



THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



University of
Reading



Evacuees, North Lincolnshire, 1939

What was it like moving from town to country as an evacuee? Country life during the Second World War

Through this activity your class will be able to read about real children who moved as evacuees from the town to the countryside during the Second World War. Some children had good experiences while others found the move hard. During this activity, students will have the opportunity to explore true stories, find out what the countryside was like over 70 years ago and create their own stories based on what they have discovered.

UPPER PRIMARY | LOWER SECONDARY

Learning outcomes

By the end of the activities students will:

- have increased knowledge of being evacuated from an urban centre like London
- be able to explain the differences in food, lifestyle, toys, play and health between rural and urban areas
- have developed their skills in reading and interpreting written documents, such as letters and official paperwork that children wrote and were given, as part of their evacuation.

Before your visit

Task for your students

Your students imagine they are children from a town, such as London. They are about to embark on their journey to the countryside as an evacuee. Below is a statement about a character that your students can read, reflect on and use to come up with questions about where they are going.

Character

You are a child who lives in the centre of London in 1940. The Second World War has been going on for over a year now and recently bombs have been destroying houses and a church a few streets away from you. You are about to be evacuated to the countryside, away from the dangers of bombs and the effects of the war. What questions would you like to ask to find out about the place that you are being evacuated to and what it is going to be like? If you've been told who you are staying with you may also like to write a letter to them.

More information for preparation

- This website links to our museum's archives and more information about evacuation in Reading: reading.ac.uk/merl/collections/archives_a_to_z/merl-d_evac.aspx
- Review the profiles of Barbara Wood, Douglas Andrews and Peter Terry Douglas showing photos and accounts of their time as an evacuee from across England (attached as PDFs on the webpage for this activity).
- **Reading:** *Goodnight Mr Tom* by Michelle Magorian (ISBN/EAN: 9780590538367);
Carrie's War by Nina Bawden (ISBN: 9780349009162);
War Game by Michael Foreman (ISBN: 9781857937138)
- **Film:** *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*

THEMES AND TOPICS

- Local history study and a period after 1066
- Local history study
- Modern world history
- Challenges of Britain, wider World 1901 to present day.

LINKS WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES

This activity could also be used in conjunction with the 'What was it like to be a child in the countryside?' resource.

Visiting the Museum of English Rural Life

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At the Museum of English Rural Life you can discover what it might have been like to live in the countryside as an evacuee. The galleries provide a useful context for life in the countryside during the war years.

Town and Country gallery

- Our digital interactive in the Town and Country gallery enables small groups to explore stories about 11 different children who were evacuated from their homes in towns across England. It reveals children's lives through many different photographs, artefacts and papers, from school reports to official letters. We have included archives for three of the children as part of this resource on the webpage.
- In the Forces for Change gallery students are able to see the uniform that Betty Merrett wore when working on a farm and driving a tractor as part of the Women's Land Army.
- Throughout the rest of the museum there are many opportunities for students to discover how children, families and other people lived during the 1940s and 1950s.

Use the questions you came up with in your pre-visit activities to explore the galleries. If you need any help, other questions to consider when looking at objects and photos include:

- Who did that?
- What happened?
- When did it take place? (season)
- Where did it take place?
- Why did that happen?
- How did that happen?
- What was it like for rural children to welcome evacuees from the towns?
- Consider gender roles of men and women, boys and girls between town and country both then and now.

What was it like in the countryside following the evacuation?

The table overleaf will help your students discover what a child's life was like in the town and how it changed as an evacuee in the countryside. All our galleries give some clues and ideas. The Town and Country gallery is a helpful gallery for looking at town-related objects and photographs.

Questions to consider:

- Which items in the museum reveal what people did or had in the countryside?
- What did people have in towns? Were these items different?

Key themes to discuss and research are:

- clothes
- food
- transport
- home
- play
- materials or what things are made of.



Theme	What was it like in the town/city before evacuation?	What was is like in the countryside following the evacuation?
Clothes What clothes did people wear? What materials were used?		
Food What did people eat or drink? How were they carried or transported?		
Transport How did people get around? What transport did they use? How do you get to school or after school clubs? How was transport powered? How safe were roads?		

Theme	What was it like in the town/city before evacuation?	What was is like in the countryside following the evacuation?
Home How did the home differ? What did people have in their homes? Were there differences?		
Play How did children play? Where did they play? What toys did they have?		
What things are made of What materials were used? How did they look? What are their properties?		

What next?

- Write a letter to your parents to say you have arrived, how you are getting on and what it is like.
- Come up with a role play of meeting the family who would be caring for you. There could be different roles including the evacuees, the adults looking after them and the children already living in the countryside.
- Now act out the rural family showing the evacuees around their new home and village, and the evacuees commenting on the things that are very different to them.
- Ask a grandparent or an older person you know whether they were alive in 1939–1945. If so, were they evacuated or did they have family or friends who were? You might like to ask the following questions to find out more about their experience.
 - Where were you evacuated to?
 - What was the journey like between home and where you went?
 - Who did you live with?
 - What did you eat?
 - Did you return home? What was that like?
 - Where did you go to school when evacuated?
 - Did you have any jobs or work to do while in the countryside?



Evacuee luggage label



Children writing notes. Taken by an evacuee teacher, Maud Goddin, 1939

MERL galleries

