

H ORIGINAL

WORLD WAR II

WITH TOM HANKS

A portrait of Tom Hanks in a military uniform, looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is a dramatic, hazy battlefield scene with tanks, soldiers, and aircraft silhouettes against a blue and orange sky. The overall tone is somber and historical.

Education Guide



About the Series

Narrated by Tom Hanks, this landmark 20-episode documentary series offers a sweeping and definitive retelling of the most devastating and defining conflict in human history, drawing on rarely seen archival material, evocative storytelling, and insights from leading historians. From the opening shock of Germany's invasion of Poland through the rise and fall of the Axis powers, the series captures the ferocity of battles fought on land, sea, and air, and explores the human cost of total war, while also revealing the hidden wars of espionage, codebreaking, and industrial might that shaped the conflict's outcome. Blending the actions and decisions of pivotal wartime leaders with the experiences of soldiers and civilians across continents, the series culminates in the dawn of the atomic age and the Cold War, offering a comprehensive and deeply human portrait of the conflict that reshaped the modern world.

Curriculum Links

World War II with Tom Hanks is relevant for Global History, European History, U.S. History, Military History, Government and Social Studies courses. The content is appropriate for middle school through college students.

To The Educator

This series can help deepen student understanding of the causes, major events and far-reaching consequences of World War II, including the individuals and events that shaped both its outcome and the post-war world. The series covers major battles, the Holocaust, the homefront, espionage and code-breaking and the complex decision to use the atomic bomb.

Individual episodes can be used to support the study of key campaigns, critical analysis of leadership decisions, and the exploration of themes such as propaganda, resistance, genocide, and total war, as well as connections to contemporary global issues. Each page in this guide aligns with a specific episode, providing a framework for how the episode might be used in a classroom. We encourage educators to use this guide as a resource as they develop lesson plans and activities that best suit the needs, interests, and learning goals of their students.

General World War II Resources

[History.com: World War II Hub](https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii)

The National WWII Museum: Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Resources for Educators
<https://www.ushmm.org/teach>

Episode Guide: The Beginning

In September 1939, enabled by a secret pact between Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, Germany invades Poland with its lightning style of tank warfare, plunging Europe back into war. Adolf Hitler can now pursue his longed-for racial war, as the world watches in horror, and the stage is set for global conflict.

Thought Starter

Have you ever read a book, watched a movie or television show, or played a game set during World War II? What are some things you already know about the war?

Did You Know?

World War II was the largest and deadliest conflict in human history. It resulted in the deaths of some 60 million people worldwide and left millions more displaced.

People to Know

- Adolf Hitler
- Joseph Stalin
- Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Winston Churchill

Terms to Know

- Treaty of Versailles
- Nazi Party
- Lebensraum
- Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

Discussion Questions

- How does Hitler go about seizing power in Germany?
- How are Jewish people in Germany and Poland treated by Hitler's government and military?
- What is appeasement? Do you think appeasement was a reasonable strategy? Why or why not?

Primary Sources

Adolf Hitler's Reichstag Speech, September 1, 1939

Source: *The Avalon Project*

<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gp2.asp>

Radio Address by Neville Chamberlain, September 3, 1939

Source: *The Avalon Project*

<https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gb3.asp>

In these speeches, delivered by Hitler on the day Germany invaded Poland and by Chamberlain two days later, the two leaders lay out their justifications for military action.

Suggested Activity

After reading the two speeches, ask students to analyze the statements: What reasoning does each leader give for military action? What evidence do they present in support of their decision? What specific words or phrases suggest justification, blame, or moral positioning? How does each leader frame their country's role in the conflict? In what ways are the statements similar and different?

From The National WWII Museum

How Did Adolf Hitler Happen?

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/how-did-adolf-hitler-happen>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Barbarossa

Operation Barbarossa, Nazi Germany's surprise invasion of the Soviet Union, launches on June 22, 1941. In what is the largest military operation in history, Hitler aims to capture the Soviet Union's vast economic resources, enslave its populations and expand Germany east. It is the beginning of a brutal campaign that will ultimately help decide the war in Europe.

Thought Starter

What was the Soviet Union? What are some things you already know about it?

Did You Know?

Soviet Red Army troops were assisted by "General Winter"—the nickname used for the U.S.S.R.'s deadly cold weather. German soldiers reported some 100,000 cases of frostbite by the end of 1941, resulting in the amputation of nearly 15,000 limbs.

People to Know

- Erwin Rommel
- Hermann Göring
- Benito Mussolini

Terms to Know

- Maginot Line
- Blitzkrieg
- Battle of Britain

Discussion Questions

- Why does Hitler decide to invade the Soviet Union? Why does Stalin ignore warnings about the invasion?
- What is a "war on two fronts"? Why is it seen as a bad idea?
- How would you describe Operation Barbarossa? How did geography and weather impact the operation?

