

peace pledge union

The End of the Second World War, August 1945 (also known as 'Victory over Japan/ VJ Day')

Age group:
KS3

Curriculum links:
History/ Citizenship/ PSHCE

Learning Outcomes:

- To consider VJ Day/ the end of WW2 from a range of different perspectives.
- To reflect on civilian experiences of war (including economic, social and emotional/ psychological impact).
- To use this knowledge to consider alternatives to military conflict and warfare.

Factors to consider:

Different cultural perspectives preconceptions within the class (including staff).
Students who have lived or recent history experience of war/ violent conflict.

Introduction:

On 6th August 1945, at 8.15am, an atomic bomb was detonated over Hiroshima, Japan by Allied Forces. This was the first time that nuclear weapons had been used in warfare. Three days later, on 9th August, another atomic bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. Approximately 210,000 civilians died directly as a result of these attacks on Japan, and many more were made ill and suffered longer term conditions, from both radiation and as a result of injuries/ burns from the bombs.

On 15th August 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced the surrender of Imperial Japan, effectively ending the Second World War. In Japan, the "memorial day for the end of the war" is observed on 15 August. Survivors of the atomic bombs ("hibakusha"), their families and supporters continue to work towards the abolition of nuclear weapons. The United Nations developed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in September 2017. There are currently 82 signatories and 40 states parties (August 2020).

The First World War was considered "the war to end all wars". Unfortunately this was not the case. Following the Second World War "Never Again!" has become a commonly used phrase. But how are we actively working to ensure such devastation and suffering never happens again?

For each of the individual stories you will read below:

1. What are your thoughts and feelings when you read about their experiences?
2. Do you think you will be celebrating the end of the war? If so, how? Who with? If not, why?
3. What would be your plan for peace in the future?

1. Jakub, 28 years old member of the Polish resistance to Nazi occupation, Warsaw

I have been in hiding since the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939. At times this has been exciting, at others terrifying. At first we were helping Jewish people find places where they could also go into hiding. Then we intercepted the German Army's supplies and redistributed them to people who were poor or otherwise needed our help. Even when 'VE Day' was announced I had to remain in hiding. We just didn't know what was safe and who might still be looking for us. At the end of fighting in Europe, Poland was under Soviet occupation and we were unsure how we would be treated. So the 'end' of the war in May didn't feel like much of a celebration to me.



After some months I decided to go back to my home town of Warsaw. It is a ruined city now with no family, no home. I come from a Jewish family and my family that weren't taken to the camps in the early years of the war are all missing. I doubt that I will find them.

*Old Town Market Place, Warsaw, 1945 From
[Wikimedia Commons/ Public Domain](#)*

2. Monika, 12 years old, Berlin (7.5 million civilians were made homeless by Allied bombing between 1942-45)

I have been living in evacuation lodgings since last year with my mum and baby brother. We have ration cards for food and so many people share the toilets they're disgusting. I don't know where my dad is now.

My favourite place in the city, Berlin Zoo, was destroyed by bombs. I used to love going there, especially to see the elephants. Now, I have a pet rabbit. Well, I call it my pet but I know that if we get really hungry my mum will kill it for food. I haven't told my mum that I called it Cloud because of its soft ears.

We heard that people in Britain has parties in the streets in May when the Allied Forces entered Europe. I wish I could have joined a party. I wonder if they have to ration food in England too?

Now we have heard that dreadful bombs have been dropped in Japan, worse than the bombs they dropped here. This means that at last the war is over. I wonder what it's like for the children in Japan. Do they have food rations? How many children like me died? What has happened to their pets? I hope at least I get to keep my rabbit now.

3. Benito, 15 years old, London

My mum's parents came to London from Italy at the end of the last century to help out with the new family business. They had just got married and coming to live in another country was an adventure for them. They soon had little English-Italian kids! My mum met my dad in London (dad is also Italian). My dad was too young to fight in the First World War, but they both told me how scary the night time bombings were. After the great war people really got into coffee and ice cream, so the family cafe did really well!

I was still a child when this war started in 1939 and for a long time things didn't feel that different. Everything changed in June 1940 when Italy joined the side of the Nazis. All of a sudden everyone thought we might be spies even though we've lived here all our lives! The government ordered that all Italians should be rounded up and taken to internment camps. We spent 9 months in Yorkshire. The camps had been built in World War One so you can imagine how run down they are now.

