

# World War II

*Was World War II Australia's worst conflict?*

BY JO LEECH

*World War II*  
By Jo Leech

ISBN: 978 1 875585 99 1

First published 2011 by

History Teachers' Association of Victoria  
Suite 105  
134–136 Cambridge Street  
Collingwood VIC 3066

Phone 03 9417 3422  
Fax 03 9419 4713  
Web [www.htav.asn.au](http://www.htav.asn.au)

© Jo Leech 2011

Editor: Ingrid Purnell  
Layout: Ali Edmonds

Printed by Print Impressions  
[www.printimpressions.com.au](http://www.printimpressions.com.au)

The purchasing educational institution and its staff have the right to make copies of the whole or part of this book, beyond their rights under the Australian Copyright Act 1968, provided that: 1. the number of copies does not exceed the number reasonably required by the educational institution to satisfy their teaching purposes; 2. copies are made only by reprographic means (photocopying), not by electronic/digital means, and not stored or transmitted; 3. copies are not sold or lent; 4. every copy made clearly shows the footnote 'Produced by HTAV. © Jo Leech 2011.'

Except where permitted by this blackline master licence or under the Copyright Act 1868, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

Every effort has been made to trace and acknowledge copyright. However, should any infringement have occurred, the publishers offer their apologies and invite the copyright owners to contact them.

COVER IMAGE: Coast Guard Photographer Photographing Australian Troops, July 21, 1945. A Coast Guard combat photographer standing erect in the stern of an LCVP, snaps Australian troops as they storm ashore in the first assault wave to hit Balikpapan on the Southeast Coast of Borneo. Heavy black smoke from burning oil wells can be seen from the beach. © Bettmann/CORBIS.



FIGHT



# Contents

<b>2</b>	Foreword
<b>4</b>	Overview
<b>6</b>	Introductory activity: World economic systems
<b>8</b>	Inquiry Question 1: Was World War II Australia's worst conflict?
<b>9</b>	Inquiry Question 2: Who fought in World War II and why?
<b>13</b>	Inquiry Question 3: Why did the main players in WWII behave the way they did?
<b>14</b>	Inquiry Question 4: What was the worst concentration camp for Australians?
<b>16</b>	Inquiry Question 5: What was life like on the home front?
<b>18</b>	Inquiry Question 6: Was Curtin or Menzies the better wartime prime minister?
<b>19</b>	Concluding activity: Responding to Inquiry Question 1
<b>21</b>	Inquiry tips
<b>23</b>	Sources
<b>54</b>	Useful resources



# Foreword

**I**nquiry-based learning is a major component of humanities teaching in Australia and abroad. The inquiry approach first emerged in the physical sciences and was applied to the humanities following work done by John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky and others on psychological and social development. The approach has been employed in various learning contexts by J.S. Bruner, Joe Exline, Dan Apple, Cornelia Bruner and the Education Development Center, among others.

In the Australian context, inquiry has come to form a major part of curriculum in History and other subjects. Historical inquiry involves the retrieval, comprehension and interpretation of sources, and judgement guided by principles that are intrinsic to the discipline. Inquiry yields knowledge that is based on the available evidence but which remains open to further debate and reinterpretation. The method fosters in students the ability to recognise varying interpretations of history and to determine the difference between fact and opinion.

The inquiry method is based on the proposition that learning should be structured around a series of relevant and targeted questions, often developed in partnership with students, rather than the traditional method of a teacher (expert) imparting an established set of facts to students (recipients). Good inquiry questions will be intriguing for students and teachers alike.

Inquiry units tend to encourage curiosity, imagination, detective work, interaction, physical movement and debate. In recent years some educators have combined inquiry and creativity tasks by requiring students to design their own models and constructions.

In the history classroom, the opening lesson of an inquiry unit often centres on a curious image or item which students are asked to speculate upon. The teacher might ask questions like ‘What do you think is going on here?’, ‘When might this image have been created?’ and so on. After some initial hypotheses and discussions, the teacher might explain the origin and significance of the image before introducing the main inquiry question. This is usually a broad, over-arching question that ‘frames’ the unit. This framing question (for our purposes, Inquiry Question 1) will be kept in mind throughout the study and completed in full at the end of the unit. The teacher also sets several other inquiry questions targeting specific points – these can usually be answered in one or two lessons each.