Primary Sources

Operation Barbarossa Newsreel

This newsreel footage, courtesy of the Internet Archive, shows the German Wehrmacht (armed forces) at the beginning of Operation Barbarossa. Named "Fight Against Bolshevism #1," this silent 16mm newsreel was made by the German government for the German public.

<https://archive.org/details/10874germannewsreeeuropesfightagainstbolshevismimosvwr>

Suggested Activity

After students watch the short film individually or as a class, ask students to consider the film as propaganda: What is propaganda? In what ways does this film fit the definition of propaganda? Who was its intended audience? What information were its creators hoping to pass along to the audience? What is shown in the film? What might not be shown that could be important to understanding this event?

From The National WWII Museum

Operation Barbarossa: The Biggest of All Time,
by Robert Citino, PhD

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/operation-barbarossa>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: The Blitz

After defeating Poland, Hitler looks west, planning an attack into France that will take advantage of a weak point in their defenses. France is overrun and new British Prime Minister Churchill scrambles to evacuate Allied troops from the coast. Shocked by the defeat of France, Roosevelt calls to mobilize the U.S. while German planes bombard Britain from the sky. The Germans are pushed back as Roosevelt establishes the U.S. as the “arsenal of democracy” in the war against tyranny.

Thought Starter

Have you heard the word “blitz” before? What do you think it might mean?

Did You Know?

The Battle of Britain was the first battle in history to be waged almost exclusively in the air.

People to Know

- Erwin Rommel
- Hermann Göring
- Benito Mussolini

Terms to Know

- Maginot Line
- Blitzkrieg
- Battle of Britain

Discussion Questions

- How did France prepare for war with Germany? Why do their defenses fail?
- Why does Churchill want the U.S. to join the war? Why are some Americans hesitant to do so?
- Was “the Blitz” successful? Why or why not? How did it impact American public opinion of the war?

Primary Sources

We Shall Fight on the Beaches

On June 4, 1940, shortly after British troops were successfully evacuated from Dunkirk and before the fall of France to the Nazis, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed the British House of Commons. You can hear the speech here, courtesy of the Internet Archive: https://archive.org/details/Winston_Churchill/1940-06-04_BBC_Winston_Churchill_We_Shall_Never_Surrender.mp3

You can read the full text here, courtesy of the International Churchill Society: <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/we-shall-fight-on-the-beaches/>

Suggested Activity

Distribute copies of Churchill’s speech as well as markers, highlighters, or colored pencils. Ask students to read all or parts of the speech and then annotate the text. Students can highlight 3–5 words or phrases and explain in the margins what they think Churchill meant by them. They can highlight what they find to be the most powerful or inspirational phrases as well as identify where Churchill uses rhetorical devices like anaphora, parallelism, inclusive and emotive language, imagery, tone shift and sentence structure or syntax.

From The National WWII Museum

The Blitz of 1940, by John Curatola, PhD
<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/blitz-1940>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Pearl Harbor

Driven by their desire for resources and an Asian empire, Japan invades China. The U.S. joins the global outcry as Japanese troops brutally destroy the Chinese capital of Nanking. FDR responds with a crippling oil embargo, but Japan refuses to back down, propelling them towards an attack on Pearl Harbor that will change the trajectory of WWII and the world.

Thought Starter

Post or hand out copies of a photo of the attack on Pearl Harbor, like the one found here, from the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/98506923/>

What do you think is happening in this photo? What evidence can you point to? What clues do you see about where this might have taken place? Who do you think might have taken this photo? Why might it have been taken?

Did You Know?

Twenty-three sets of brothers died on the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Though family members often served on the same ship before World War II, U.S. officials discouraged the practice after Pearl Harbor.

People to Know

- Emperor Hirohito
- Hideki Tojo
- Isoroku Yamamoto

Terms to Know

- Rape of Nanking
- Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere
- Pearl Harbor

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the reasons Japan signed the Tripartite Pact? What were they hoping to achieve through expansion?
- Why was Pearl Harbor an important location for the U.S. Navy? Why does Japan decide to attack Pearl Harbor, and why did they think the attack would be successful?
- How did the United States respond to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Primary Sources

Remember Pearl Harbor

Watch some or all of these videos featuring first-hand accounts of the attack on Pearl Harbor from U.S. Navy veterans: <https://www.history.com/playlists/pearl-harbor-the-last-word?video=2>

Suggested Activity

Ask students to prepare an artistic response to these first-hand accounts. Examples could include (1) "Found poetry" using the words of Pearl Harbor survivors (2) A portrait of a Pearl Harbor survivor (3) A drawing, painting or cartoon of an event described by a survivor (4) A dialog or scene from a play about an event described by a survivor

From The National World War II Museum

The Path to Pearl Harbor

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/path-pearl-harbor>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: The War at Sea

In 1940, German U-boats are sinking British hopes of victory. From the sidelines, FDR loans Britain much-needed aid and maneuvers U.S. patrols to the edge of an “undeclared war” with Germany. Meeting at a game-changing summit, Churchill and FDR align their goals. But as America and Britain get closer, so do the German U-boats. Once at war, the US will face not only German ships but the might of the Japanese empire. At Midway, America’s young and inexperienced forces will fight for control of the sea.

