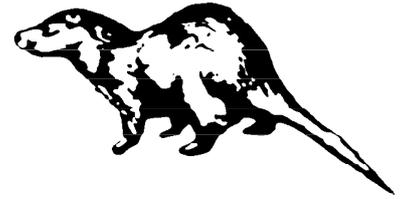


# NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



## WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR CHILDREN EVACUATED DURING WORLD WAR II?

### TEACHERS' NOTES

This was a series of three lessons completed in the middle of a term's study of the effects of World War II on the lives of children. Previous work had covered key events, dates, information about the main leaders and finding out about the Blitz and air raids, leading to the idea that some children were evacuated from their homes.

#### **Year group/class**

The class consisted of 31 Year 3 and 4 children, with a typical mixture of abilities.

#### **Teaching time**

Approximately four hours, spread over three lessons.

#### **Key question**

What was life like for children evacuated during World War II?

#### **Resources**

BBC Resource Pack: *Children in the Second World War*

Our school log book and admissions register

Items brought in by the children – letters, newspapers, ID cards, gas masks, etc.

## The Teaching: Lesson 1

Building up an understanding of evacuation and evacuees through introduction to the topic, exploring feelings of evacuees, studying a photograph to develop ideas further, the reading of an official text about evacuation, simulating the steps they would take in packing their own evacuation suitcases, and drawing their own picture of an evacuee with thought bubbles.

### Episode 1

*Focus: Oral introduction to the topic, vocabulary, brainstorm of feelings of evacuees.*

In an oral introduction to the topic, I explained to the class how evacuation started, why children were evacuated, and where evacuees were sent. We began a list of new vocabulary on the board – *evacuee*, *evacuated*, *evacuation* – and added to it as the lesson progressed.

Each word was discussed and used in context.

The children were then asked to brainstorm the feelings of evacuees as they left their homes, families and possessions. I made a list of feelings on the board as the discussion progressed.

### Episode 2

*Focus: Visual literacy – using a photograph to empathise and articulate feelings.*

In pairs, the children were given a photograph of evacuees boarding a train. I asked each pair to discuss what the children were doing, what they were taking with them and what emotions they were showing. As the children's ideas expanded, I added their further ideas to the list of feelings.

### Episode 3

*Focus: Reading a difficult and challenging text as the basis for planning their own evacuee suitcase.*

Each child was then given an extract from a government wartime document entitled: *War and Emergency Information and Instructions*.

We read the text together to support the less able readers in the class.

The children were asked to mark the text to show:

- 1 what evacuees needed to take with them; and
- 2 any suggestions of the Government's position on evacuation – whether or not it was compulsory, and how the Government tried to persuade people that evacuation was a good idea.

Afterwards the children decided to collect items for an evacuee's suitcase.

#### **Episode 4**

*Focus: Reconstruction from text – working from a newspaper headline and report.*

I then displayed an enlarged copy of a newspaper headline and the children were asked to predict the content of the report from the headline.

The children were given a copy of the report, which described the experiences of a young girl from the East End of London seeing the countryside for the first time. We discussed the impression the report gave of the train journey (fun, relaxed, exciting, carefree) and the evacuee's impressions of the countryside (amazement, ignorance).

We also discussed what the newspaper was trying to do in this article; some children were able to identify that it was trying to allay any anxieties parents had about the happiness and well-being of their children, and to reassure them that they had made the right decision in choosing evacuation.

#### **Episode 5**

*Focus: Visual representation and labelling – drawing a picture of an evacuee and expressing thoughts.*

The lesson finished with me asking the children to draw an evacuee, complete with possessions, and to show the child's thoughts and feelings.

Most of the class wrote the evacuee's thoughts in bubbles around him/her, while some of the less able children recorded the evacuee's feelings using single words.

## Evaluation of Lesson 1

The children were good at brainstorming the emotions of an evacuee. The photographs were photocopied and were rather dark, so I displayed the originals as well.

All children enjoyed the text-marking exercise as a quick way of locating and showing information, which even the least able could manage well.