When we came back it was really hard to get the business going again. Thankfully we missed most of the Blitz, but London has been really damaged. On VE Day we did ok, but lots of people still don't trust you if you're Italian.

4. Randeep, 25 years old, Indian soldier (British Commonwealth)

I volunteered to join the British- Indian army; we are told that we are the largest volunteer army that has ever existed. At first I felt proud of that. I was fighting in Germany at the start of the war. After 'VE Day', when the British celebrated in the streets we were sent to Burma to fight the Japanese army. It feels like I've been here for such a long time. So many of us are getting ill. My friend Ali got malaria and was sent away for treatment. I don't know when I'll see him again. I heard that some Indian soldiers had been captured in Africa. They were sent to camps in Germany where they changed sides and tried to fight for Indian independence from British rule. I guess they were sick of the British telling them what to do.

I am so tired. Nothing feels like home. I'm not sure what I am fighting for anymore. But I do know that I'm fighting for a country I have never been to in a country I never thought I would see.



The British Army in Burma 1945 Indian troops of the 20th Division search for Japanese at the badly damaged station in Prome, 3 May 1945. From [Wikimedia Commons/ Public Domain](#)

4. Eiko, 32 years old, mother in Nagasaki Japan

There have been food shortages since the start of the war, but this year the rice harvest has been very poor and many people are thin and hungry. We have heard news of a terrible bomb at Hiroshima, but how can one bomb destroy a whole city? We have had many bombs here at Nagasaki, at the docks and factories. But we have been lucky that they are not firebombs, like there have been in Tokyo. Maybe we are too far away for the American planes.

They say at Hiroshima there was a bright pika (a 'bright flash') followed by fire. It is a new kind of bomb. People are burned and the water is poisoned. But our Prime Minister Suzuki has told us we should not be afraid. We should ignore the threats from America and continue to protect our country from their invasion. We have anti-aircraft guns and searchlights here to protect us.



On 9th August an air raid alert was sounded in Nagasaki at 7.50am. The 'all clear' was given at 8.30am. A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki at 11.01am.

"Children's memorial in Nagasaki" by International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons is licensed under CC BY-NC 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/>

5. Peter, 19 year old British naval lab assistant, The Empire Clyde hospital ship*.

I was able to join the forces towards the end of the war and was pleased to be able to contribute. I went on the hospital ship, The Empire Clyde, as a lab assistant to look for survivors in Hiroshima. This was my first time away from home, so there were many new things to experience and get used to. Life on a ship is very different to life on land!

We arrived in Hiroshima 6 weeks after the atomic bomb was dropped on the city. We reached the harbour and some of us disembarked. We looked and looked but we found no-one there alive. Not a single living soul. I took a couple of photos on that day but I felt too bad to take any more. The city was completely destroyed.

I had so hoped that I could help someone. Our ship left shortly after and we went to Shanghai to provide a free hospital for local people. We fed as many children as we could when we were there as there were so many starving and living in the streets. At last I felt that I could help some of these people whose lives had been turned upside down.

Further information/ sources:

https://www.icanw.org/the_treaty

<https://theconversation.com/from-world-war-ii-enemy-internment-to-windrush-britain-quickly-forgets-its-gratitude-to-economic-migrants-98331>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/z3h7bk7/revision/1>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/timeline/factfiles/nonflash/a6651858.shtml>

<https://theconversation.com/why-remembrance-of-indian-soldiers-who-fought-for-the-british-in-world-war-ii-is-so-political-86885>

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2007/sep/01/weekend7.weekend2>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/in-pictures-53476318>

<https://hibakushastories.org/meet-the-hibakusha/>

<https://www.history.com/news/the-man-who-survived-two-atomic-bombs>

** With sincere gratitude to Dorothy Runnicles for giving permission to tell the story of her late husband's experience at Hiroshima. Peter was not able to talk about his experience with his family during his lifetime, so we hope that by sharing his story now we can encourage others to continue to pursue peaceful resolutions to conflict. Thank you.*

About Peace Pledge Union:

The Peace Pledge Union is the oldest secular pacifist organisation in Britain. Since 1934 it has been campaigning for a warless world. For more information see: www.ppu.org.uk