Thought Starter

Find Great Britain on a map. What do you notice about it? What do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of its size and location?

Did You Know?

At Midway, the U.S. Navy benefited from a relatively new technology—radar. Radar allowed ships to detect Japanese aircraft and better prepare for attacks. In contrast, the Japanese ships relied solely on human lookouts.

People to Know

- Karl Donitz
- Winston Churchill
- Franklin Roosevelt
- Chester Nimitz

Terms to Know

- Arsenal of democracy
- U-boats
- Lend-lease
- Aircraft carrier

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the reasons that shipping was essential to the British war effort?
- What happened at the Atlantic Conference? What was the significance of this meeting?
- What happened at the Battle of Midway? What role did intelligence play in the Allied victory? Why is it often described as a turning point?

Primary Sources

The USS Yorktown played a crucial role in the Allied victory at Midway but was heavily damaged by Japanese bombers and torpedo planes and sank on June 7, 1942. These veteran oral histories from The National WWII Museum help tell the story of the battle.

<https://youtu.be/HWQDoLVMZyA>

Suggested Activity

As students watch the section of the episode about the Battle of Midway, ask them to take notes on the details presented. Then, watch the oral histories. Ask students to create a Venn diagram or short written analysis identifying what details appear in both sources, what is unique to the oral histories (e.g. emotions, sensory details, personal perspective), and what is emphasized more in the episode (e.g. strategy, dates, outcomes). Then, discuss as a class: What was surprising or especially interesting about the oral histories? How do personal narratives help deepen historical understanding? What are some of the limitations of both first-person accounts and secondary sources?

From The National World War II Museum Article: The Battle of Midway

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/battle-midway>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Guadalcanal

America's "day of infamy" at Pearl Harbor is the birth of a new Japanese empire. Japan launches unprecedented attacks across Asia, proclaiming "Asia for the Asians" and pushing out Western colonial powers. Fueled by ideology, Japan's armies are seemingly unstoppable – until a confrontation with the 1st Marine Division of the United States at Guadalcanal becomes a testing ground in a war without mercy.

Thought Starter

What is an empire? What are some characteristics of an empire? Can you think of any examples of empires you've learned about in the past? Do any empires still exist?

Did You Know?

Troops on Guadalcanal faced not only intense combat, but severe hot and humid weather, malnutrition, and exposure to tropical disease.

People to Know

- Douglas MacArthur
- U.S. Marine Corps
- William "Bull" Halsey

Terms to Know

- Bushido
- Surrender
- Battle of attrition

Discussion Questions

- Who controls the Philippines when World War II begins? Why does Japan want to control the Philippines?
- What does it mean to surrender? What is the Japanese attitude toward surrender? What significance did this have in the Pacific theater?
- What challenges do the U.S. Marines face at Guadalcanal? How would you describe the fighting at Guadalcanal? What is the battle's significance?

Primary Sources

In 1943, journalist and author Richard Tregaskis published *Guadalcanal Diary*, a personal account of the Battle of Guadalcanal. A copy of the diary is available courtesy of the Internet Archive here: <https://archive.org/details/american-library-02-guadalcanal-diary-1943.-mc-kay-d-m-ia/page/n21/mode/2up>

Suggested Activity

After reading the diary, ask students to create a cartoon or comic strip based on his experiences, using 2-3 direct quotes. The art should address (1) the events of Guadalcanal (2) the conditions and circumstances that shaped the fighting (3) the emotions and questions Tregaskis addresses and asks in his diary.

From The National World War II Museum Article: The Pacific Strategy, 1941-1944

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/pacific-strategy-1941-1944>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Darkness Falls

Under Adolf Hitler's leadership, anti-Semitic policies escalate from discrimination to widespread genocide. The state-sponsored persecution features mobile killing squads conducting mass shootings, and then purpose-built death camps, where millions of men, women and children are murdered by poison gas.

Thought Starter

What are some things you already know about the Holocaust? What are some questions you have?

Did You Know?

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored persecution and mass murder of millions of European Jews, Romani people, the intellectually disabled, political dissidents, and homosexuals by the German Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945.

People to Know

- Heinrich Himmler
- Reinhard Heydrich
- Joseph Goebbels
- The Frank Family

Terms to Know

- Anti-Semitism
- Nuremberg Laws
- Kristallnacht

Discussion Questions

- What was the "Final Solution" and what steps did Hitler and the Nazis take to carry it out?
- What are some ways that Jewish people resisted the Nazis?
- How do the Allies react and respond to the Holocaust? Do you agree with their response? Why or why not?