As they go through the unit, students examine a set of historical sources. These sources, comprising documents, images, statistics, news clippings or artistic works, are used as evidence with which to answer the inquiry questions. Through a range of enjoyable tasks, students respond creatively and form opinions of their own on the questions and issue raised.



Inquiry activities also require students to:

- form hypotheses
- conduct research
- analyse sources
- synthesise ideas
- understand context and chronology
- articulate and justify an argument.

The most important part of the process, however, is the sense of surprise and enthusiasm that is created when teacher and students set about solving a puzzle together.

I trust this series will give you many lively ideas for your classroom.

**Ingrid Purnell, Editor**

*The HTAV would like to thank Dr Rosalie Triolo and Emily Board for their expertise and assistance in developing the Inquiry-based Learning series.*



# Overview

## *Was World War II Australia's worst conflict?*

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

On 1 September 1939 Germany invaded Poland. Two days later, following Adolf Hitler's refusal to meet their demands for withdrawal, Britain, Australia, New Zealand and France declared war on Germany. Germany was joined by Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria and, later, Finland.

Through the apparatus of his protective squadron, the SS, Hitler set about solving what he termed 'the Jewish question,' i.e. how to rid Germany of Jews. The SS, under the command of Heinrich Himmler, rounded up Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, disabled people, Russian prisoners of war and German dissidents; these people were taken to specially-constructed extermination camps where many of them were gassed. The most notorious of these camps were Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Treblinka.

On 7 December 1941 Japanese planes attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. This attack not only demonstrated Japan's involvement in the war, but it drew the USA in to the fray on the side of the Allies (Britain and others). On 7 March 1945 the Allies began an invasion of Germany. As Russian troops were capturing Berlin, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker on 30 April. On 8 May the war in Europe ended after Germany unofficially surrendered.

By June 1945 the Japanese had retreated home. The United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan in August, destroying both cities. On 2 September Japan officially surrendered, thus ending World War II (also known as the Second World War or WWII).

At a conference in October 1945, the United Nations and its Charter (based on the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) were established with the support of fifty-one nations; this later grew to 185 nations.

### AUSTRALIAN PRISONERS

The Germans and Italians captured 8000 Australian prisoners of war (POWs); 265 of these died. POWs were captured from the Mediterranean and Middle East campaigns, also from the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans and from the RAAF crews that had been involved in operations over Germany, occupied Europe and North Africa.

Two-thirds of Australia's 30 000 POWs were taken by the Japanese at the beginning of 1942. They were imprisoned in camps throughout Japanese-occupied territories in Borneo, Korea, Manchuria, Hainan, Rabaul, Ambon, Singapore, Timor, Java, Thailand, Burma, Vietnam and Japan. Most of these POWs suffered years of malnutrition and disease (such as dysentery, malaria, cholera and ulcers) and endured brutal treatment from the Japanese. Many were forced into slave labour in factories and mines and on the Thai-Burma Railway. In POW camps in Borneo, only six Allied prisoners survived from a total of 2500, after a massacre by Japanese soldiers in 1945.

Located in Singapore, Outram Road was a prison camp at which Japanese military police detained POWs who had tried to escape. These prisoners were kept in small cells, were forbidden to talk and occasionally received beatings. Thirty-six per cent of Australian prisoners died there.



# Introductory activity

When studying World War II, one needs to understand many ideological terms (or 'isms'), some of which can be rather remote and abstract. This activity will help to make the concepts clearer and more memorable.

Read the extract below and complete the tasks that follow.

## WORLD ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

### FEUDALISM

You have two cows. Your lord takes some of the milk.

### PURE SOCIALISM

You have two cows. The government takes them and puts them in a barn with everyone else's cows. You have to take care of all the cows. The government gives you as much milk as you need.

### BUREAUCRATIC SOCIALISM

You have two cows. The government takes them and puts them in a barn with everyone else's cows. They are cared for by ex-chicken farmers. You have to take care of the chickens the government took from the chicken farmers. The government gives you as much milk and eggs as the regulations say you should need.

### FASCISM

You have two cows. The government takes them both, hires you to take care of them and sells you the milk.

### PURE COMMUNISM

You have two cows. Your neighbours help you take care of them, and you all share the milk.

