

Churchill's 3pm Speech on VE Day

The 8th May 1945 marked the end of WW2 in Europe with Germany's unconditional surrender to the Allied Forces. At 3pm Winston Churchill gave a speech that was broadcast on national radio announcing the news to the Commonwealth. In his speech he addresses the debt of gratitude owed to the Allied Forces, but also reminds everyone that the war with Japan is still ongoing and that there is still much to be done before freedom is fully achieved.

You can read our abridged version of Churchill's speech on page 4.



Words as weapons

Churchill made many speeches during WW2 to keep morale high and inspire the British public and troops to carry on with the war effort. He used different linguistic devices such as alliteration and metaphors as well as emotive language. Many of these speeches have now become iconic with certain phrases becoming synonymous with the war effort:

DID YOU KNOW?

After Churchill made his radio broadcast on VE Day he appeared on the balcony of the Ministry of Health building in London to a mass of cheering crowds. When he declared: 'This is your victory.' The crowd shouted back: 'No – it's yours!'

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender..."

From Churchill's speech following the evacuation of British troops from Dunkirk.

"This was their finest hour"

From Churchill's speech made on 18th June 1940 praising the RAF during the Battle of Britain.

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat"

From Churchill's first speech in office as Prime Minister following the resignation of Neville Chamberlain.

"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few"

From Churchill's speech made on 20th August 1940 praising the ongoing efforts of the RAF during the Battle of Britain.

🧑 Activities

- 1 Channel your inner Churchill and perform a dramatic reading of one (or more) of Churchill's speeches from WW2. You could perform these in class or during assembly.
- 2 Study Churchill's speeches and create your own VE Day speech in pairs or groups. What linguistic devices could you use? What ways could you transmit your speech to reach the most people in the shortest amount of time?



Churchill's VE Day Speech

8th May 1945 (abridged)

// Yesterday morning at 2:41 am at Headquarters, General Jodl, the representative of the German High Command, and Grand Admiral Doenitz, the designated head of the German State, signed the act of unconditional surrender of all German Land, sea, and air forces in Europe to the Allied Expeditionary Force, and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command.

Today this agreement will be ratified and confirmed at Berlin... Hostilities will end officially at one minute after midnight tonight (Tuesday, May 8), but in the interests of saving lives the ceasefire began yesterday to be sounded all along the front, and our dear Channel Islands are also to be freed today.

The Germans are still in places resisting the Russian troops, but should they continue to do so after midnight they will, of course, deprive themselves of the protection of the laws of war, and will be attacked from all quarters by the Allied troops. It is not surprising that on such long fronts and in the existing disorder of the enemy the orders of the German High Command should not in every case be obeyed immediately. This does not, in our opinion, with the best military advice at our disposal, constitute any reason for withholding from the nation the facts communicated to us by General Eisenhower of the unconditional surrender already signed at Rheims, nor should it prevent us from celebrating today and tomorrow (Wednesday) as Victory in Europe days.

Today, perhaps, we shall think mostly of ourselves. Tomorrow we shall pay a particular tribute to our Russian comrades, whose prowess in the field has been one of the grand contributions to the general victory.

The German war is therefore at an end. After years of intense preparation, Germany hurled herself on Poland at the beginning of September, 1939; and, in pursuance of our guarantee to Poland and in agreement with the French Republic, Great Britain, the British Empire and Commonwealth of Nations, declared war upon this foul aggression. After gallant France had been struck down we, from this Island and from our united Empire, maintained the struggle single-handed for a whole year until we were joined by the military might of Soviet Russia, and later by the overwhelming power and resources of the United States of America.

Our gratitude to our splendid Allies goes forth from all our hearts in this Island and throughout the British Empire.

We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing; but let us not forget for a moment the toil and efforts that lie ahead... We must now devote all our strength and resources to the completion of our task, both at home and abroad. Advance, Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King! //

Wireless in the 1940s

Communications: The 'Wireless'

As most homes did not have a television set until the 1950s and 1960s, the radio was the main form of home communication and entertainment during the war. Listening to the 'wireless' was one of Britain's most loved pastimes during WW2. Most families could afford a radio and would listen in daily to hear updates from overseas about the war. The radio entertained and informed the British public, providing families with daily updates of overseas developments and offering moments of relief with music and comedy shows.