Primary Sources

Survivor Account

In mid-June 1944, when she was 14 years old, Agi Laszlo Geva's family was deported from their home in Hungary to the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. In this video, filmed in 2022, she talked about her experience.

<https://www.history.com/videos/the-proof-of-survival-agnes-laszlo-gevas-holocaust-testimony>

Suggested Activity

After viewing the video, lead a guided reflection. Questions could include: What part of Agi Geva's story stood out most to you? Why? What emotions did you feel while listening to her story? What do you think she most wanted people today to understand about the Holocaust? How is listening to a survivor story different from reading about the Holocaust? Why is it important to hear stories directly from survivors? What will you remember about her story and what are you still curious about?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The Holocaust

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/holocaust>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Operation Torch

In 1942, Eisenhower leads the first joint U.S.-British operation of the war – Operation Torch—successfully landing thousands of untested U.S. troops on the Vichy controlled shores of North Africa. The Allies race to trap the German forces in Tunisia, resulting in fearsome tank battles against the famed “Desert Fox,” German Field Marshall Erwin Rommel and his battle-tested Afrika Korps.

Thought Starter

If you were trying to win a game, do you think it would be better to take a big risk to win quickly (and potentially lose quickly) or play it safe and build momentum? Why?

Did You Know?

The Allies’ launch of Operation Torch in North Africa was, in part, an attempt to ease pressure on the Soviet Union by drawing Axis forces away from the Eastern Front.

People to Know

- Dwight D. Eisenhower
- Erwin Rommel
- George S. Patton

Terms to Know

- Empire
- Suez Canal
- Amphibious operation
- Landing craft

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the challenges the Allies face in Operation Torch?
- What role do the French play in North Africa? What is the French reaction to Operation Torch?
- What do you think Winston Churchill meant when he said, “There is only one thing worse than fighting with allies, and that is fighting without them”?

Primary Sources

Operation Torch Image Gallery

Provide students with time to review the images in the Operation Torch Image Gallery from the Naval History and Heritage Command: <https://www.history.navy.mil/browse-by-topic/wars-conflicts-and-operations/world-war-ii/1942/operation-torch/operation-torch-image-gallery.html>

As they review the images, ask students to note (1) what they see in the photographs (2) what they think might be happening in the photos (3) what questions they have about the photos.

Suggested Activity

After reviewing the photographs, ask students to choose 3 photographs to caption. For each photograph, ask students to write three captions: (1) a neutral caption (2) a pro-Allied caption and (3) a skeptical or critical caption. Then, discuss as a class: How did your different captions change the story being told? What language contributed to that shift? What other ways are there to shift how an audience interprets an image? Can an image ever be truly neutral? Why or why not?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The U.S. Invasion of North Africa

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/us-invasion-north-africa>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Secrets and Lies

Amid World War II's chaos, a hidden battle rages — a war of espionage, deception, and codebreaking. At Bletchley Park, Alan Turing and his team race to crack Germany's "unbreakable" Enigma Code in a bid to thwart Nazi plans and save Britain from invasion. But as the codes evolve, daring missions and deadly risks intensify.

Thought Starter

Set a 3-minute timer and see if students can solve the code below. When time expires, see if anyone has solved the code. If not, explain that it is a Caesar cipher, and to solve it, you substitute each letter with the letter 3 spaces backward in the alphabet. Can students now solve the code? (Answer: This is a secret message.)

KLV LV D VHFUHW PHVVDJH

Did You Know?

By 1945, 75 percent of Bletchley Park's staff were women.

People to Know

- Alistair Denniston
- Alan Turing

Terms to Know

- Bletchley Park
- Enigma machine
- Ultra

Discussion Questions

- What part did codes and espionage play in World War II? Why was the work done at Bletchley Park important?
- Do you think codes and espionage are still important to modern militaries? Why or why not?

Primary Sources

In 1941, Alan Turing and other leaders at Bletchley Park wrote a letter directly to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, urgently requesting more resources for the facility's work. The letter can be found here, courtesy of the UK National Archive: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/a-dramatic-plea-for-churchills-help/>

Suggested Activity

Ask students to review the letter and then compose a response from the perspective of the prime minister that notes (1) whether or not the requested resources will be supplied and why the decision has been made (2) the challenges to providing the resources and (3) an analysis of the importance of the work being done at Bletchley Park.

