

# Activity: Air raid practice

**History  
Years (3/4)**

## ABOUT THE ACTIVITY

*As with all of our activities, this is designed to complement the work done in school – it is not meant to be a complete history unit.*

The group visits one of the original air raid shelters underneath the Hall, and has a mock air raid drill, including:

- fitting and wearing gas masks
- experiencing an air raid
- singing wartime songs and listening to music

## WHERE THE ACTIVITY FITS IN

### to a visit to Beaumanor

an air raid activity is one of the three major strands of a wartime visit to Beaumanor (along with rationing and evacuation), chosen because of its relevance to the experiences of a wartime child. The visit also includes a wartime schoolroom, playground games and songs, ethical discussions and, where appropriate, research of primary historical sources (newspapers, oral testimony, etc.).

### to the QCA scheme

**History unit 9**      What was it like for children in the Second World War?

## ADAPTING THE ACTIVITY FOR A DIFFERENT AGE GROUP

Year 5 and 6 children could:

- consider the messages given in the posters of the time and explore the concept of propaganda
- listen to a taped story ("The Bomb" by Richmal Crompton or "Rosie" by Robert Westall) on a WW2 replica wireless

## PRIOR LEARNING

It is helpful if the children have learned:

- that some real WW2 gas masks are dangerous (due to asbestos) and that they should not be played with.
- about the different types of shelter, such as Anderson, Morrison and public brick shelters.
- some WW2 songs, especially "Run Rabbit Run", "Kiss me goodnight Sergeant Major" and "Thingummy bob".
- About pre-decimal coinage.

## VOCABULARY

In this activity, children will have opportunities to use:

- words associated with air raids, *eg. Blitz, air raid, bomb damage, Anderson shelter, Morrison shelter, Public shelter, gas mask, respirator, gas rattle, siren, A.R.P. warden,*
- words associated with feelings, *eg. empathy, sympathy, frightened, panic*

## RESOURCES

- Air raid shelter, gas masks, antiseptic wipes, hi-fi and sound-to-light systems, smoke machine, song sheets, posters & graffiti, intercom & leader instruction sheets.

## EXPECTATIONS

### At the end of this activity, due to age or ability

*most children will:*

understand what needed to be done in order to survive an air raid and have an idea of the smells, sounds and feelings of claustrophobia induced by an air raid shelter.

*some children will not have*

known how to use a gas mask and learn some wartime songs.

*made so much progress and will:*

*some children will have*

been able to empathise with the feelings and fears of real wartime children caught up in an air raid. They will also understand the fact that air raids were not confined to WW2 but are still happening today and that some children, somewhere in the world, may not be alive at the end of the day – due to air raids.

*progressed further and will:*

## RISK ASSESSMENT

In addition to the 'Group Visits - General Risk Assessment', the following specific risks have been identified

