



Canada at War
1914-1919 | 1939-1945

Second World War

///Education Guide///



///Message to Teachers///

This guide is intended to assist teachers and students as they study Canada's involvement in the Second World War. It highlights some of the significant historical themes and events of that period but is not meant to be a comprehensive history of Canada and the war; in fact, some teachers may choose to highlight different aspects of this period in their classes, such as the naval war on Canada's doorstep or Canada's participation in the bombing offensive against Germany. Nonetheless, the content presented here constitutes a meaningful entry point into examining the country's involvement in one of the 20th century's pivotal armed conflicts. Additionally, the skills students will develop in the activities will apply to any existing units being used in class by teachers.

Developed in line with the historical thinking concepts created by the [Historical Thinking Project](#), this guide complements Canadian middle-school and high-school curricula. It invites students to deepen their understanding of the Second World War through primary- and secondary-source research and examination, engaging discussion questions and group activities.

This guide was produced by [Historica Canada](#) with the generous support of the Government of Canada. Further educational activities and resources are available on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) and [The Memory Project](#) websites. We hope that the guide will assist you in teaching this important period of Canadian history in your social studies or history classroom.

///Introduction///

The Second World War was a global conflict that lasted from 1939 to 1945. Angered by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War, Germany rejected the tenets of the treaty and began a military buildup, seizing lost territory in Europe. Attempting to contain Germany's aggression, the leaders of Great Britain and France followed a policy of appeasement, tolerating Germany's occupation of the Rhineland, Austria and Czechoslovakia in an aim to preserve peace. Appeasement failed when Germany's armed forces, under Adolf Hitler and the Nazi government, invaded Poland in September 1939 and Europe was once again entangled in armed conflict, just as it had been in the years 1914 to 1918.

Fighting alongside its allies, Canada made large military contributions to the war effort. Canadians on the home front contributed to the war by taking up employment in war industries, producing munitions, food and other goods for use in the Pacific and European theatres of war. Over 16,000 aircraft, 4,000 ships, and 800,000 military vehicles were built in Canadian factories, many by women.

Of the over one million men who enlisted to fight for Canada abroad (including those from Newfoundland, which was not yet a Canadian province), more than 44,000 were killed and some 55,000 were wounded. For those who survived, the military aided in transitioning soldiers to civilian life by providing educational opportunities, grants and loans for the purchase of land and homes, and additional funds for time served. Learning about the brave individuals along with the atrocities of the Second World War reveals the complexity of Canada's role in the international conflict, which would lead the country to a new economic and military status in the postwar world.

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Alec MacInnis, Canadian Army
(courtesy Alec MacInnis, *The Memory Project*, Historica Canada).

Peggy Lee, Women's Ambulance Corps (St. John's Ambulance), 1942 (courtesy Peggy Lee, *The Memory Project*, Historica Canada).

Online Resources

The following resources are referenced throughout this guide. They can assist with learning about and teaching Canada's involvement in the Second World War.

Canada at War (1914-1919 | 1939-1945)
Canada1914-1945.ca

The Historical Thinking Project
historicalthinking.ca

The Canadian Encyclopedia – Second World War Collection
TheCanadianEncyclopedia.ca/en/article/second-world-war-wwii

Library and Archives Canada
bac-lac.gc.ca

The Memory Project – An archive of first-hand accounts and photographs of veterans of the Second World War
thememoryproject.com/stories/WWII

The Canadian War Museum – Canada and the Second World War
warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/chrono/1931crisis_e.shtml



SECOND WORLD WAR TIMELINE

1 September 1939

Germany invades Poland. Two days later, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain declares that "this country is at war with Germany."

A motorcycle unit of the Nazi army, followed by trucks, is shown during the German invasion of Poland, 1939 (courtesy Associated Press/CP # 08900161).



17 December 1939

Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King announces the creation of the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan, an agreement between Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia to train airmen from these countries in Canada during the war.

26 March 1940

Prime Minister King and the Liberal Party win the federal election with a large majority, aided by a promise to avoid enacting conscription legislation for war service.

Survivors from the Battle of Hong Kong who were held at Ohashi Prison Camp in Japan and liberated, after four years of captivity, on 15 September 1945 (courtesy George MacDonell, *The Memory Project*, Historica Canada).

10 July 1940

The Battle of Britain begins. Around 100 Canadians serving in the Royal Canadian Air Force participate in this battle and 23 lose their lives. Keeping Britain as a "foothold" in Europe is of strategic importance to the eventual offensive against Germany.



8–25 December 1941

Canadian soldiers fight in the Battle of Hong Kong. Approximately 290 soldiers are killed, while around 260 of the approximately 1,700 captured Canadians will die in Japanese prisoner of war camps.

