

1940s Wartime Life Room

A visit to the National war Museum is an ideal activity for a full class. It's best to divide your class into two groups. Each group can take part in two 45 minute sessions as follows.

- 1. Gallery tour with Second World War trail**
- 2. Exploring 1940s wartime Life Room**

Groups swap over.

The 1940s wartime Life Room is split into four sections.

In each of these areas you will find objects and information relating to the lives of four different people.

Each section tells the personal story of a real person.

- 1. Elise Morton – the evacuee**
- 2. Kenneth Muir – the soldier**
- 3. William Nesbit – the POW (prisoner of war)**
- 4. Margaret Maxwell – the ATS girl (Auxiliary Territorial Service)**

This resource pack contains teachers' notes for each area.

You can divide your group into four, to investigate each area. Groups should spend about ten minutes exploring each of the four themes. This will give you time for feedback to round off the session.

1940s Wartime Life Room

The Evacuee – Elise’s Story

Elise’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of an 11 year old evacuee – **Elise Morton**. Pupils can explore the objects and information in her suitcase, in the bedroom and on the walls. They can discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils can also listen to the memories of Millie Gray, who recounts her own experience as an evacuee during the war.

Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Gas Mask** – young children were given these red and blue gas masks. They were called *Mickey Mouse* masks because they made children look a bit like the cartoon character. They would have to carry these with them at all times.
- **Suitcase** – evacuees were limited to what they could take with them. A girl like Elise would be allowed to take the following:

‘One vest, one pair of knickers, one petticoat, two pairs of stockings, handkerchiefs, gym slip and blouse, hat and cardigan’

In the suitcase the pupils will find:

- clothing
- favourite toy
- comic book
- boiled sweets
- name tag, all evacuees wore labels indicating their destination.
- **Toys, games and books** – ask pupils to consider similarities and differences between toys from the past and the present. Many toys would also be home made – can they think why?
- **Photographs** – these show different images of children during the war. These can be used as a stimulus for the group to consider what life would have been like for them. What emotions do you think the evacuees were feeling as they were queuing for the bus?
- **Wooden Rattle** – originally designed to scare birds away from crops, these were used to alert people of imminent gas attacks. Neither side carried out gas attacks during the Second World War but gas attacks were used during the First World War.



1940s Wartime Life Room

The Evacuee – Elise’s Story

Look out for



On the shelves you will see toys, books and games.

How are they different from the toys and games that you have?

Write your answer here.

Open up the suitcase

Evacuees were only allowed to pack a small suitcase. Elise has been allowed to take her favourite toy.

What single special thing would you take with you?

Write your answer here.



Look out for



Find the photographs on the shelf. Can you circle the words that describe how the children are feeling?

happy

sad

nervous

worried

apprehensive

excited

1940s Wartime Life Room

The Evacuee – Elise’s Story

Why did children have to carry a gas mask at all times?

Write your answer here.

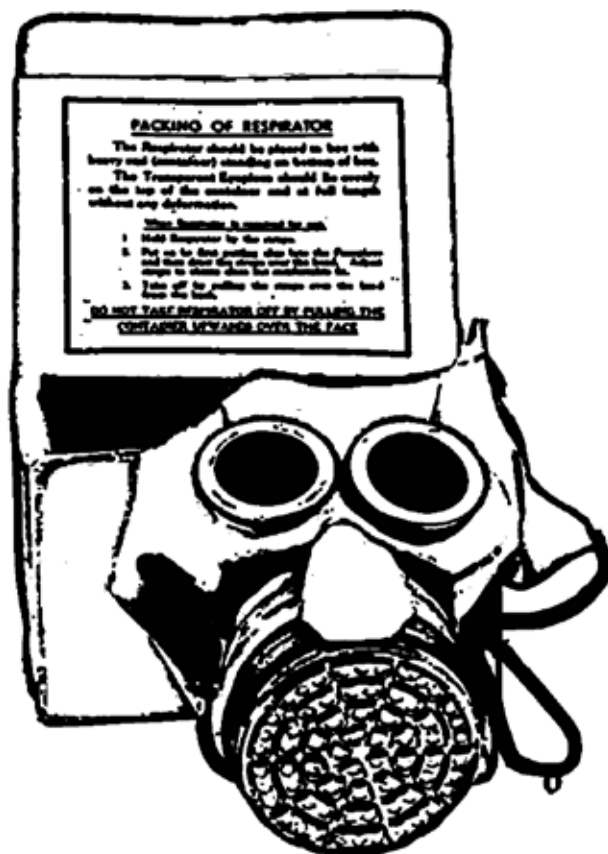
Look out for

Look for the wooden rattle.