From The National World War II Museum

Article: Alan Turing and the Hidden Heroes of Bletchley Park

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/alan-turing-betchley-park>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Stalingrad

In 1942, Hitler launches his second offensive in the Soviet Union: Operation Blue. Quickly becoming impatient, Hitler splits his force in an attempt to capture both the Caucasus oil fields and Stalingrad. Initially successful, the German Sixth Army captures up to 90% of the city until they are trapped by General Zhukov's men. The Soviet attacks and the unforgiving Russian winter steadily wipe out the German troops until their leader, General Paulus, surrenders. Furious, Hitler launches his final attack, ending all hopes for a German victory on the Eastern Front.

Thought Starter

What do you think would matter most in a battle: supplies, weather, leadership, or morale?

Did You Know?

Nearly 1 million Soviet women served on the front lines during World War II. This included an all-female regiment of dive-bombers known as the "Night Witches," who flew biplanes on night bombing raids behind German lines.

People to Know

- Joseph Stalin
- Gen. Friedrich Paulus
- Field Marshal Georgy Zhukov

Terms to Know

- Stalingrad
- Siege
- Urban warfare

Discussion Questions

- In what ways was oil important to the war effort? How did each side access the oil needed to wage war?
- Why is Stalingrad a strategically important city? How is it symbolically important?
- What are some of the reasons Germany was unsuccessful at the Battle of Stalingrad?

Primary Sources

These translations of diary entries written by a German soldier at the Battle of Stalingrad are courtesy of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History:

https://www.gilderlehrman.org/sites/default/files/inline-pdfs/william_hoffman_diary_of_a_germany_soldier.pdf

Suggested Activity

Have students read the diary entries. While reading, students should mark each entry as green, yellow or red or with a 1-10 scale to indicate the soldier's mood. Then, discuss as a class: How does the soldier's attitude and mood change over time? What factors and events contribute to his changing attitude and tone? How might a Soviet soldier's diary compare with this one?

From The National World War II Museum Article: *Unsung Witnesses of the Battle of Stalingrad*

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/unsung-witnesses-battle-stalingrad>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

Episode Guide: Italy

In the summer of 1943, after a successful campaign in North Africa, Churchill convinces Roosevelt that the best way forward is an invasion of the island of Sicily. But what is thought to be a quick and decisive attack instead becomes a months-long slog up the Italian peninsula, as Hitler has no intention of giving up this key part of his empire without a fight.

Thought Starter

Do you think it would be more difficult to fight a war in the mountains or on flat land? What makes you think so?

Did You Know?

The 100th Infantry Battalion, comprised of more than 1,400 Japanese American troops, earned its nickname, the “Purple Heart Battalion,” in large part due to extensive casualties suffered at Monte Cassino and Anzio.

People to Know

- George S. Patton
- Bernard Law Montgomery
- Benito Mussolini

Terms to Know

- Sicily
- Monte Cassino
- Gliders

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the reasons the Allies decide to invade Italy?
- What role do the Tuskegee Airmen play in Italy?
- How does the relationship between the U.S. and Great Britain change after the invasion of Italy?

Primary Sources

Operation Mincemeat, an Allied ruse designed to trick Germany into leaving Sicily undefended prior to its invasion, is often described as one of the most successful intelligence operations of the war. This website, from the UK’s University of Plymouth, allows access to a number of primary sources related to Operation Mincemeat: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/discover/what-was-operation-mincemeat>

Suggested Activity

Ask students to read about Operation Mincemeat and review the materials created to fool the Germans. Then, discuss as a class or ask students to respond in writing: Could an operation like this be successful today? Why or why not? What might intelligence operatives today have to do to achieve a similar effect?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The Allied Campaign in Italy

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/allied-campaign-italy-1943-45-timeline-part-one>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Battle for the Skies

In 1942 the Allies are eager to challenge the Luftwaffe's superiority in the air. The RAF and U.S. Army Air Forces combine operations to bomb the industrial heart of Germany and destroy German air power ahead of the upcoming Allied invasion of France. Airmen on both sides will suffer grievous losses—and so will civilians below.

Thought Starter

If one side in a war controls the air, what advantages do they have?

Did You Know?

During just one week in October 1943—which became known as “Black Week”—the Eighth Air Force lost 148 bombers, nearly 13 percent of its attacking aircraft, and some 1,500 crew during bombing raids against Germany.

People to Know

- Gen. Henry “Hap” Arnold
- Eighth Air Force
- Herman Göring

Terms to Know

- Strategic Bombing
- Luftwaffe
- Norden bombsight

Discussion Questions

- How did air warfare change during this period? What was the difference between the British and American strategies?
- What were some of the challenges faced by American bomber crews?
- Why was destroying the Luftwaffe an important goal for the Allies?

Primary Sources

In this oral history from The National WWII Museum, former B-17 bomber pilot John H. “Lucky” Luckadoo recounts his experiences with the Eighth Air Force.

