

World War Two Archeobox TN v1

World War Two lasted from 1939 to 1945. It was perhaps the first 'total war' where civilians were equally at risk from the fighting as were members of the armed forces. Yet daily life had to carry on. People still went to school work, needed somewhere to live, something to eat and wear, and places of entertainment. We tend to focus on the danger of WW2, but we also need to remember daily life.

This selection of replica artefacts is designed to help you find out more about everyday life during World War Two.

There are five different replica artefacts:

- coins from World War Two
- warning rattle used by air raid wardens
- hurricane lamp
- incendiary bomb
- Victoria Cross

1. What can you find out about World War Two by looking at a single artefact? You can use just one or all of artefacts to do this.

Typical questions you might ask an artefact:

1. *Look closely at the object.* If possible handle it. Draw it and label it - what are the key parts?
2. *How is it made?* What is it made of? Where was it made? Who made it? Is it big/small? Is it heavy/light? How can you tell?
3. *How old do you think it is?* New/Old/older/very old? How can you tell?
4. *What do you think it is/was used for?* How can you tell?
5. *Who would have used it?* Were they rich or poor? Where was it used? How did it change people's lives [significance]? How can you tell?

I'm sure you and your children will be able to think of many more questions. It is important to keep a list of those questions you *can't* answer and use those questions as the basis for further research into Roman Britain.

2. What can you tell about domestic life in World War Two from looking at the coins?

[a] Looking at an individual coin:

Get them to look carefully at just one coin - either as a class on a whiteboard or in small groups. The children could draw or rub their coin, and label it, as a way to encourage them to look closely at the coin.

Useful questions might include:

- when was this coin made?
- how old is it?
- is it new and shiny, or old and worn?
- who or what is commemorated on the coin?
- how much is it worth?
- what could I have bought with this coin?

You might also do some maths with the children at the same time. Finish up by asking two key questions:

- why do we have coins of different values?
- how useful is a coin as evidence? Is it primary evidence, or secondary evidence?

[b] For the set of World War Two coins as a whole:

The main thrust of the activity is to get the children to look carefully at the coins and use them as evidence of life during World War Two. The questions will reflect those from the 'starter' activity:

- what are the coins made from?
- what images do they have on them? Are all the images the same?
- are they all the same size/value/colour/from the same period?
- how well used are they?
- can we date them from the coins themselves?
- how do you think they were made?
- where do you think they were found?
- do you think they would be valuable today?

Some of these - and other questions the children might devise for themselves - you will not be able to answer simply from investigating the coins. For example, 'how were they made?' Use these unanswered questions as a basis to research WW2.

Ask the children what they think they could have bought, at the time, with each of the coins. Then carry out some research to find out what each of the coins would really have bought. Compare the results with what coins of similar value might buy today.

3. What can you tell about domestic life from the artefacts relating to the Blitz?

Together, the warning rattle, hurricane lamp and incendiary bomb can help us understand what it was like living through the Blitz, either in London or in any other town or city that was bombed. You will easily be able to find local stories of bombing from newspaper archives and the local history section of your nearest library. Even in my tiny village in rural Lincolnshire bombs were dropped on the local pub and the landlord's daughter was rescued after the blast blew her up the chimney!

Let the children try to work out what would each of the three artefacts would have been used for. [The warning rattle was used by air raid wardens; the incendiary bomb was used to try to burn down houses; and the hurricane lamp was used in shelters during an air raid, or in a home when the electricity was not working.]

What can we tell about life during the blitz from the artefacts?

Useful questions might include:

- what is it?
- what might it have been used for? How can you tell?
- what is it made from?
- how does it work?
- is it valuable?
- does it have a special meaning?

I'm sure your children will think of many more questions to ask of the artefacts.

Taking the three together, ask the children to think about being bombed. Where would they go? What would be the safest place to hide? How would they feel when the air raid warden came round with the rattle? How would they deal with incendiary bombs? What if your lamp didn't work? What preparations would they make *before* a raid? The artefacts give a different dimension to the topic of air raids.

4. What can you tell about World War Two from the Victoria Cross?

Background Information about the Victoria Cross

The Victoria Cross was introduced in 1856. Before 1856 there were no awards for bravery open to all soldiers - it was expected all soldiers would do their best. Important officers might get a knighthood or be promoted. Queen Victoria and her husband, Prince Albert, thought all soldiers should have a chance of a medal if they had done something particularly brave whilst fighting the enemy. At first, civilians [i.e. people not part of the army or navy] could not win the Victoria Cross, but this was changed. Also, to begin with, you had to be alive to receive your medal. It was only in the Boer War [1899-1902] that it became possible to receive the VC if you were killed while fighting.

The Victoria Cross is awarded 'for valour.' Since it was introduced, 1357 awards have been made, and three people have won it twice. That means 1354 people - all men - have won the VC. 111 won the medal during the Crimean War, 628 in the First World War, 182 during World War Two and only 14 since 1945. The most recent was in 2012, when Lance Corporal James Ashworth showed 'courage beyond words' whilst fighting the Taliban in Afghanistan. Over 900 of the awards have been made in person by the King or Queen at the time, and another 300 by a member of the Royal Family.

Each person who wins the medal gets an annual pension payment from the Government. Originally, in 1856 this was £10 per year, increased in 1898 to £50. Now, it is £1495 per year.

Ask the children to look carefully at the replica Victoria Cross. What are the words on the medal? What do they mean? Why do they think the ribbon is purple? What might someone have to do to win a VC? 182 were awarded during the whole of WW2. Only three were awarded in England - two for air attacks and one for anti-aircraft work. What might it feel like to be awarded a VC? Most were handed over by the King or Queen - a real sign of bravery. You might ask the children to research some of the winners of the VC to help them work out what the words 'For Valour' mean.

5. Finally, pulling it all together.....

You want the children to begin to draw some conclusions about life during World War Two from what they have discovered - even if their main conclusion is that I need to find out more about life at the time before I can reach any strong conclusions. They should be able to make a list of unanswered questions they want to find the answers to!

Have fun. Alf Wilkinson June 2018, v1