1939

JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1940

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

1941

JAN
FEB
MAR
APR
MAY
JUN
JUL
AUG
SEP
OCT
NOV
DEC

3 September 1939

The SS *Athenia*, sailing from Glasgow to Montréal with 469 Canadians on board, is sunk by a German U-boat. Many consider this the beginning of the Battle of the Atlantic, the longest sustained naval campaign of the Second World War, in which the Royal Canadian Navy would play a key role.

Unidentified ratings manning a two-pounder anti-aircraft gun aboard HMCS Assiniboine, 10 July 1940 (courtesy Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-104057).



10 September 1939

After almost unanimous consent in the House of Commons and the Senate, Canada declares war on Germany. Over 58,000 Canadian men enlist that month for military service.

January 1940

The federal government launches the first Victory Loan campaign of the Second World War to finance the military effort. Over the next five years, Canadians invest more than \$12 billion in these government-issued bonds.



CWAC platoon marching (courtesy Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/R112-1282-X-E).

2 July 1941

The federal government establishes the Canadian Women's Auxiliary Air Force, the first military division open to women in Canada. As the war progresses, the government creates army and navy divisions for women, called the Canadian Women's Army Corps and the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service.

Nations involved in the conflict:

ALLIED POWERS (SELECTED)	AXIS POWERS (SELECTED)
Canada	Germany
Great Britain	Italy
France	Japan
United States	Hungary
Soviet Union	Romania
China	Bulgaria

Many of the terms highlighted in purple in the timeline are related to the Second World War. If you are unfamiliar with any of these terms, look up their definition.

TIMELINE (CONTINUED)

1942

16 August 1942

1,946 Canadians are captured and 916 killed in a disastrous military raid against the German-held French port of Dieppe.

Unidentified Canadian soldiers landing on Juno Beach, 6 June 1944 (courtesy Lieut. Ken Bell/Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-132655).



6 June 1944

Allied forces land in Normandy, on the French coast, which begins the liberation of Western Europe from Nazi occupation. Canadian soldiers land at a beach code-named Juno and, after fierce fighting and many casualties, break the German positions.

27 April 1942

A national plebiscite on releasing the government from its promise to avoid bringing in military conscription is held. The “yes” vote to release the government from its promise is decisive across the country, except in Québec. Most Québécois are against conscription.

20–27 December 1943

Canadian soldiers participate in the Battle of Ortona during the bloodiest month of the Italian campaign. A week of fierce fighting results in 650 Canadian casualties, with over 200 dead.

1943

1944

30 August 1944

The Canadian public begins to learn of the atrocities committed by the Nazi regime when major newspapers across the country including the *Toronto Star*, *The Globe and Mail* and the *Winnipeg Free Press* carry front page articles about the Majdanek (Lublin) Nazi extermination camp in Poland.



Crowd of Dutch civilians celebrating the liberation of Utrecht by the Canadian Army, 7 May 1945 (courtesy Alexander Mackenzie Stirton/Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-134376).

Oct–Nov 1944

Oct–Nov 1944

The King government, under enormous pressure due to a shortage of infantry, authorizes the transfer of 16,000 conscripts overseas (fewer than 13,000 were actually sent). English- and French-speaking relations are badly damaged.

Canadian soldiers participate in the Battle of the Scheldt, which begins the liberation of the Netherlands from occupying Nazi forces.

1945

15 August 1945

Victory over Japan (VJ) Day marks Japanese surrender and comes just days after the United States drops two atomic bombs, one on Hiroshima (6 August) and one on Nagasaki (9 August), instantly killing an estimated total of 100,000–150,000 people.

7 May 1945

The German government's surrender ends the war in Europe. The next day, Victory in Europe (VE) Day celebrations take place across Canada.

Arrival of Jewish refugees in Canada, 1948 (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-3301-3).



10 December 1948

The United Nations, of which Canada is a founding member, adopts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The declaration stems from a need to prevent large-scale human rights violations such as those that happened during the war. Canadian lawyer John Peters Humphrey is instrumental in drafting the declaration.

1947

1 May 1947

Prime Minister King declares that Canada intends to increase its population through immigration. Canada authorizes the entry of European refugees fleeing the war's aftermath, referred to as displaced persons. The federal government permits Holocaust survivors to apply to become Canadians beginning in 1945.

1948

TIMELINE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Many people and events related to the Second World War are not included in the timeline. Identify two and provide an argument for their inclusion.
2. What were Canada's reasons for entering the war? How did this differ from Canada's entrance into the First World War?
Read the Second World War article on *The Canadian Encyclopedia* and refer to Historica Canada's First World War Education Guide available on the *Canada at War* website for background information.