<https://www.ww2online.org/view/john-luckadoo>

Suggested Activity

Watch segments 6, 7, and 8 of the oral history as a class. Then, ask students to reflect upon what they heard: What dangers are described? What emotions does the pilot express? What does this interview reveal about air warfare?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The Eighth Air Force vs. The Luftwaffe

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/eighth-air-force-vs-luftwaffe>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Overlord

After years of discussion over how to take the fight directly to Germany, the Allies set a target for a cross-channel invasion: Normandy, spring of 1944. But the road to Operation Overlord is no easy journey, with Hitler lying in wait. For the Allies, it's a race to pull off one of the most complicated operations in military history.

Thought Starter

What factors might you need to consider before invading a heavily defended coastline?

Did You Know?

Nearly 160,000 Allied troops from 15 nations; more than 23,000 airborne troops; 7,000 naval vessels; and 12,000 aircraft took part in the D-Day invasion.

People to Know

- Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower
- Field Marshal Erwin Rommel

Terms to Know

- Atlantic Wall
- Operation Overlord / D-Day
- Paratrooper

Discussion Questions

- How did Eisenhower want to use air power in preparation for D-Day? What challenges did he face in implementing his strategy?
- What part did nature, geography and the environment play in D-Day?
- How did mistakes by Hitler and German military leadership contribute to the success of the D-Day invasion?

Primary Sources

On the eve of the D-Day invasion, General Dwight D. Eisenhower issued a statement to the soldiers, sailors, and airmen of the Allied Expeditionary Force. You can find the original document and a transcript, courtesy of the National Archives, here: <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/general-eisenhowers-order-of-the-day>

Suggested Activity

Ask students to read Eisenhower's message and consider the audience, main goals, and tone of Eisenhower's message. Students can then prepare a written response discussing: What information does Eisenhower want troops to have? What information might he have left out? How might his message have been received by the troops? What questions might they have?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: D-Day: The Allies Invade Europe

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/d-day-allies-invade-europe>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Long Road to Tokyo

The B-29 bomber is the Allies' best chance to strike Japan, and they turn to China as a potential air base. But Japan launches its largest land offensive of the war to gain control of Asia, leading to brutal fighting in the jungles and plains of South Asia. All the while the U.S. Navy is speeding through the Pacific towards the Mariana Islands, another potential future B-29 base.

Thought Starter

How many miles is the U.S. from Japan? Take a guess.

What do you think would be difficult about fighting a war many thousands of miles from home?

Did You Know?

The B-29 was the first bomber to feature a pressurized crew compartment, allowing crew to fly in relative comfort without the constant need to wear heavy oxygen masks or heated suits.

People to Know

- Chiang Kai-shek
- Gen. Joseph Stilwell
- Field Marshal William Slim

Terms to Know

- B-29 Superfortress
- India-China Ferry
- Burma Road

Discussion Questions

- What are some of the challenges China faced during World War II?
- Where are the Mariana Islands and why were they important to Allied military strategy?
- What role did engineering and construction play in World War II?

Primary Sources

In this oral history from The National WWII Museum, veteran Paul Dietzel recounts his experiences as a copilot of a B-29 Superfortress during World War II: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/paul-dietzel-6th-bombardment-group>

Suggested Activity

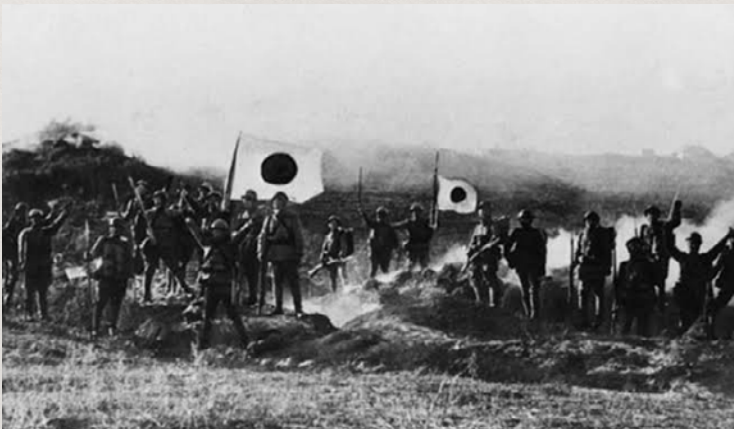
Ask students to watch the segments "Tinian," "Iwo Jima" and/or "Two Rough Missions." Then ask them to prepare a job description and/or job interview questions for a B-29 pilot. What personality traits or skills were important to be successful at this job?

From The National World War II Museum Article: Banzai Attack: Saipan, by Larry Decuers

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/banzai-attack-saipan>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Home Front

As the tide begins to turn against the Axis powers, the leaders of Germany and Japan deploy opposite strategies on their home fronts. Hitler and his propaganda minister do everything in their power to shield the German people from the war, while Hideki Tojo asks the Japanese to sacrifice more and more to support the war effort. But both governments' demands of their people will grow more intense – and deadly.

