

History Task

To understand the events of evacuation

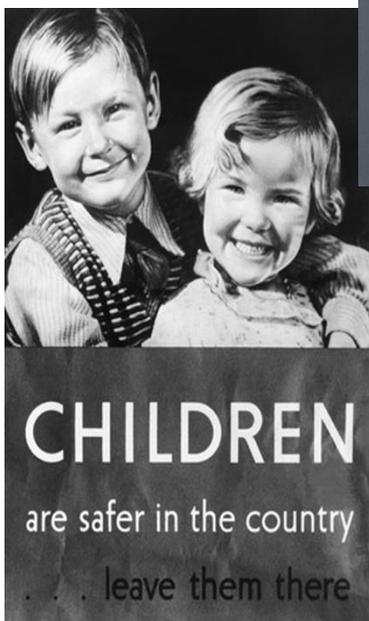


Your task is to create an information sheet on behalf of the government to reassure the parents of evacuees.

Evacuation was a traumatic experience for both children and parents. Skim and scan the information on the next pages and then produce a **one-page information sheet** on behalf of the government to **educate** and **reassure** parents of evacuees during wartime.

You may want to consider:

- Why might the government need to convince parents to evacuate their children?
- Why should parents send their children away?
- What concerns might parents have for their children going to the countryside?
- How will you reassure them?



You must include:

Facts

A mixture of text, bullet points, headings and illustrations

Careful use of language to reassure

A slogan

Why was evacuation introduced by the Government?

The British government was worried that a new war might begin when Hitler came to power in 1933. They were afraid that British cities and towns would be targets for bombing raids by aircraft as enemy planes tried to destroy factories. Children would be in danger because bombs would hit homes and schools too, so the government came up with a plan to 'empty the cities' by evacuating children and mothers to protect them from the air raids.

'Operation Pied Piper', as the evacuation was called, began on 1st September 1939 following Hitler's invasion of Poland. It tried to ensure the safety of young children from the cities that were considered to be most in danger of German bombing – London, Coventry, Birmingham, Portsmouth, etc.

MOTHERS
Send them out
of London



Who was evacuated?

About 1.5 million people were evacuated in 1939:

- Schoolchildren (827,000) and their teachers
- Mothers with children under five (524,000)
- Pregnant women (12,000)
- Some disabled people

Many returned home after a few weeks, but in 1940 a second wave of evacuation took place in response to the German bombing campaign referred to as the Blitz. As a result, many evacuees stayed in the countryside until the end of the war.

Where did children go?

Children were sent from cities to places where there was less risk of air raids. Many London children went to Devon, Cornwall and Wales. Other children moved to villages in the North, East Anglia and Scotland.

Evacuees went to live with **host families**. Their new homes were called '**billets**'. '**Billeting officers**' arranged for people to look after the children.

A smaller number of children (perhaps 10,000) went to other countries such as Canada, Australia and the United States.

How did evacuees travel?

An evacuation journey often began with a walk to school. Then it was off in buses to the station, where special trains were waiting.

Children had labels attached to them, as though they were parcels. They stood at railway stations, not knowing where they were going nor if they would be split from brothers and sisters who had gathered with them. They felt scared about being away from their families but also excited about going to a place they had never seen before and only read about in books.



What did the evacuees take with them?

The evacuees weren't able to take many possessions with them. Every evacuee had a gas mask, food for the journey (such as sandwiches, apples and chocolate) and a small bag for washing things and clothes. Pinned to the children's coats were labels. On the label were each child's name, home address, school and where he or she was going.

The government recommended that in addition to their gas mask and identity card the evacuees had the following items:

Boys:

2 vests
2 pairs of pants
Pair of trousers
2 pairs of socks
6 handkerchiefs
Pullover or jersey

Girls:

Vest
Pair of knickers
Petticoat
2 pairs of stockings
6 handkerchiefs
Slip (like a very long vest with shoulder straps)
Blouse
Cardigan



In addition, evacuees also packed the following items in their suitcases:

- Overcoat or mackintosh
- Comb
- 1 pair of Wellington boots
- Towel
- Soap
- Facecloth
- Toothbrush
- Boots or shoes
- Plimsolls
- Sandwiches
- Packet of nuts and raisins
- Dry biscuits
- Barley sugar (rather than sugar)
- Apple



On arrival

The children arrived in the countryside, tired, hungry and uncertain whether they would ever see their families again. They were taken to the village hall, where they would be met by the **billeting officer**. Things did not always go to plan. Some children ended up in the wrong places. Sometimes evacuees just stood in a line, and local people picked which children to take, often haggling over the most presentable children while the sicklier and grubbier children were left until last.

Life for the evacuees:

Though evacuees missed their homes, many enjoyed the country. Country life was full of surprises. Some city children had never seen a cow, and were startled to see where milk came from. Seeing carrots growing in muddy fields, one child said in disgust 'ours come in tins'.

Locals and evacuees went to school and played together. Most became friends, though local children sometimes said it was unfair when the 'townies' were given sweets and parties!

Host families:

Host families received money for each evacuee they took in. They were paid by taking a form to the local post office. **Billeting** was compulsory. People who refused to take evacuees into their homes without a good reason could be taken to court and fined.

It was not only **billets** that had to be found for evacuees. They also needed schools. Many teachers had been evacuated with their pupils, but it was not always easy to find them classrooms to teach in.



Not all evacuees came from poor areas. Some children found themselves evacuated from homes with bathrooms, to billets that had no facilities except a toilet at the bottom of the garden and a tin bath in front of the fire. In 1944, a Women's Institute survey found that in 21 counties 50 per cent of village schools had only earth or bucket toilets.

Going home:

In April 1945, the Government sent out a timetable of travel arrangements to return the evacuees to their homes when the war was over. The return of the evacuees was much better organized than the original evacuation in 1939 had been.