The newspaper report was useful for countering the idea most of the children had that evacuees were unhappy and worried about leaving home.

It contained some humorous ideas, which helped to broaden the children's thinking. Most children made an excellent drawing of an evacuee, using the photographs and information they had gathered, and using thought bubbles to show that they could begin to empathise with children in that situation.

Having so many different sources of information to draw on meant that we covered a lot in one lesson.

I was exhausted!

## The Teaching: Lesson 2

Evacuation and the school: reading of log book entries, relating these to an overall picture of what evacuation involved, and further extending understanding through looking at a video.

### Episode 1

*Focus: Whole class reading of text – extract from a school log book.*

I showed the children our school's admissions register and log book from the time of World War II, and I explained the purpose of each.

Then I put an extract from another school's log book up on the overhead projector.

We read the extract together and discussed the unfamiliar vocabulary. This was added to our list from the previous lesson and included words such as *host*, *billet* and *verminous*.

We discussed what the extract told us about the life of evacuees.

## Episode 2

*Focus: Problem-solving discussion – deciding whether statements were true or false when compared with information in the school log book.*

True or false? I gave the children a set of statements to discuss with a partner.

They had to identify whether each one was true or false, using the log book extract as the evidence for their opinions. They had to agree with each other before recording their view.

This was followed by whole class feedback, in which differences of opinion were discussed. Some of the statements were not easy to assess and could be interpreted either way, but different views were accepted as long as sound reasons were given to substantiate them.

## Episode 3

*Focus: Reading extracts from the school log book.*

I then read extracts from our school log book which I had selected to reinforce some of the information in the extract we'd read on the OHP. The admissions register and school log book were left out for the children to look at.

## Episode 4

*Focus: Viewing a video recreating evacuee life.*

We finished the lesson with one of the BBC TV programmes for schools. It included recreated scenes depicting evacuees being billeted with host families, and accounts by evacuees describing their experiences.

## Evaluation of Lesson 2

I was really pleased with the interest the children showed in exploring the school's log book and admissions register. Over the next couple of weeks they kept coming to me with new facts they had discovered, and some of the children were thrilled to find their own address listed as one that had accepted evacuees.

A lot of additional information was gleaned about schooling in the 1940s, including how much time was lost through snow and ‘inclement weather’ causing the school to close, how the children were inspected on their gardening, and how head lice were even more of a problem then than now.

I felt that the paired true or false activity was useful for the children to have to justify their ideas to each other. This meant that everyone had to take part in the discussion rather than letting others contribute.

### **The Teaching: Lesson 3**

Demonstration, modelling, and implementation of the letter genre through the medium of working on an evacuee’s letters.

#### **Episode 1**

*Focus: Reading an evacuee’s letters in groups.*

We were fortunate in that one of the children in the class has a grandfather who was evacuated during the war and had kept copies of the letters he had sent home from his billet.

The children were put into mixed ability groups of four or five, and each group was given a copy of one of the letters to read, discuss, make notes about, and then report back to the class what they had found out about his life as an evacuee.

#### **Episode 2**

*Focus: Letter genre – demonstration, modelling and implementation.*

The children were then asked to write a letter from themselves to their parents, as if they had been evacuated, drawing on all the ideas gathered in the last few lessons.

As we had been learning how to set out letters and about appropriate tone and vocabulary for both formal and informal letters in literacy lessons, this activity gave the children the opportunity to practise and reinforce that learning within a purposeful context.

## Learning outcomes

The children:

- found out about the experiences and feelings of evacuees from a range of information sources
- used vocabulary associated with evacuation accurately and appropriately
- communicated their learning and reinforced their letter writing skills.

## Overall Evaluation

I was pleased with the quality of the children's letters. Some children demonstrated a good grasp of facts, incorporating into their letters details about head lice, the money used at the time, the games children played then, as well as using correct vocabulary such as *billet* and *host*. They also showed the ability to empathise with children in that situation. Most children were pleased with their letters and it inspired some of the more reluctant writers to write more than usual.

### **Nuffield Primary History project**

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