///Canada in Battle///

THE BATTLE OF HONG KONG

The Canadian Army's first engagement of the Second World War came at Hong Kong, a British colony on the coast of China to which Canada had sent a small force to reinforce the existing British garrison. On 8 December 1941, Japanese troops attacked. On 25 December, the vastly outnumbered British and Canadian forces surrendered to the Japanese. Canadian losses were heavy: of the nearly 2,000 soldiers involved in the battle, approximately 290 were killed and approximately 264 died in Japanese prisoner of war camps.

POSTER ANALYSIS

To the right is a poster used to recruit men into military service.

1. Who do you think is the intended audience?
2. Does the poster use positive or negative messages to make its point?



Poster: "Let's Go... Canada!"
(courtesy Canadian War Museum/
CWM # 20010129-0277).

Consider: when analyzing a primary source, specific words, sources, symbols, images and dates may offer useful details.

For more information on reviewing primary sources, please see "A Guide to Primary Sources" on *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* Learning Centre.

HERITAGE MINUTES

Go to the Historica Canada website and view the *Heritage Minute* about John Osborn. Company Sergeant Major Osborn was posthumously honoured with the only Victoria Cross (the highest medal for bravery) awarded for the Battle of Hong Kong.

For additional video resources, Historica Canada's website features a number of *Heritage Minutes* related to the Second World War, including clips on Tommy Prince, Pauline Vanier, Mona Parsons, Marion Orr, John Humphrey and postwar housing ("Home from the Wars").

WORKING WITH PRIMARY SOURCES

Find a primary source on your own that illustrates some aspect of the Second World War. Think about letters, diary entries, photographs or cartoons from the period. Once you have selected your source, explain in point-form notes what it reveals about the Second World War and share your findings with a partner. To find your primary source, search websites like *The Memory Project*, the *Canadian War Museum*, *Veterans Affairs Canada* or *Library and Archives Canada*.

DIEPPE RAID

Infantrymen of the Queen's Own Cameron
Highlanders of Canada going ashore during the
raid on Dieppe, 1942 (courtesy Capt. Frank Royal/
Department of National Defence/Library and
Archives Canada/PA-113245).

"A and B Companies, landing immediately in front of the Blue Beach seawall, met intense and unexpectedly heavy machine-gun fire from a number of posts on the wall, sustaining very heavy casualties as they left the landing craft."

—CAPTAIN GEORGE BROWNE, CAPTURED SOLDIER AT DIEPPE

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

In 1940, the German army invaded Belgium, the Netherlands and France. By the end of June 1940, the German army occupied much of Western Europe. The Canadian raid on the French port of Dieppe on 19 August 1942 was the Canadian Army's first major engagement in the European theatre of war. It was intended to test German coastal defences, gather intelligence, relieve German pressure on the Soviet Union and offer the Canadians some battle experience. The raid was a disaster: of the roughly 5,000 Canadians involved, more than 900 were killed and nearly 2,000 taken prisoner. In addition, Canadian losses in the air made up about a tenth of the total Allied air losses at Dieppe. But the raid was not seen as a failure right away.

Read the two editorials on page 6. For each editorial, underline or highlight positive-sounding words and statements in blue and negative-sounding words and statements in red (use any two different colours if you need to). Look up words or phrases that are new or unfamiliar to help you complete the task.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Choose one editorial from page 6 to read and note three to five new vocabulary words you learned. Summarize the main point of the editorial in one sentence.

Find a photograph from the Dieppe raid on the Internet and explain how it reflects what the raid was like. Use one piece of information from your notes to help explain the photograph.



The Winnipeg Tribune

18 AUGUST 1945

August 19 is the third anniversary of the Dieppe raid....

[T]he heavy sacrifices made on that misty August morning were not made in vain. Dieppe was a stepping stone to victory in that it gained knowledge and information immensely valuable to the success of the amphibious operations in the assault on Europe. As General Crerar said on the eve of D-Day: "The plans, the preparations, the methods and the technique which will be employed are based on the knowledge and experience bought and paid for by the 2nd Canadian Division at Dieppe. The contribution of that hazardous operation cannot be overestimated. It will prove to have been the prelude to our forthcoming and final success."

In these days of final victory our thoughts are with the gallant men who fell at Dieppe and their comrades who laid down their lives in battle before and since that freedom might endure.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

19 AUGUST 1982

It was 40 years ago this week that troops from the Second Canadian Division hit the beaches of Dieppe in the first attempt by Allied forces to penetrate the Nazi coastal defences of Occupied Europe. The ill-fated raid, for all its heroism, is a testament to the bad planning, bad execution and bad luck that can doom a military operation....