### RUSSIAN COMMUNISM

You have two cows. You have to take care of them, but the government takes all the milk.

### CAMBODIAN COMMUNISM

You have two cows. The government takes both and shoots you.

### DICTATORSHIP

You have two cows. The government takes both and drafts you.





# FIGHT



## PURE DEMOCRACY

You have two cows. Your neighbours decide who gets the milk.

## REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

You have two cows. Your neighbours pick someone to tell you who gets the milk.

## BUREAUCRACY

You have two cows. At first the government regulates what you can feed them and when you can milk them. Then it pays you not to milk them. Then it takes both, shoots one, milks the other one and pours the milk down the drain. Then it requires you to fill out forms accounting for the missing cows. In triplicate.

## ANARCHY

You have two cows. Either you sell the milk at a fair price or your neighbours take the cows and kill you.

## CAPITALISM

You have two cows. You sell one and buy a bull.

## SURREALISM

You have two giraffes. The government requires you to take harmonica lessons.

## ACTIVITY

1. Although these 'definitions' are satirical, they are, to some extent, based on real economic-political systems. Using books and the internet, find evidence to support THREE of the mock definitions (i.e. instances in which real countries have exhibited these traits).
2. Referring to, but not copying, a dictionary, write a real definition for *capitalism*, *communism*, *democracy*, *dictatorship* and *fascism*.





# Inquiry Question 1

*Was World War II Australia's worst conflict?*

1. Examine Sources 1–9 (p. 23–32):
  - Source 1: Australian frontier conflicts (1788–early 1930s)
  - Source 2: Boer War (1899–1902)<sup>1</sup>
  - Source 3: World War I (1914–18)
  - Source 4: World War II (1939–45)
  - Source 5: Korean War (1950–53)
  - Source 6: Vietnam War (1955–75)
  - Source 7: Gulf War (1990–91)
  - Source 8: Afghanistan War (2001–)
  - Source 9: Iraq War (2003–).
2. Drawing on Sources 1–9 and your prior knowledge of the wars above, discuss the following question as a class: Which of these conflicts would have been Australia's worst, and why?
3. After discussing initial responses, consider how one might go about judging the question in an informed way. With a partner, write down FIVE criteria you would use to compare the conflicts.
4. Our suggested criteria, which are probably similar to the ones you developed, are:
  - The number of Australian personnel that served
  - The number of Australian deaths
  - The number of Australian injuries
  - Effects on Australia in the short term (economic/social/political)
  - Effects on Australia in the long term (economic/social/political).
5. Put these criteria aside. At the end of the unit you will use them as you attempt to answer Inquiry Question 1: 'Was World War II Australia's worst conflict?'

<sup>1</sup> Though technically the Second Boer War, this conflict is generally known as the Boer War.



FIGHT



# Sources

Distribute these sources to your class as required. You may photocopy from this booklet, or print directly from the CD provided.

Sample pages



## SOURCE 1

Artist's impression of Australian frontier conflicts (1788–early 1930s).



J. Macfarlane, *Sturt's Party Threatened by Blacks at the Junction of the Murray and Darling*, 1830.



## SOURCE 25

Bolton extract.

### ON CURTIN AND MENZIES:

Both gave good service as wartime prime ministers. The first Menzies government (1939–41) coincided with the phase of the war fought mostly in Europe and North Africa, so that it seemed a re-run of the 1914–18 war, with the major decisions made overseas. Menzies accordingly spent several months in Britain, and was criticised for it. ...

As a new prime minister Curtin was confronted by the crisis in the Pacific after Japan entered the war. He is remembered for a clear acceptance of the need for Australia's steadfast adhesion to the American alliance, symbolised in his unlikely but effective partnership with General Douglas MacArthur, and for the skill and courage with which he persuaded the Australian Labor Party to accept conscription for service in the South-West Pacific. Like Menzies he tried to preserve Australia as a third force between the great allies, the United States and Britain. Like Menzies also, he offered Australians sincere and acceptable leadership and a government able to earn trust in a time of crisis.

*Prof. Geoffrey Bolton, chancellor of Murdoch University, 2006.*

Extract courtesy of 'Menzies and Curtin: Contemporary Perspectives,' published online by the John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library in collaboration with the Menzies Foundation, 2006, at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/www2leaders/index.html>. All excerpts from this site accessed 19 November 2010.