What sort of noise does it make?

Try it for yourself (carefully).

What do you think it was used for?



Make a sketch of it here.

1940s Wartime Life Room

The Soldier – Kenneth’s Story

Kenneth’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of **Kenneth Muir**, a soldier serving in Europe during the war. Pupils can explore the objects and information found in his kit bag, around the fireplace and on the walls. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils can listen to the memories of George Laidlaw, who recounts his experience as a sailor during the war.

Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Identification Discs** – these were used to identify soldiers if they were killed in action. They would always wear two, in the event of death the octagonal disc would be placed in the mouth and the other returned to the commanding officer. The disc would contain the soldier’s surname and religious denomination for proper burial arrangements
- **Shaving Kit** – personal hygiene would still have been important. Soldiers would have carried a rolled up toilet bag like this one. Pupils will find a razor and shaving brush inside.
- **Letters** – a letter written by Kenneth telling his parents about life at the Front. This would have been a censored version, as soldiers were not allowed to give too much detail in their correspondence. The second letter was written by Kenneth’s commanding officer expressing his sympathy after Kenneth had been killed in action. It was written just days after Kenneth’s original letter home, and only months before the end of the war.
- **Radio** – most homes had a radio and it became the focal point of the household during the war, especially when the daily news bulletin was broadcast at 9pm. The radio was also very important for morale; variety shows would make fun of Hitler and his generals.
- **Stove and utensils** – pupils could be asked to compare the stove and cooking utensils with what they have in their own kitchen today. What are the similarities and differences? How would this stove have worked?



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The Soldier – Kenneth’s Story

Look out for



Look for the radio.

Why do you think the radio was so important during the war?

Write your answer here.

Talk about

Compare the stove and cooking utensils with what you have in your kitchen today.



Open up the kit bag

A soldier would carry objects that were important for his daily life when he wasn't fighting.

Draw the objects that Kenneth used for keeping clean

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The Soldier – Kenneth’s Story

Look out for

Soldiers Helmet

This is a typical helmet worn by soldiers at the Front.

Why do you think it has a net covering?

Write your answer here.



Identification Discs

Look carefully at the identification discs

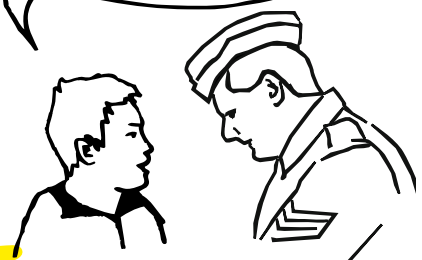
What information can you find on them?

Write your answer here.



Talk about

Why do you think a soldier would carry two of these?



Look out for

There are two letters in the kit bag. Read Kenneth’s letter to his mother.

What mood do you think Kenneth was in when he wrote the letter?

Write your answer here.

Read Captain Cox’s letter to Kenneth’s mother.

How many days are there between the two letters being written?

What has happened to Kenneth in this time?

Write your answer here.

1940s Wartime Life Room

POW – William's Story

William's Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the life of **William Nesbit**, a Scottish soldier in a Polish prisoner of war camp. Pupils can explore the objects and information found in the Red Cross box and on the walls. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Pupils listen to the memories of Geoff Bryden, who recounts his own experience of having been a prisoner of war.

Key objects – teachers' notes

- **Red Cross box** – the Red Cross played a vital role in providing prisoners of war with food and clothing parcels. They also provided a means for prisoners and their families to stay in touch through the delivery of letters. Items such as corned beef, cigarettes and chocolate were important for maintaining the morale of the prisoners and would also supplement the meagre rations they received in camps
- **Clothing** – balaclava, long jacket, gloves, socks and scarf. William was a POW in Poland, which could get very cold during the winter. The Red Cross would send clothes parcels with items like these
- **Red Cross Armband** – William wore this in his duties as a medical orderly in the camp. A medical orderly has no formal training but can assist medical or nursing staff with routine duties and first-aid
- **Camp currency** – William received these as payment for his work as a medical orderly. These coupons known as Lagergeld could be used to buy razors, shaving soap and toothpaste
- **Telegram** – the telegram is a message from the army informing William's parents that he is now a POW
- **Letter** – this letter was written to William in 1946. It is from a prison guard, Joseff Blumme, who had struck up a friendship with William in the camp
- **Map** – the map shows the principal POW camps for allied soldiers in Europe. The pupils could try to find William's camp.



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POW – William’s Story

Read the telegram that was sent to William’s mother.

What has happened to William?

Write your answer here.