[N]o amount of wartime propaganda and press censorship could disguise the fiasco. The survivors of Dieppe knew – and shared – the truth even if their leaders considered the public's morale too fragile to withstand candor. And if the co-opted, censored press was not about to tell Canadians their boys had been used as cannon fodder, it was left to [a German newspaper] to provide the most honest assessment at the time: "As executed, the venture mocked all rules of military strategy and logic."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which editorial has a more positive tone?
2. How are the positions taken on Dieppe different in each editorial?
3. How do you explain the differences in the editorials when they are written about the same event?

THE ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

In July 1943, Canada entered into its first sustained land campaign of the war, nearly four years after it had begun, when its forces participated in the invasion of the Italian island of Sicily. In September 1943, the Canadians also formed part of the force invading mainland Italy. This "Italian Campaign" lasted to 1945, with Canada suffering approximately 26,000 dead, wounded and captured.

ORTONA

From 20–27 December 1943, Canadian soldiers fought against Axis forces throughout the town of Ortona, on Italy's Adriatic coast. The battle was one of the fiercest of the Italian Campaign and featured desperate house-to-house, room-to-room and hand-to-hand combat. Canadian soldiers used a technique called "mouse-holing." This involved blasting holes through walls of houses so soldiers could move from house to house without going out into the street where they could be shot by snipers.

"[O]ne felt a choking claustrophobia in the place. Everywhere was misery, death and destruction. I could not possibly paint, or even sketch, on that first dreadful visit."

—CANADIAN WAR ARTIST CHARLES COMFORT

Infantry of the Edmonton Regiment supported by Sherman tanks of the Three Rivers Regiment, Ortona, Italy, 23 December 1943 (courtesy T. F. Rowe/Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-114030).



Painting: *Via Dolorosa, Ortona* by Charles Comfort (courtesy Canadian War Museum/CWM # 19710261-2308).

THINK. PAIR. SHARE.

Without knowing much about the details of the battle, what would you **infer** from the archival photo (*left*) and the painting by Canadian war artist Charles Comfort (*right*)? What do they tell us about the Battle of Ortona? Discuss briefly with a partner.

INFERENCE: an educated guess based on a limited amount of information.

Find out more about the Battle of Ortona by reading *The Canadian Encyclopedia's* article on the subject. As you read through the article, use the "5Ws Reading Chart for Secondary Sources" located on the Learning Tools section of the *Canada at War* website to record key details about the battle and decide why it may be considered "historically significant."

Refer to the Historical Thinking Project to learn more about the concept of historical significance.

POSTWAR REFLECTION

The war left physical as well as emotional scars on Canadian soldiers. Listen to the account of veteran Alec MacInnis as he recalls a moment from Ortona after more than 60 years.

To locate the audio clip, search “Alec MacInnis” on [The Memory Project](#) website.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Alec MacInnis chose to tell this particular story from Ortona rather than something else? What is revealed about the nature of armed conflict by listening to his story?
2. Search “Ortona” on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) to read a secondary-source account. What differences do you note between Alec MacInnis’s account of his experiences at Ortona compared to the *Encyclopedia* article?

THE BATTLE OF NORMANDY: A TURNING POINT

D-DAY

Starting in 1943, the United States and Great Britain began planning for an invasion of Western Europe to free its peoples from German occupation. The landing would be in France along the coastal region known as Normandy, but the operation was delayed as the Allies gathered forces and prepared the invasion plan.

On 6 June 1944, the largest invasion armada (fleet of vessels) in history left England for the Normandy coast in Operation “Overlord.” More than 150,000 Allied troops landed, including 14,000 Canadians who landed on Juno Beach. In addition, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) patrolled the skies and attacked enemy targets, while Canadian paratroopers landed behind German lines. Thousands of sailors on more than 100 Royal Canadian Navy (RCN) vessels supported the invasion by escorting and transporting troops, and by clearing mines.

“D-Day” marked the beginning of the Allied liberation of Nazi-occupied Western Europe, and the Canadians would play a significant role. But the campaign in Normandy would be bitter and last until late August. More than 5,000 Canadian troops died in those 11 weeks and another 13,000 were wounded.

“The waters of the English Channel and the winds of the Normandy coast have erased the footprints these men left in Juno Beach. But not even the great tides of time can wash away the deep impressions they have made in our national memory, and in the chronicle of the free world.”

—PRIME MINISTER PAUL MARTIN, 6 JUNE 2004 AT JUNO BEACH

“We prepared for the Normandy landings. We embarked at Southampton [England] on June 5th, at five o’clock in the evening. We spent the night on the water and we arrived in front of Bernières-sur-Mer at around seven o’clock in the morning. After that, the real fighting began.”