Hazard	Risk control
Groups in the cellars	No children are allowed in the cellars unless in the charge of an adult.
Fire	On entry to the cellars, leaders are instructed in the fire procedure for the cellars and given a fire exit map and instructions. A written record of the group, its size and its time of entry and exit, is taken or radioed to the Hall reception desk
Trip hazards in the cellars	The floors in the cellars are somewhat uneven. Children are told that they must walk at all times, and must not jostle each other, while under the Hall.
Use of gas masks - specific	Children and their leaders are always given the choice of whether to wear gas masks, and told that it will be perfectly all right if they do not wish to do so, either from choice or because they think that they shouldn't. All used gas masks are cleaned immediately with antiseptic wipes.
Use of gas masks - general	All groups are told that they shouldn't take the use of our gas masks as a general signal of approval for the wearing of any gas masks. They are explicitly warned of the dangers of wartime gas masks (asbestos) and that it is wise not to play with such masks.
Flashing lights	The simulated air raid contains flashing lights, which could affect people with epilepsy. This warning is contained here, in the booking pack sent to group leaders when they book and to all people as they go into the room. If requested, the lights can be turned off.
Exiting the cellars	On exiting the cellars, the leader should ensure that a helper leads the way out into the courtyard. This avoids the danger of children running out of the cellars straight in front of traffic entering the courtyard.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES CHILDREN LEARN	ACTIVITY	LEARNING OUTCOMES CHILDREN	POINTS TO NOTE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What to do when the siren sounds.</li> </ul>	<p>Entering the air raid shelter</p> <p>The group collects at the back door of the hall and is escorted to the air raid shelter.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The blackout is mentioned.</li> <li>• The reason for drill is explained, and the suggestion that with practice comes a lessening of panic.</li> </ul>	<p>Children are shown the original air raid sign and asked why it is white lettering on a black background.</p> <p>They are told that while it is normal for gentlemen to allow ladies through the door first, excessive politeness would be unnecessary and dangerous. This idea could be expanded later to explore notions of courtesy and good manners.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What to do when they enter the shelter and about the room.</li> </ul>	<p>The group is seated and safe practice is explained.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The history of the room and the sequence of events in a typical air raid is outlined.</li> </ul>	<p>Originally designed as a beer cellar, it was used as a command post and air raid shelter during the war.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to use a gas mask.</li> </ul>	<p>Those in the group who wish to try one on are handed a gas mask and shown how to put one on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The gas drill is learned.</li> <li>• The history of gas use is understood.</li> </ul>	<p>The Government recommended a specific sequence of activity that entailed people holding their breath for about one minute. We do, however, tell children not to try it.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What an air raid might be like.</li> </ul>	<p>The air raid (about 5 minutes) is played. If possible, the group is kept silent for the duration of the raid so as to allow anyone who can, put themselves in the place of a real evacuee in a real air raid.</p> <p><u>We think that this is the focal point of the entire activity and, as such, treat it with the seriousness it requires.</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children understand the sequence and the horror of an air raid and sympathise with blitz victims.</li> <li>• Some children might start to empathise with real blitz victims.</li> </ul>	<p>We try to make this realistic and unsettling without getting the children too upset. We talk about the awful event of the Blitz, especially in relation to Coventry, but we try to get children to understand that this is also a contemporary problem.</p> <p>We also try to make children aware of the consequences of the blitz, without trying to frighten them.</p> <p>We explain the difference between sympathy and empathy, then ask them to sit quietly during the raid and try to imagine what it would be like to be in a shelter in Coventry during a raid.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The masks are cleaned and returned to the box.</li> </ul>	<p>Antiseptic wipes are handed out, then the masks and waste wipes are collected in.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• N/A</li> </ul>	<p>We make certain that the masks are thoroughly cleaned with the wipes before collecting them in.</p>

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITY	LEARNING OUTCOMES	POINTS TO NOTE
CHILDREN LEARN		CHILDREN	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>About some of the songs.</li> </ul>	<p>Children are handed out song sheets, the ones that they wish to sing are chosen and the music played.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Songs are learned</li> <li>Children start to understand the calming properties of a good sing-song and the community spirit which it engenders.</li> </ul>	<p>We use this as an antidote to the possibly scary previous activity.</p> <p>We talk about the background to some of the songs, and the idea of whistling in the dark.</p> <p>We make a point of singing and talking about "Thingummy-bob" and about the idea that everyone is 'doing their bit'.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The group leaves the shelter and returns to the base room.</li> </ul>	<p>Children are marshalled out of the cellars and safely collect in the courtyard. The Hall reception is notified that they have left.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<p>Even though everyone is used to the dim light, it is still essential to walk carefully and group up safely in the courtyard.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A playground game.</li> </ul>	<p>If time and weather permit, the group encircles the yew tree in the courtyard and plays "Looby Loo" or similar.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children learn how to do one of the traditional playground games and are given the opportunity to compare it with modern outdoor activities.</li> </ul>	<p>We use these games to show that children used to have simpler, more sociable pastimes and games in earlier days,</p>