

VE Day: Thanks for 80 years of peace

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Jubilation: On 8 May 1945, Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced on the radio at 3pm that the war in Europe had come to an end, following Germany's surrender the day before.

Did WW2 create the modern world? Anniversary celebrations are a powerful reminder that this terrible conflict also shaped contemporary society.

What's happening?

Eighty years ago, World War Two ended in Europe. Although fighting continued in the Far East, it was a moment of rejoicing across Britain.

Crowds gathered outside Buckingham Palace and the future Queen Elizabeth joined the celebrations, even dancing the **conga** at The Ritz Hotel.

The war “destroyed the Old World,” by causing **colonial empires** to collapse. The United States emerged as the Western **superpower**, launching what magazine publisher Henry Luce called the “American century”.

Find out more

After the conflict, Britain's Labour government formed the **welfare state**, introducing free healthcare for all.

Jet aircraft, modern computing and nuclear power were all developed during the fighting.

Since the fighting ended, Europe has enjoyed an **unprecedented** period of peace. But, the current conflict in Ukraine has, say some, dramatically undermined the global order.

But there are still good reasons to mark VE Day, as a chance to reaffirm our commitment to world peace.

Did WW2 create the modern world?

Some say

Yes! A lot of the things Europeans take for granted were a result of World War Two, in politics, technology and society.

Others think

No! The consequences of World War Two were more negative than positive. Besides, 80 years of peace have ended with the conflict in Ukraine.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

1. Connect

"If you were born in Britain after World War II, you see a continuous atmosphere of decline, moral and economic and political."

Stephen Bayley (1951 –), Welsh critic

Empty heading

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Do you find books, films and podcasts about World War Two interesting or boring? Why do you feel this way?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: How many people were killed during World War Two? How many veterans from that conflict are still alive?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know about this story for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine that the government passed a law making it compulsory for schools to teach about World War Two. Write a letter to the Education Department arguing for or against this proposal.

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, come up with three ways that your school could celebrate or commemorate VE Day 80. Then, present them to the class and vote on your favourite one.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine that you have been sent to interview an old man or woman who remembers the original VE Day. Write a newspaper story about the conversation you have and the message they want to share.

Glossary

Conga - A Latin American dance of African origin, usually with several people in a single line, one behind the other.

Colonial Empires - A state that establishes and controls colonies, typically through military conquest, political dominance, and the exploitation of resources and people.

Superpower - A state that possesses military or economic might, or both, and general influence vastly superior to that of other states.

Welfare state - A safety net put in place by the government to ensure that no-one falls into poverty.

Unprecedented - Never been seen before.