—LORENZO TREMBLAY, VETERAN OF THE REGIMENT DE LA CHAUDIÈRE, FROM *THE MEMORY PROJECT*



Troops of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade (Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry Highlanders) going ashore, Bernières-sur-Mer, France, 6 June 1944 (courtesy Gilbert Alexander Milne/Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-122765).

ACTIVITY

Read the Battle of Normandy article on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) and fill out the “5Ws Reading Chart for Secondary Sources” chart located on the Learning Tools section of the [Canada at War](#) website to record what you have learned.

After reading about the history of the invasion of Normandy and D-Day, try to interpret the meaning of this political cartoon from the 4 June 2004 edition of *The Globe and Mail* newspaper. What is the message? Who is the intended audience? Do you agree with its message? Why or why not?

TIP FOR CARTOONS:

To help you interpret political cartoons, pay close attention to any words, symbols or captions in the cartoon. Note them down if it helps you.



▲ Editorial cartoon: “Ever have a chance to backpack across Europe when you were our age?” 2004 (courtesy Brian Gable/CP Images/CP # 01515112).

THE END OF THE WAR IN EUROPE

After the breakout from Normandy, Canadian and Allied forces fought an 11-week campaign to liberate parts of France, including the coast of the English Channel, from German occupation. In September 1944, Canadian and Allied forces advanced into Belgium and the Netherlands, eventually invading Germany beginning in March 1945. More than 7,600 Canadians died during the liberation of the Netherlands. In fact, Canadians and the Dutch have maintained a special relationship as a result of Canada's role in liberating the country.

Germany surrendered on 7 May 1945 and the following day was proclaimed "VE-Day" for "Victory in Europe." But Allied forces were still at war with Japan in the Pacific.

The following quotes provide two perspectives about the war's end in Europe:

"I believe the future of Canada rests in their hands. It will be a grand future should they be given the opportunity in peace to prove and practice the admirable characteristics they have demonstrated in war."

—CANADIAN GENERAL H.D.G. CRERAR,
7 MAY 1945, SPEAKING ABOUT CANADIAN SOLDIERS

"I remember being in Ottawa for VE-Day; they called it Victory Day. There was a big show. Everyone was in the streets. It was a very beautiful day. . . . I was disappointed about becoming a civilian again. I felt like my big adventure was over. I had done something I really enjoyed."

—JULIENNE LEURY, ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE
WOMEN'S DIVISION, FROM *THE MEMORY PROJECT*

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think General Crerar's comments were so optimistic?
2. Julianne Leury referred to her time in the Air Force as a "big adventure." Why do you think the war was such an adventure for Leury?

/// Women and the War ///

"We had to put up with a lot from the men and yet without us, as [British prime minister] Mr. Winston Churchill said in one of his last speeches after the war, he said 'without the women, we may have lost the war.'"

—HELEN JEAN CRAWLEY, BRITISH ARMY'S AUXILIARY TERRITORIAL SERVICE,
FROM *THE MEMORY PROJECT*

Canadian women served in the armed forces both at home and overseas during the war years in the following areas:

- Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service (often referred to as the Wrens). More than 7,000 women served with the Wrens, which supported the navy at home in places such as Halifax, in the United States and also overseas such as in Great Britain.
- The RCAF's Women's Division (known as "WD"), where some 17,000 served.
- The Canadian Women's Army Corps (sometimes referred to as CWACs). Established in 1941, it had more than 21,000 members.
- More than 4,400 Canadian nurses served in the army, navy and air force during the war.

For further information about women in the war, see the "Women and War" article on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).

▲
Gunners of the 12th Field Artillery with the victory issue of the *Maple Leaf* newspaper, Aurich, Germany, 20 May 1945 (courtesy Lieut. Donald I. Grant/Department of National Defence/Library and Archives Canada/PA-150931).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In the above quote, Helen Jean Crawley states, "We [women] had to put up with a lot from the men."

1. What do you think she meant by this statement?
2. What challenges do you think women in the armed forces faced compared to men?

POSTER ANALYSIS

How does this poster portray the efforts of the Canadian Women's Army Corps?



▲ Poster: "The Spirit of Canada's Women," 1942 (courtesy Canadian War Museum/CWM # 19750251-008).

ORAL HISTORY ACTIVITY

In groups of four, visit [The Memory Project](#) website and listen individually to one of the women's accounts listed below. Note down two or three things that you learned about her service in the war, including the branch of service and role. This activity could also be completed individually.

- Margarita "Madge" Trull (Women's Royal Naval Service)
- Peggy Lee (Canadian Women's Army Corps)
- Nellie Rettenbacher (Canadian Women's Army Corps)
- Helen Jean Crawley (British Army's Auxiliary Territorial Service)

"I wanted to be a part of the group that would defend against what was happening around the world. It was without a doubt the most important thing happening at that time."