Returning evacuees to their homes was not as easy as you might think. Some evacuees returned to find their homes destroyed by bombs. Others, whose parents had been killed, had nobody to go home to. Some evacuees could not even be found, because they had gone home early without telling anyone.

By 12 July 1945, 54,317 evacuees had returned to London. Over one hundred trains were used to transport them.

By August 1945 there were still 76,000 people in reception areas. These were people who either had no home to go to, or who did not want to return. When evacuation officially finished in March 1946

Public Information Leaflet

Evacuation

Why and How?

Public Information Leaflet No. 3

Read this and keep it carefully. You may need it.

Issued from the Lord Privy Seal's Office July 1939

Why evacuation?

There are still a number of people who ask "What is the need for all this business about evacuation? Surely if war comes it would be better for families to stick together and not go breaking up their homes?"

It is quite easy to understand this feeling, because it is difficult for us in this country to realise what war in these days might mean. If we were involved in war, our big cities might be subjected to determined attacks from the air – at any rate in the early stages – and although our defences are strong and are rapidly growing stronger, some bombers would undoubtedly get through.

We must see to it then that the enemy does not secure his chief objects – the creation of anything like panic, or the crippling dislocation of our civil life.

One of the first measures we can take to prevent this is the removal of the children from the more dangerous areas.

The Government Evacuation Scheme

The government have accordingly made plans for the removal from what are called "evacuable" areas to safer places called "reception" areas, of school children, children below school age if accompanied by their mothers or other responsible persons, and expectant mothers and blind persons.

The scheme is entirely a voluntary one, but clearly the children will be much safer and happier away from the big cities where the dangers will be greatest.

There is room in the safer areas for these children; householders have volunteered to provide it. They have offered homes where the children will be made welcome. The children will have their school teachers and other helpers with them and their schooling will be continued.

What you have to do

Schoolchildren:

Schoolchildren would assemble at their schools when told to do so and would travel together with their teachers by train. The transport of some 3,000,000 in all is an enormous undertaking. It would not be possible to let all parents know in advance the place to which each child is to be sent but they would be notified as soon as the movement is over.

If you have children of school age, you have probably already heard from the school or the local education authority the necessary details of what you would have to do to get your child or children taken away. Do not hesitate to register your children under this scheme, particularly if you are living in a crowded area. Of course it means heartache to be separated from your children, but you can be quite sure that they will be looked after. That will relieve you of one anxiety at any rate. You cannot wish, if it is possible to evacuate them, to let your children experience the dangers and fears of an air attack in crowded cities.

Children under five:

Children below school age must be accompanied by their mothers or some other responsible person. Mothers who wish to go away with such children should register with the local authority. Do not delay in making enquiries about this.

A number of mothers in certain areas have shown reluctance to register. Naturally, they are anxious to stay by their men folk. Possibly they are thinking that they might wait as well wait and see; that it might not be so bad after all. Think this over carefully and think of your child or children in good time. Once air attacks have begun it might be very difficult to arrange to get away.

Expectant mothers:

Expectant mothers can register at any maternity or child welfare centre. For any further information inquire at your town hall.

The Blind:

In the case of the blind, registration to come under the scheme can be secured through the home visitors, or enquiry may be made at the town hall.

Private Arrangements:

If you have made private arrangements for getting away your children to relatives or friends in the country, or intend to make them, you should remember that while the government evacuation scheme is in progress ordinary railway and road services will necessarily be drastically reduced and subject to alteration at short notice. Do not, therefore, in an emergency leave your private plans to be carried out at the last moment. It may then be too late.

If you happen to be away on holiday in the country or at the seaside and an emergency arises, do not attempt to take your children back home if you live in an "evacuable" area.

Work must go on:

The purpose of evacuation is to remove from the crowded and vulnerable centres, if an emergency should arise, those, more particularly the children, whose presence cannot be of assistance.

Everyone will realise that there can be no question of wholesale clearance. We are not going to win a war by running away. Most of us will have work to do, and work that matters, because we must maintain the nation's life and the production of munitions and other material essential to our war effort. For most of us therefore, who do not go off to the Fighting Forces our duty will be to stand by our jobs or those new jobs which we may undertake in war.

Some people have asked what they ought to do if they have no such definite work or duty.

You should be very sure before deciding that there is really nothing you can do. There is opportunity for a vast variety of services in civil defence. You must judge whether in fact you can or cannot help by remaining. If you are sure you cannot, then there is every reason why you should go away if you can arrange to do so, but you take care to avoid interfering with the official evacuation plans. If you are proposing to use the public transport services, make your move either **before** the evacuation of children begins or **after** it has been completed. You will not be allowed to use transport required for the official evacuation scheme and other essential purposes, and you must not try to take accommodation which is required for the children and mothers under the government scheme.

For the rest, we must remember that it would be essential that the work of the country should go on. Men and women alike will have to stand firm, to maintain our effort for victory. Such measures of protection as are possible are being pushed forward for the large numbers who have to remain at their posts. That they will be ready to do so, no one doubts.

The "evacuable" areas under the government scheme are: London including West Ham, East Ham, Walthamstow, Leyton, Ilford and Barking in Essex; Tottenham, Hornsey, Willesden, Acton and Edmonton in Middlesex; the Medway towns of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester; Portsmouth, Gosport and Southampton; Birmingham, Smethwick; Liverpool, Bootle, Birkenhead and Wallasey; Manchester and Salford; Sheffield, Leeds, Bradford and Hull; Newcastle and Gateshead; Edinburgh, Rosyth, Glasgow, Clydebank and Dundee.

In some of these places only certain areas will be evacuated. Evacuation may be effected from a few other places in addition to the above, of which notice will be given.