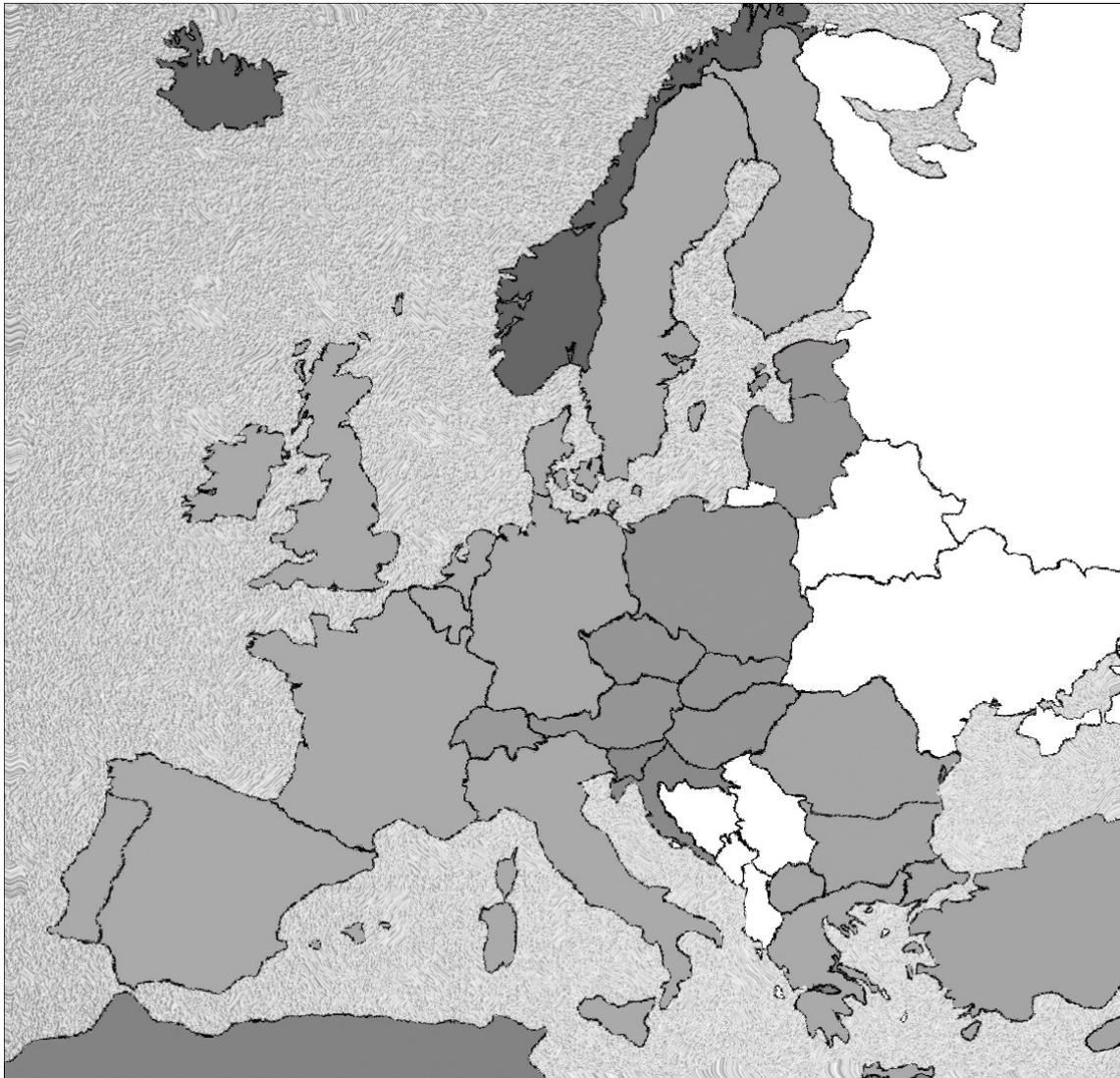
Map of Europe

By June 1940 these countries had all been occupied by Nazi Germany:

Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, France

Use an atlas to find them on this map of Europe. Colour them in red.

Find Britain. Colour it in green. Colour Germany in yellow. Use your map to explain why it was more difficult for Hitler to invade Britain.



Timeline

Use the timeline on the next page to place these important events.

As you learn more about life during World War Two you can add more events and dates of your own.

June 1939	Women's Land Army reformed
1 st September 1939	Germany invades Poland
1 st September 1939	Evacuation of children started
3 rd September 1939	WAR BEGINS. Britain declares war on Germany
8 th January 1940	Rationing begins
10 th May 1940	Winston Churchill becomes Prime Minister
26 th May 1940	Dunkirk evacuation begins
10 th July 1940	Battle of Britain begins
7 th September 1940	The Blitz begins
1 st June 1941	Clothing is rationed
8 th December 1941	USA enters the war
27 th July 1942	Sweets are rationed
3 rd May 1943	Part time war work for women is made compulsory
6 th June 1944	D-DAY Allied forces land in France
13 th June 1944	First V1 bomb lands
7 th May 1945	Germany Surrenders
8 th May 1945	V. E. Day (Victory in Europe)
6 th August 1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima
9 th August 1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki
14 th August 1945	Japanese surrender
2 nd September 1945	Official papers signed by Japanese, ending WW2

Timeline



Do you Remember?

Do you know someone who remembers what it was like in the war? Why not ask them to come into your classroom and tell you about their experience. You will need to prepare your questions in advance. Remember that some people can still be upset by some of the things that happened, even though it was a long time ago, so ask your questions thoughtfully.

Here are some questions you might ask someone who was a child in wartime Britain.

1. What is your name and where do you live?
2. Do you remember how old you were when the war began?
3. Do you remember the day war began?
4. Were you evacuated?
5. Can you describe the place where you lived or stayed?
6. Were houses very different then?
7. Did you ever go in an air-raid shelter?
8. What do you remember about the bombing in wartime?
9. What did you enjoy doing as a child in wartime?
10. Looking back, what are your strongest memories of living in wartime Britain?