—CORINNE KERNAN SEVIGNY, CANADIAN WOMEN'S ARMY CORPS, FROM *THE MEMORY PROJECT*

DISCUSSION

What do the above accounts reveal? What can we learn from listening to veterans recounting their war experiences that we could not learn from secondary-source articles from [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)? How does oral history differ from written history? To learn more about interpreting oral history accounts, see "A Guide to Primary Sources" in [The Canadian Encyclopedia's Learning Centre](#).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Choose one of the accounts from the women noted above and use it as the starting point to write a diary entry from her perspective describing her wartime experiences. Use the information you have learned in this section to help you write the entry.

/// Home Front ///

The Second World War is often referred to as a "total war," meaning that all parts of society were organized to help defeat opposing forces, in this case Nazi Germany and, later, Italy, Japan and other Axis countries. While over a million Canadian men and women served in the military, civilians worked and volunteered in many different jobs and sectors on the Canadian home front.

Pitching hay on Diamond L Ranch, Millarville area, Alberta, 1943 (courtesy Glenbow Archives/NA-4868-75).

THE ECONOMY

Men and women worked on farms and in factories during the war years. Some 1,200,000 women worked during the war. Their roles included making ammunition and parts for aircraft and ships. In virtually all aspects of the economy, women filled jobs that were normally reserved for men, becoming bus drivers, lumber workers ("lumberjills") and more. By 1943–44, 439,000 women worked in the service industry, with another 373,000 working in manufacturing (including the munitions industry).



ACTIVITY: WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

To the right is a photograph of Veronica Foster, who was made into a national symbol as "Ronnie, the Bren Gun Girl," showcasing women's industrial contributions to the war. What do you notice about the photo from 1941? Does the photograph offer a particular message to the viewer about women's wartime work and experiences?

For more information on women in the workforce during the war, view the National Film Board film, [Rosies of the North](#).



VOLUNTEERING

During the war, women contributed heavily in unpaid labour, either in the home, by volunteering or by organizing patriotic fundraising activities. Many women assisted the men and women in uniform, and their families left behind, through charitable organizations such as the Red Cross or the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire.

Moreover, women also took the lead in practising rationing (fixed allowances for specific food or goods), which the government imposed in 1942. Meat, sugar, coffee and gasoline were among the goods all Canadians were expected to use sparingly.



Buying food at Eaton's using ration stamps, 30 March 1943 (courtesy Toronto Archives/Fonds 1266, Item 84160).

Veronica Foster, known as "The Bren Gun Girl," poses with a finished Bren gun, 1941 (courtesy National Film Board of Canada/Photothèque/Library and Archives Canada/e000760403).

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

A "total war" meant that everyone was involved in the war effort; children and youth were no exception. They were encouraged to save their money and buy War Savings Stamps, write letters overseas, and collect scrap metal and other salvageable goods. Other children were relocated during the war years, including many British children who were evacuated to Canada for their safety. Known as "guest children," they spent the war years in Canada.

Read more about children and the war in the article titled "Wartime Home Front" on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#).



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The photo to the right, "Wait for me, Daddy," is one of the most famous from the Second World War. What is happening in this photo? Discuss the photograph with a partner.
2. What do you think made this photo so popular? What emotions does it evoke and why is it still meaningful today?
3. If you had to give this photograph a different title, what would it be?

DID YOU KNOW?

During the war, "Wait for me, Daddy" was used by the government to help sell Victory Bonds, which helped pay for the war effort. The young boy in the photo is Warren "Whitey" Bernard.

/// The Ethical Dimension and the Second World War ///

When Hitler's Nazi party took power in 1933, life soon became unbearable for Jewish people in Germany. Violence, propaganda, intimidation as well as anti-Jewish legislation such as the 1935 Nuremberg Laws — **anti-Semitic** laws instituted by Nazi Germany that took away citizenship from Jewish people and attempted to "purify" what Nazi leaders considered to be the German race — were all part of the Nazi campaign of persecution against Jewish people.

