

Why was winning the Battle of Britain in 1940 so important?

National Curriculum subject content:

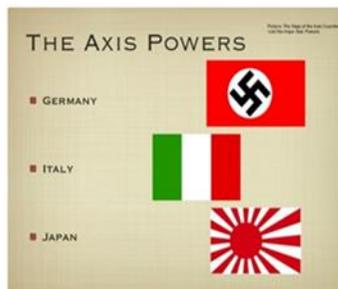
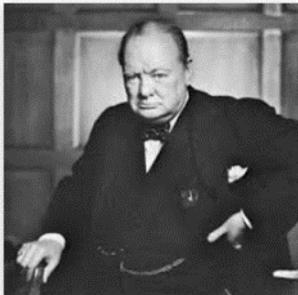
Pupils should be taught about: a study or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

Key skills covered:

Cause and consequence, historical significance, historical interpretation, historical enquiry

The Battle of Britain:

By the end of 1940, Nazi Germany had occupied almost all of Western Europe and driven the allied armies of Britain and France into the English Channel at Dunkirk. Hitler drew in order for an **invasion** of Britain, the successful execution of which depended on securing **aerial dominance**. The fight for **supremacy** in the skies, known as the Battle of Britain, lasted 12 weeks and ended in victory for the allies. Hitler's invasion plans were abandoned. Britain was able to focus its physical and human resources on preparations to attack the Germans in mainland Europe rather than defending its own **territory**. Victory also demonstrated to both the United States and the Soviet Union that the Nazi war machine was not invincible and that collaborative action might destroy it.



The Royal Air Force (RAF) is the United Kingdom's aerial warfare force. Formed towards the end of the First World War on 1 April 1918, it is the oldest independent air force in the world. The most famous fighter aircraft used in the Battle of Britain were the British Hawker Hurricane and Supermarine Spitfire Mk I.

The Luftwaffe (in German literally: "air weapon") is the air force of Germany. The Luftwaffe were the first air force to fly jet fighters. The German Luftwaffe used the Messerschmitt Bf 109 and Focke-Wulf 190.

Key vocabulary

Allied Powers	The nations that fought in WW2 against the Axis Powers.
Axis Powers	The nations that fought in WW2 against the Allied Forces.
Treaty	A written agreement between countries in which they agree to do a particular thing or to help each other.
Invasion	When a foreign country invades a country by force.
Supremacy	To have more political or military power than others.
Aerial dominance	A side holds complete control of air warfare and air power over opposing forces.
Territory	A certain area that's owned or under the control of someone.
Third Reich	Reich is a German word. It means the 'Third Empire'.
Fuhrer	The German word for leader.
Chancellor	Chancellor is the title of the head of government in Germany and Austria
Luftwaffe	The air force of Germany
Channel Islands	Two islands, Jersey and Guernsey in the English Channel, near the coast of Normandy. They were occupied by the Wehrmacht (German Armed Forces) during the WW2.
Dunkirk	Dunkirk is a port located in the north of France, on the shores of the North Sea near the Belgian-French border
Evacuation	Evacuation means leaving a place. During the Second World War, many children living in big cities and towns were moved temporarily from their homes to places considered safer, usually out in the countryside.
Sortie	An attack made by troops coming out from a position of defence.

Timeline of events:

18 June 1940: Prime Minister Winston Churchill delivers a speech to the House of Commons stating that he expects there to soon be a battle in Britain.

22 June 1940: Nazi Germany takes control of France. Great Britain is the only European country left to resist Hitler.

1 July 1940: The Germans invade the Channel Islands.

10 July 1940: The Battle of Britain begins. The German Luftwaffe attack British supply convoys in the English Channel for the first time.

16 July 1940: Hitler issues a directive to prepare a landing operation against Great Britain – Operation Sea Lion.

12-15 August 1940: The Germans realise that the British are using radar so attack 'Chain Home' stations along the coast.

13 August 1940: Adlertag ('Eagle Day') – Germans attack Fighter Command airfields and aircraft factories but are disrupted by bad weather.

15 August 1940: Referred to as 'The Greatest Day', a day which sees the heaviest fighting of the Battle so far. The Luftwaffe fly over 2,000 sorties and lose 75 aircraft. Fighter Command fly 974 sorties and lose 34 aircraft. The day is called 'Black Thursday' in Germany.

16 August 1940: Prime Minister Winston Churchill visits the Battle of Britain bunker at RAF Uxbridge.

18 August 1940: Referred to as 'The Hardest Day'. The Luftwaffe mount large scale raids on three targets in southern England that include Kenley and Biggin Hill.

24 August 1940: German night-time bombers aiming for RAF airfields drift off course and accidentally destroy several London homes, killing civilians.

25 August 1940: The RAF bombs Berlin in retaliation for the London bombings.

15 September 1940: Hailed as 'Battle of Britain Day'. In this heavy day of fighting, Fighter Command shoots down 56 German aircraft. This costly raid convinces the German High Command that the Luftwaffe cannot achieve air supremacy over Britain, and the next day daylight attacks are replaced with night-time sorties as a concession of defeat.

September 1940: Hitler postpones Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain, until further notice.