All across Britain, families tuned into the BBC to hear Winston Churchill announce the end of war in Europe at 3pm on 8th May 1945. Following the announcement, the BBC broadcasted a range of pre-recorded celebratory programmes celebrating Victory in Europe. You can hear excerpts from VE Day radio broadcasting here:

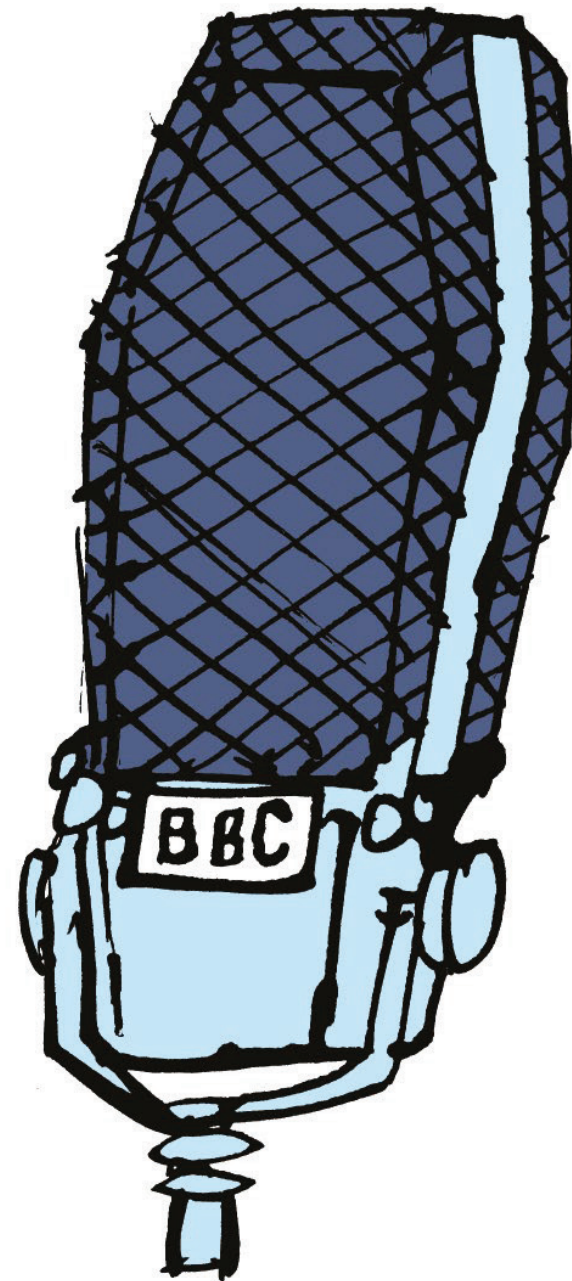
[bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/ may/ve-day-broadcasts](https://www.bbc.com/historyofthebbc/anniversaries/may/ve-day-broadcasts)

DID YOU KNOW?

VE Day Celebrations in New Zealand were held on the 9th May instead of the 8th because the government wanted to wait until Winston Churchill's speech had been broadcast. Due to the time difference, the speech was broadcast the following morning.

DID YOU KNOW?

Eight out of ten families in Britain owned a radio. The radio was an important way to keep cheerful during the war.



Newspapers

Much like the radio, newspapers kept civilians up to date about the ongoing conflict. War affects all aspects of daily life and newspapers were also key in sharing advice for how best the home front could contribute to the war effort and live as normal a life as possible.

Activities

- 1 Record your school's very own VE Day Street Party radio show – share stories of how your school is celebrating and highlight local stories of VE Day to treasure for years to come. Share your radio show, pictures and VE Day experiences on your school's social media.
- 2 Recreate your own VE Day headline newspaper using a template like this:
flipsnack.com/templates/black-white-school-newspaper-template
- 3 Discuss in groups communication in the 1940s compared to modern day. How do you find out about what's going on in the world today? Can you imagine not hearing from loved ones daily?

