

Growing Up in World War 2

Ronald Leedham was born in 1929 and from the age of eight spent the war in what was described as a 'Home for Crippled Children' in Coney Hill, West Wickham. Aged eleven, he was transferred to another home near Sevenoaks in Kent. He has vivid memories of his wartime experiences.



War Starts

I was eight, nine, when the war started. We were told there was a war on, we were going to fight the Germans because the caretaker of the home, him and his wife, well he had been in the navy in the first war... Because we were close to Biggin Hill there were always a lot of aircraft around anyway. We didn't know they were our air force, we thought they were police planes, Spitfires and Hurricanes and the big ones were for RAF... Anyway, we were always interested in these, you'd see these squadrons flying around, all above us. And then when the war started, after Dunkirk and they really stepped up the fun and games with the Luftwaffe and I can remember the school was prepared for trouble...

Full clip 3.56 mins: <http://bit.ly/1qOuM6a>

Dogfight

When I arrived at Sevenoaks, there was an air raid on, the warning had gone when we were leaving Coney Hill and it was about 20 miles to Sevenoaks, went there in the school bus. It wasn't an air raid so much, as a dogfight going on overhead and I can remember seeing the boys, they had benches in the playground and as we drove up, there were these boys lying back, watching the dogfight above them and other kids lying around, sort of standing around. Nobody took cover at all, it was just, it had happened before, do it again, you know the sort of thing. Strange.

Full clip 0.48 <http://bit.ly/1gVJaMw>

Sheltering in the Church

...We were all sleeping downstairs again, on mattresses, and I can remember this blinding flash and a terrific bang, awful noise and everything shook and all the staff came belting in again, 'Quick, quick, quick, we've got to get out, we've got to get out, quick'... And we all had to go down in the night, during the air raid, all holding hands, going down through the wood and along the path at the bottom, down to the Baptist church... we all had to lie down on mattresses and they gave us hot drinks and half the staff were crying and us kids... But fancy to think that we'd be safe, walking through an air raid with shells bursting overhead, with fires, glow over London like no-one's business, noise everywhere, flashes...

Full clip 3.43 mins: <http://bit.ly/1IEqSm1>

Buzz Bombs and Doodlebugs

I can remember the first one I saw... I remember being dressed in the dormitory, trying to get dressed and looking out of the window and I saw this funny thing go from east to west. Now buzz bombs went from south to north, every time, bang, bang, bang, back and forth. But this one was going from east to west and it was a funny looking thing compared with all the aircraft and it was making this funny noise and it was quite low... Then in a matter of days, the countryside changed. They put up barrage balloons everywhere...

Full clip 5.26 mins: <http://bit.ly/1jaEDoV>

Incendiary Bombs in the Park

...And I remember one night we saw this great big white glow in the sky over Knole Park and we went over in that direction the next day and we found there was a great field, like a big playing field, it was a big flat area, big grassed area and it had taken a full load of incendiaries... the ground was white with the phosphorus where it had burnt and there were all these tail fins of the incendiary bombs... There were hundreds of them and some of them hadn't gone off and so we were picking these unexploded incendiary bombs up and looking at them...

Full clip 2.20 mins: <http://bit.ly/1mIFTQX>

Learning Geography

"...In the seniors, the first half hour, the teacher, he kept us up to date with what was going on in the war. We had the blackboard up there and he had the newspaper with him and he'd draw where the front line was that morning or that day before and all these arrows sweeping everywhere, you know the sort of thing. And that's where you learnt your geography, believe it or not. I learned more geography about Russia, the Middle East, Libya, anywhere in Europe and where the war was going on, from the war than I ever did on anything else. We were all well up on where the different towns were and what the countryside, what the terrain was like, whether it was good tank country or not, it was absolutely marvellous...

Full clip 1.14 mins: <http://bit.ly/1iI3K6t>

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Discussion and Activity Ideas

Wartime in Britain

Research Activity: Play a selection of the clips to the class as an introduction.

Using the 'Wartime Memories' document, arrange the class into 5 groups, giving one section to each group (i.e. War Starts; Buzz Bombs and Doodlebugs; Incendiary Bombs in the Park; Dogfight; Sheltering in the Church - some are longer / shorter than others, so can be used for different levels of ability).

Looking at the words highlighted in bold, children should decide between them who is to research which word(s) and then, working individually, using the computer suite or library, children should gather information / pictures for each word. If possible, children should begin by listening to the relevant clip for their group (links in document).

Then they will come back together as a group to share their research and create either an information poster or class presentation.

Art activity: Play either 'Incendiaries in the Park' or 'Dogfight' video clip. Ask the children to create an image based on what they imagine when they hear the story. This could be a collage using found images (see research activity above) or a painting / drawing. Get the children to share their images with the class and talk about how it was to imagine the scene.

Away from Home

Class discussion: Read out the short intro about Ronald from front page, then play the video clips 'War Starts' and/or 'Sheltering in the Church'. Ask the children:

How do you think Ronald felt to be living away from home at this time? What was good? / bad?
What may have helped?

Writing Activity: Ask the children to imagine themselves as Ronald or one of his friends and to write a letter home to their family (or friend). What might they say? What might they ask about?

This activity could be done over two sessions, with the children swapping their letters and then writing imagined replies from parents, friends or other family members.

Drama activity: Ask the children to create a short drama in pairs, based on the scenario:

Two friends having a conversation together in the dormitory, talking about the war and the things they had seen that week and thinking about loved ones at home.

This could incorporate lots of different feelings: i.e. excitement, fear, sadness, worry. Can the two friends help each other to feel better about the difficult feelings? When the children have presented these dramas to each other, have a class discussion about how it felt to be the children.

Teachers please be aware: These activities may evoke painful memories/emotions for some children.

Mapping the War

Research Activity: Play 'Learning Geography' clip. Give the children a selection of dates throughout the war and ask them to research newspapers from that particular date/year. Can anyone find a map of the front line?

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Other Resources

'Wartime Memories' paper:
<http://bit.ly/1q8DXGq>

Suggested Fiction:

Michelle Magorian -
'Goodnight Mr Tom'
Nina Bawden - 'Carrie's War'

Curriculum Areas

PSHE
Citizenship
History
Literacy
Art IT Drama
SEAL Outcomes