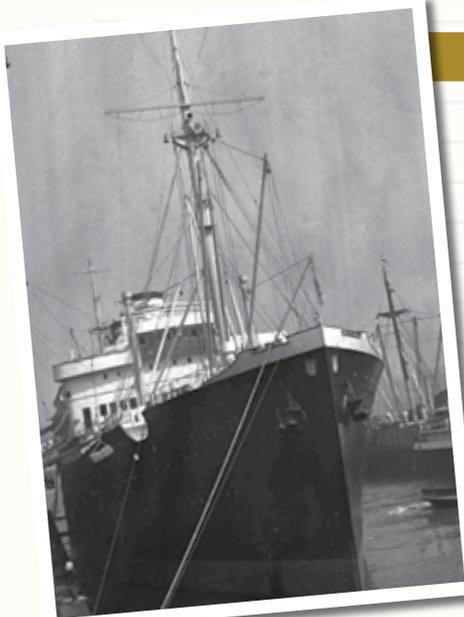
"In the 1930s, at the beginning of the Nazi persecution of the Jews, an influential Jewish leader wrote that the world was divided into two parts — 'those places where Jews could not live, and those they could not enter.' Canada fell into the latter category."

—IRVING ABELLA IN *THE GLOBE AND MAIL*, 2013

In 1938, an organized night of violence known as "Kristallnacht" (also called "Night of Broken Glass") destroyed synagogues and Jewish-owned businesses and homes throughout Germany (as well as Austria and parts of Czechoslovakia), and led to even more intense persecution of Jewish people. In 1942, Nazi officials devised the "Final Solution," a plan to kill all Jewish people living in Europe. Ultimately, this plan resulted in the murder of six million Jewish people, including one million or more at Auschwitz, a notorious death camp. Roma people (known by some as "Gypsies"), LGBTQ people, communists, socialists and people with disabilities were among the other targets of the Nazis.

ANTI-SEMITISM: hostility or prejudice directed towards Jewish people.

For more information on teaching the ethical dimension in history, refer to the [Historical Thinking Project](#).



ETHICAL JUDGMENTS: THE CASE OF THE MS ST. LOUIS

The questions at the top of page 11 provide a framework for thinking about history from an ethical point of view. Students and historians are often required to make judgments when studying history. When considering the past and the historical context of an event, students and historians need to be aware of presentism, which means applying a modern-day understanding of the world to the past.

In this example, you will need to conduct some research about the 1939 voyage of the MS *St. Louis*, a ship carrying 937 European Jewish people fleeing persecution in Germany that was denied entry to Canada, Cuba and the United States. At the start of the war in 1939, many people around the world did not foresee the atrocities that would result from the Nazi government's anti-Semitic policies and actions, including the fate of more than 250 of the Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis* who would die in the Holocaust after the ship returned to Europe.

TASK:

Read [The Canadian Encyclopedia's](#) article on the MS *St. Louis*. Answer the following questions on page 11 to help you understand the past and its complexities as they relate to the voyage of the *St. Louis*. Once complete, share your findings in a group of four or five and then discuss as a whole class.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE MS *ST. LOUIS*

1. What was the historical context, and what attitudes, beliefs and values of the era do we need to know to understand this historical issue?
2. What is our responsibility to remember and respond to what happened in the past?
3. Are there any connections to today's world? How does understanding this issue help us to make informed judgments about current issues?

For more information, listen to accounts of the Holocaust on [The Memory Project](#) website by searching “Holocaust.”

For additional learning opportunities, visit the websites of the [Montreal Holocaust Memorial](#), the [Canadian War Museum](#) and the [Virtual Museum of Canada](#).

ETHICAL DIMENSION: THE INTERNMENT OF JAPANESE CANADIANS

Relocation of Japanese Canadians to internment camps in the interior of British Columbia, 1942 (courtesy Tak Toyota/Library and Archives Canada/C-046350).



“The ill treatment of these Canadians remains a dark stain on the nation’s history, although it cannot be divorced from the anger and fear felt by wartime Canadians who worried about the threat of a Japanese invasion, or from the misplaced belief that race trumped nationality.”

—TIM COOK IN *THE NECESSARY WAR*, 2014

After the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by Japanese forces in December 1941, many Canadians feared an attack on the West Coast. As a result, anti-Japanese racism, persistent for years, grew to a fever pitch. In 1942, the government of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King acted by forcibly relocating approximately 22,000 [Japanese Canadians](#) to the interior of British Columbia where men worked in camps, and families lived in very basic conditions. With Japanese Canadians in these camps, their possessions — including fishing boats, land and businesses — were auctioned off by the government to white Canadians at very low prices. The freedoms of thousands of Canadians had been restricted and their dignity ignored. In 1944, the government ordered Japanese Canadians to settle east of the Rocky Mountains, or to leave Canada altogether by returning to Japan.



Two rows of Asahi baseball players on a baseball field, 1926 (courtesy Ed Kitagawa Collection/Nikkei National Museum).

RESEARCH QUESTION

Discuss with a partner the question below:

Can you draw a comparison between Japanese internment and the internment of “enemy aliens” during the First World War? See *Historica Canada’s First World War Education Guide* in the Learning Tools section of the [Canada at War](#) website to help make your comparison.