Thought Starter

Do you think civilian hardships like bombing raids and food shortages strengthen or weaken home front resolve during wartime? Why do you think so?

Did You Know?

By 1944, so many German men were away fighting that the Nazi government created the Volkssturm—a “people’s army” of boys as young as 16 and men as old as 60—to defend the home front.

People to Know

- Albert Speer
- Hideki Tojo
- Joseph Goebbels

Terms to Know

- Home front
- Rationing
- Propaganda

Discussion Questions

- Describe the German and Japanese home fronts in the later years of the war. How are they similar? How are they different?
- How did the German and Japanese governments use propaganda on the home front?
- In what ways can public opinion of the government play a role in a war’s outcome?

Primary Sources

These German propaganda posters, from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, are examples of how Nazi leadership attempted to rally the German home front to the Nazi cause.

https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/20150703-propaganda-3-3_Theme-Printables.pdf

Suggested Activity

Review the posters as a class or in small groups. Ask students to choose two posters and answer the following questions: Who is the intended audience? What message is it sending? What feelings is the artist trying to provoke? Why do you think the artist chose the symbols, colors, and subject matter? How are the two posters similar and different in their message and tactics?

From The National World War II Museum
Article: The Anti-Axis Art of Antonio Arias Bernal, by Chase Tomlin

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/anti-axis-art-antonio-arias-bernal>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Resistance

Resistance to Nazi occupation and oppression has been a constant throughout the war. In the summer of 1944, two cities revolt against the Nazis but meet very different outcomes. And some, living and dying through the Holocaust, take their fate into their own hands and mount organized resistance in the direst of circumstances.

Thought Starter

And thou shalt act as if / on thee and on thy deed / Depended the fate of all Germany / And thou alone must answer for it – German resistance group member Kurt Huber

What do you think this poem means?

Did You Know?

In occupied France, even something as simple as listening to banned radio broadcasts or sharing underground newspapers was considered an act of resistance.

People to Know

- Gen. Charles de Gaulle
- Free French forces
- Polish Home Army

Terms to Know

- Resistance
- Order for Warsaw

Discussion Questions

- Describe what happened to Warsaw in 1944. Why did Stalin refuse to assist the Polish Home Army?
- Describe the resistance movement at the Auschwitz-Birkenau killing center. What was it able to accomplish?
- What are some other examples of resistance? Can small acts of resistance be effective?

Primary Sources

In this interview from The National WWII Museum, Nicole Spangenberg talks about her work with the French Resistance while she was still a teenager: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/podcasts/world-war-ii-topic/season-4-veteran-voices/season-4-episode-3-french-teenager>

Suggested Activity

Watch or listen to the interview with Nicole Spangenberg as a class. Then ask students to choose one quote from the interview that resonated with them and reflect in writing: Why did this quote stand out to you? What does it reveal about Spangenberg's experience? What does it reveal about the war as a whole?

From The National World War II Museum
Article: **V for Victory: A Sign of Resistance**, by Jennifer Putnam, PhD

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/v-victory-sign-resistance>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: No Surrender

In 1944–45, as Allied victory in Europe seems all but assured, the fighting in the Pacific intensifies. The U.S. and Japan suffer terrible losses in the Philippines and on Iwo Jima. Roosevelt understands what ordinary Americans are only beginning to realize: in a clash between a nation which demands unconditional surrender and a nation which refuses to surrender, the worst is still to come.

Thought Starter

Hand out or display a copy of Joe Rosenthal's iconic photo of the Iwo Jima flag-raising.

What do you think is happening in this photo? Where might it have taken place? What makes you think so?

Did You Know?

Of the approximately 18,000 Japanese soldiers who took part in the Battle of Iwo Jima, 216 were captured by U.S. Marines. The rest were killed in action.

People to Know

- Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Gen. Douglas MacArthur

Terms to Know

- Aircraft Carrier
- Kamikaze
- Mount Suribachi

Discussion Questions

- What challenges did the Allies face in the Pacific theater? How did they overcome these challenges?
- Why did Japan begin using kamikaze attacks? How did these attacks impact the Allies?
- How did the Japanese soldiers view surrender? How does this view shape the war in the Pacific?

Primary Sources

Return students' attention to Joe Rosenthal's iconic photograph of the flag-raising at Iwo Jima, which is available from the National Archives here: <https://www.archives.gov/research/still-pictures/highlights/flag-raising-on-iwo-jima>

Suggested Activity

Discuss as a class: What was correct and incorrect about your initial analysis of this photo? How do you think it was distributed in 1944? What impact do you think it had? Then, ask students to consider how a similar photo might be distributed today. Would it have the same impact? Why or not?