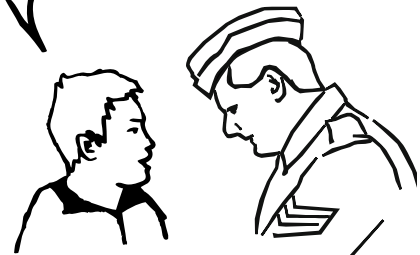
Look out for

Can you find William’s camp on the map? What country is his prison camp in?

Write your answer here.

Talk about

William had previously been missing in action. How do you think William’s family would have felt when they discovered he was now a prisoner?



Open up the Red Cross Parcel

Look out for

Look carefully at the objects William was sent in his Red Cross parcel.

What might the clothes tell us about conditions in William’s prison camp?

Write your answer here.



Of all the objects in the parcel, which one would you be happiest to get?

Circle your choice

chocolate

warm socks

balaclava

letter from home

tobacco

corned beef

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The POW – William’s Story

William had a job in the prison camp. Can you find out what it was from the evidence in the parcel?

Write your answer here.

Read the letter addressed to William from Joseff Blumme. It is quite difficult to read, but can you answer these questions.

Who was Joseff?

Write your answer here.



Can you list some of the things that have happened to Joseff in the last year?

Write your answer here.

1940s Wartime Life Room

Women at war – Margaret’s story

Margaret’s Story

In this area pupils will find objects relating to the lives of women during the Second World War. It focuses on **Margaret Maxwell**, who worked with the Auxiliary Territorial service (ATS). The ATS originally recruited women for driving, clerical and general duties but many of them ended up serving in anti-aircraft command.

Pupils can explore the objects and information found in and around the kitchen area. They can then discuss and answer the questions in the worksheet.

Key objects – teachers’ notes

- **Respirator and haversack** – this is a civilian issue gas mask from the 1940s. 45 million gas masks were issued in Britain during the Second World War. The mask contains charcoal filters which act as a barrier to the ‘larger than air’ gas particles.
- **Stone pig** – this ceramic hot water bottle is a good mystery object for pupils – can they guess what it might have been used for?
- **Laundry objects** – ironing board, iron, bucket, soap and dolly. Pupils can compare these objects with ones in their own home. How does doing the laundry then compare with today?

- **Pictures of women at war**
 - **Anti-aircraft observations**
 - **Searchlights**
 - **ATS air raid wardens**
 - **Making dressings**

These photos all show women at work doing a variety of jobs.

Like many women, Margaret served with the ATS. The vast majority of these women were employed in anti-aircraft command. As well as operating the searchlights, they worked on anti-aircraft guns, but were not officially allowed to fire them.



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Women at war – Margaret’s Story

Look out for

Look at the evidence in this area. What did women do to help the war effort? Support your answers with pieces of evidence.

Write your answer here.

Find an object that you don’t have in your kitchen nowadays. Explain what it is and what it was used for.

Sketch it here.

Look out for

Look at the photographs of women working during an air raid. Write three words to describe how you might have felt doing this job.?

Write your answer here.

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Women at war – Margaret’s Story

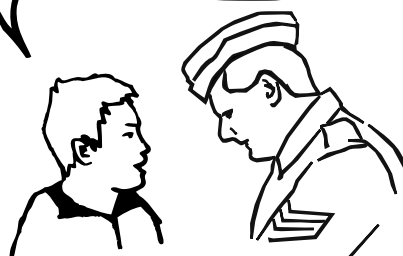
Look out for



Find the posters. Why did people have to 'make do and mend'?

Talk about

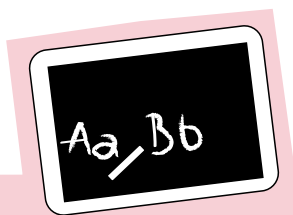
As many men were away during the war, women also had to look after everyone at home. Why did they call it the home front?



Find the rations. How would you feel if this was your food for the week?
Discuss with the people in your group.

Write your answer here.

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Back at school activities

1. **The Evacuee** - ask the class to imagine they have been evacuated from the city. They should write a letter home describing how life in the country is different.
2. **The Soldier** – the class could research a wartime incident and produce a radio broadcast or newspaper article that would be reported at home.
3. **The POW** – remind the class about the letter from Joseff. The class could write to Joseff describing what life has been like since the end of the war.
4. **Recruiting women** – during the war to encourage women into work to help the war effort. The class could research these and produce posters of their own.
5. **Recruiting women** – pupils could script and perform a radio advertisement encouraging women to enlist with an organisation like the WLA (Women's Land Army) or the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Services).