

OVERVIEW

During World War II, Britain's railways were used to transport evacuees from designated 'danger' zones to reception areas around the country. Apart from Norwich and Great Yarmouth ('neutral'), Norfolk was considered safe and as such thousands of children were sent there over the course of the war.

This session is designed to explore the evacuee experience, building knowledge of wartime evacuation and encouraging imaginative, creative responses.



Photograph taken from album of evacuees from St James' School, Upper Edmonton, London to Aylsham Norfolk: 'Waiting in the Market Place, North Walsham' on arrival, 1939

Please consider a trip to Whitwell and Reepham Station, where children can experience a carriage ride and see a restored railway station.



Introduction and **September 1939.** A combination of questioning and discussion to establish:

Context

What has happened: war has been announced and evacuation has been called for. Explain danger, neutral, and reception areas and read extract on evacuation. Surveys on towns and villages were carried out to record how many rooms might be available for evacuees.

In September 1939, 19,000 evacuees travelled to Norfolk (by January 1940, 11,000 remained.)

Where have you come from? Where might you end up?

Every evacuee had a different experience, not all good or bad. This will become clearer throughout the day.

Make Do and Mend

Make a notebook to record your thoughts, feelings and impressions of life as an evacuee. Create a simple book using brown paper, plain or lined paper and string. Emphasise lack of 'new things' during the war, and the need to be creative and resourceful. Remind children that they can use this throughout the day to keep a note of their new life in the country.

Source Investigation

Use sources to consolidate information e.g. 'Why Evacuation?' pamphlet; WW2 posters etc.

Investigate these in pairs or small groups and feed back: what can we learn from these materials?

Many children had to pack their bags in a hurry, and may not have had much choice in what they put into it. Introduce the list of government recommended items for an evacuee.

Timed task: what would you take with you? Two minutes to come up with ten things. Write or draw in notebook.

What might you have to leave behind? What might you try to pack but have to remove?

Devising a Scene In groups of 4, use the items in your envelope to help devise a scene based on the story inside. These are real recollections from people evacuated to Norfolk, and everyone's is different. You are going to perform these, so you need to think hard about how best to give the audience a sense of the story.

You may want to:

- Read carefully through your story as a group. Is there anything you don't understand? What was this person's experience like?
- Assign roles: these do not have to all be acting; if someone would prefer not to perform, they could adopt the role of director, script writer etc.
- Decide on how you will perform: will there be a narrator? Will it be entirely action?
- Write a simple script.
- Rehearse plenty of times.

Performances

Emphasise the need for projection. We may perform these outside, using the platform as a kind of stage, so in order to be heard you need to be facing your audience, and projecting your voice. When others are performing, you need to be quiet and listening.

What can people's memories tell us about the experience of an evacuee? What was life like for these children?

A Walk in the Country

What might a child who has lived their whole life in London be experiencing for the first time in the countryside?
An imaginative walk looking at the landscape with outsider eyes.

Some London children had never seen a cow before, except for in picture books, and didn't know what it was. Others were simply unprepared for life in the country – arriving without appropriate shoes or clothing. **What might have been positive though?** Fresh food, new experiences (e.g. working on a farm), new people, a feeling of safety, better quality of life. Draw on details from performances for this.

Simple plant identification and countryside exploration. Notes and drawings in notebooks: and a 'postcard home' to slot inside.

Writing Home

Write a postcard home and address it: based on your experience of the day and information about your character, how do you feel about being an evacuee? Do you want your parents to know? Will you be honest?