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The Battle of Iwo Jima

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/topics/battle-iwo-jima>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: The Last Days of the Reich

In the winter of 1944, as American and British armies are advancing across western Europe, Hitler plans one last major offensive attempt through the Ardennes forest – the Battle of the Bulge – to swing the tide of the war back in Germany’s favor. Meanwhile, the Soviet Red Army is swiftly moving across Eastern Europe to fulfill Stalin’s ultimate wish of taking Berlin.

Thought Starter

During wartime, what factors might help people keep moving forward in the face of overwhelming odds? Why do you think so?

Did You Know?

The Battle of the Bulge got its name from the way the German offensive created a large “bulge” in the Allied front lines on maps before eventually being pushed back.

People to Know

- Adolf Hitler
- Dwight Eisenhower
- Gen. George S. Patton

Terms to Know

- Ardennes Offensive
- 101st Airborne Division
- Hitler Youth

Discussion Questions

- What challenges does the 101st Airborne Division face at Bastogne?
- How would you describe the Battle of Berlin? What are some of the reasons it unfolded the way it did?
- Why do you think Gen. Eisenhower decided not to compete with the Soviets to take Berlin?

Primary Sources

In this interview from the National Archives, World War II veterans Frank Cohn and Harry Miller discuss their experiences at the Battle of the Bulge: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ETozzyFnr_Y

Suggested Activity

Watch all or part of the interview, then reflect in writing: If this interview were a book, what would the title be? If it had 5-10 chapters, what would those chapters be titled? Write a one paragraph summary that would appear on the back of the book, and a “reviewer’s quote” that sums up your review of the “book.”

From The National World War II Museum

Article: The Battle of the Bulge

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/battle-of-the-bulge>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Endgame

The U.S. determines by early 1945 that Japan will never surrender and will need to be subdued by force. Newly sworn-in President Truman must authorize an invasion of the Japanese home islands at a terrible cost to American lives. Emperor Hirohito hopes to avoid the destruction of his land and people, but his generals are agitating for war. Both men seek a way out, but only one can deploy the most terrible weapon the world has ever seen.

Thought Starter

By June 1945, Germany had surrendered, but Japan was still fighting the Allies fiercely. How do you think civilians in the Allied and Axis countries were feeling in this moment?

Did You Know?

At the Battle of Okinawa, the U.S. Navy lost 36 ships and craft and nearly 600 aircraft in the battle; most were destroyed by kamikaze attacks.

People to Know

- Emperor Hirohito
- Harry Truman
- Dr. Leslie Groves

Terms to Know

- Manhattan Project
- Atomic Bomb
- Potsdam Declaration

Discussion Questions

- Why do the Allies initially believe an invasion of Japan is necessary to win the war? What risks does such an invasion involve?
- What is Japan's strategy at Okinawa? Is it successful?
- Why do you think President Truman decided to use the atomic bomb in Japan? Do you agree with his decision?

Primary Sources

This *Life Magazine* exhibit includes pictures of V-J Day celebrations in New York's Times Square: <https://www.life.com/history/v-j-day-kiss-times-square/>

Suggested Activity

Ask students to review the images and then write a "Postcard from Times Square" describing the scene from the point of view of a Times Square visitor. Postcards can include a summary of the events the visitor witnessed and the mood of the crowd, specific details from the photographs, and at least one question the visitor has about the celebration.

From The National World War II Museum

Article: V-J Day

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/v-j-day>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>



Episode Guide: Fall Out

The war is over, and the Allies are triumphant. The United States and the Soviet Union initially work together to establish a new world order, but over the course of the next four years these two nations will go from Allies of convenience to ideological adversaries, launching the next phase of global conflict under the shadow of nuclear war.

Thought Starter

Imagine you are a soldier returning home from World War II. What hopes and concerns might you have about returning to civilian life?

Did You Know?

Nearly 70 million people—the majority of them civilians—were killed in World War II.

People to Know

- Harry Truman
- Winston Churchill
- Joseph Stalin

Terms to Know

- United Nations
- Nuremberg Trials
- Iron Curtain

Discussion Questions

- What is the United Nations? What do the Allies hope it will accomplish?
- Describe the Allied plan for post-war Germany. Was it successful?
- What are Stalin's post-war goals? Why do tensions develop between the Soviet Union and the other Allied nations?

Primary Sources

Read Winston Churchill's March 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech here, courtesy of the UK National Archives: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/cold-war-on-file/iron-curtain-speech/>

Suggested Activity

After reading the speech, ask students to prepare a brief reflection: What is Churchill's warning about? Who is his intended audience? Is his warning justified? How might people living in different parts of the world respond differently to his message?

From The National World War II Museum
Article: Great Responsibilities and New Global Power, by Kristen D. Burton, PhD

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/new-global-power-after-world-war-ii-1945>

Resources for K-12 Teachers and Students

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers>