DID YOU KNOW?

The story of the Vancouver Asahi, a Japanese Canadian baseball team, offers interesting insight into the period of internment and experiences in the camps.

Read an article on the Asahi on [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#) for more information.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY: ADDRESSING THE PAST

In 1988, the government of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney acknowledged the [treatment Japanese Canadians](#) suffered during the Second World War.

The government’s official acknowledgement included the following: “Despite perceived military necessities at the time, the forced removal and internment of Japanese Canadians during World War II and their deportation and expulsion following the war, was unjust.”

“We can’t change the past. What’s done is done . . . but this helps erase the bitterness, that’s for sure.”

—KEN KITSUKAKE, FORMER MEMBER OF THE VANCOUVER ASAHI, TALKING ABOUT BEING INDUCTED IN THE CANADIAN BASEBALL HALL OF FAME, QUOTED IN THE *TORONTO STAR*, 2003

EXTENSION ACTIVITY (CONTINUED)

Read and discuss the two statements below in a small group in your class. What is your opinion of governments officially recognizing the injustices of the past? With which statement from former Canadian prime ministers do you agree more? If you are more comfortable writing your response, record it in your notes or electronically.

Brian Mulroney in 1988: “Error is an ingredient of humanity. So, too, is apology and forgiveness. We have all learned from personal experience that, inadequate as apologies are, they are the only way we can cleanse the past, so that we may as best we can in good conscience face the future.”

Pierre Trudeau in 1984: “I do not see how I can apologize for some historic event to which we or these people in this House were not a party. We can regret that it happened. . . . I do not think it is the purpose of the government to right the past. It cannot rewrite history. It is our purpose to be just in our time, and that is what we have done in bringing in the Charter of Rights.”



▲
Victory Square Cenotaph, Vancouver, British Columbia. Photograph by Jennifer Mackenzie (courtesy Alamy #cyy45h).

/// Legacy and Consequences ///

CENOTAPH PROJECT

The Cenotaph Project is an engaging activity giving students an opportunity to get to know the individual men and women who served, and in some cases died, in wartime by researching military service files available from [Library and Archives Canada](#).

Visit the Learning Tools page of the [Canada at War](#) website for full activity details, and step-by-step instructions on accessing unique primary source records and developing the research project.

THE END OF THE WAR

The Second World War greatly impacted individual Canadians and the nation in many ways. More than 44,000 Canadians and Newfoundlanders were killed, and returning service people often found themselves without the necessary support to readjust to civilian life. Canadian military strength had grown exponentially since the interwar years. Women were increasingly employed in wartime industries, while many Canadians found their rights restricted due to internment and other wartime conditions. Canadian society had adapted to life during the war, and it would need to readapt to life during the postwar era.

Create a chart and conduct research to discover how the country changed in the following areas below.

Divide the class into five groups, each taking a different category. Students should try to include at least two to three point-form notes for each category, and each group can share their results with the class.

- Militarily (e.g., how did Canada’s navy and air force presence expand during the war?)
- Economically (e.g., how did wartime industrial growth influence Canada’s economy?)
- Politically (e.g., was new legislation established for returning service people?)
- Socially (e.g., were new responsibilities and labour opportunities available for women?)
- International relations (e.g., how did new global alliances shift Canada’s role in the postwar period?)

Sources: Search [The Canadian Encyclopedia’s](#) interactive timelines, including those related to immigration, politics and government, economy and labour, and the Second World War. Articles about the home front, external relations, the Canadian armed forces, and the Second World War are also good starting points. The [Chronology of Canadian Military History](#) exhibition on the Canadian War Museum website also provides additional information.

EXTENSION QUESTIONS

Consider what you’ve learned about the Second World War and discuss these questions in small groups or as a whole class:

1. Did Canada do the right thing by participating in the Second World War?
2. Is there such a thing as a “just war”?

“Most of us hadn’t had any consequential job at all before we joined the army. And so we had no background that we could draw upon to enhance our transition to civilian life. It was a tough haul. It wasn’t an easy transition from war to peace.”

—ALAN SHAW, ARMY, FROM *THE MEMORY PROJECT*

JUST WAR: a war that is seen as morally justifiable.

“I USED TO THINK/NOW I THINK”

As a way of reflecting upon what you have learned about the Second World War and Canada’s experience, engage in an “I used to think/now I think” exercise. What did you previously think about Canada and its experiences at war? What do you think now? Write down a list of thoughts that show how your thinking about the war has changed. Once you have reflected, share your thinking with classmates in groups of four.

For additional resources and activities related to Canada’s participation in the Second World War, visit [Canada1914-1945.ca](#).