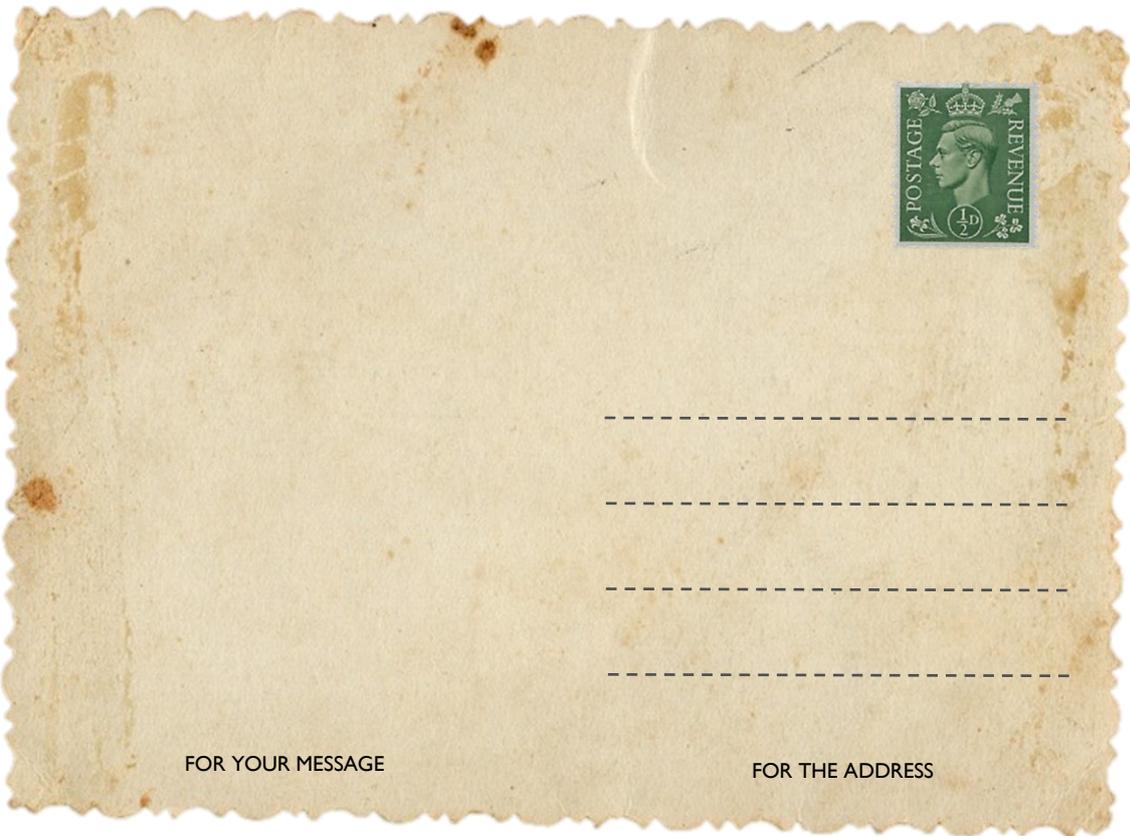
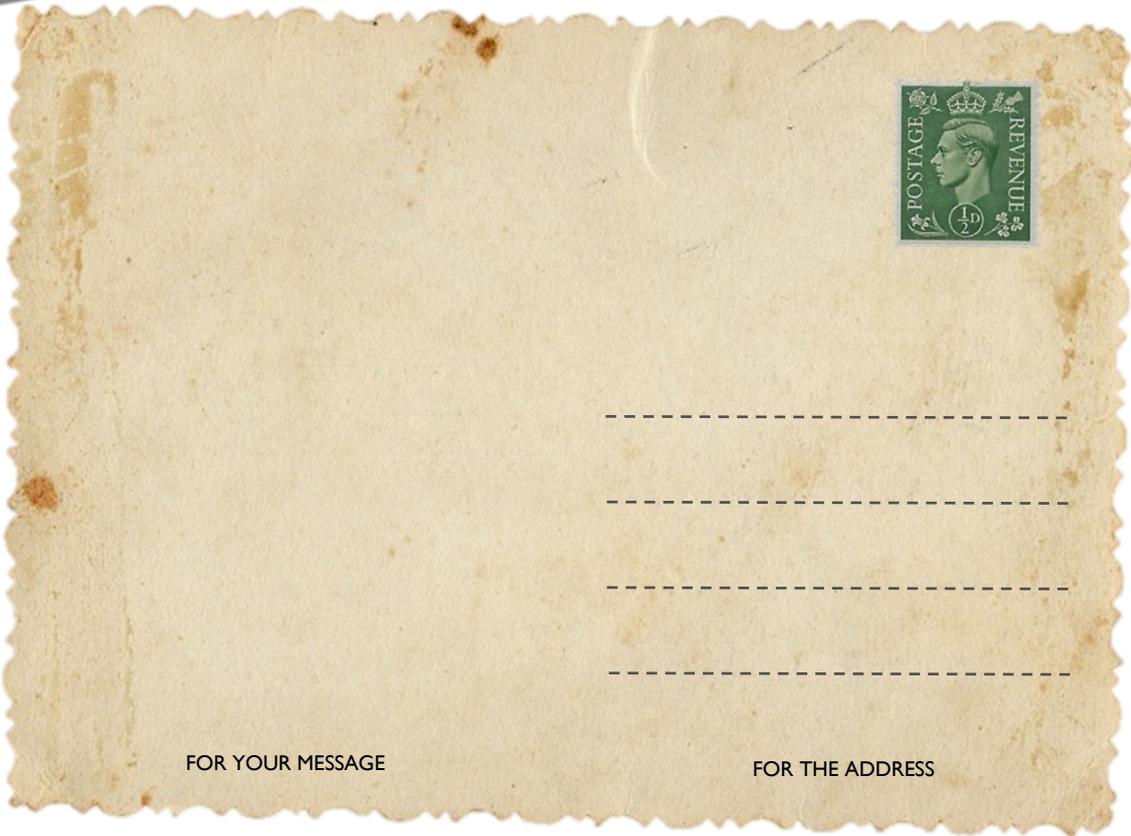
Unwilling Billets

Not everyone was willing to take in evacuees.

In Summer 1940, following the Blitz in London, the Government sent out 10, 400 letters to the parish of Aylsham and St. Faith's asking for offers to take evacuees. They received 427 offers, of which 128 were already housing evacuees. [Read extract from contemporary account—below].

How would you persuade someone to take in an evacuee? Write a short letter, making the argument for taking a child in.





12 July 1944

Brancaster is to get thirty of these child evacuees, without their mothers. Most of these women are working on the land all day, and I should imagine that the children would be all over the place. It is their mother's job to look after them, but I suppose they scented a nice holiday from domestic cares, and refused to come.

So like the Government! Evacuate the dear children and pose as a sort of Father Christmas, and to hell with what may happen at the other end of the railway journey.

15 July 1944

There has been great trouble in all the districts about the larger houses refusing to take the children and especially, the mothers. This is not always as selfish as it appears. In Mrs Green's case, at Brancaster, for instance, her Cook has already announced her intention of leaving at once should any evacuees be billeted upon them.