



The Battle of Britain – The Turning Point

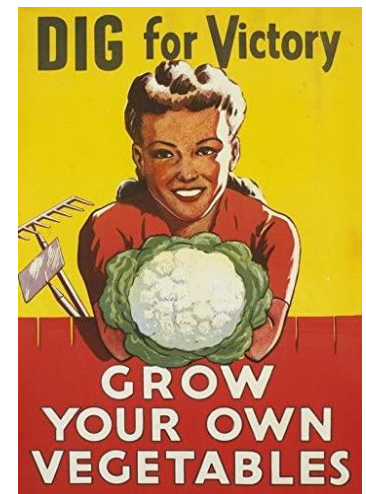
Notes from the writers:



We started our research for by looking at primary source material from 1940 and the months leading up to the Battle of Britain. We also referred to the KS2 National Curriculum for history and English to ensure that the show would spark projects and discussions back in the classroom. The Battle of Britain is one of history's greatest turning points, and we aimed to tell the story in a way which encourages *'historically valid questions about change, cause, similarity and difference, and significance'* (KS2 history curriculum). We wanted the concert to be an exciting musical and dramatic experience for the children, but we also hoped

they would return to school curious about the characters, stories and issues involved.

We approached the momentous events of 1940 from a community perspective rather than as a tale of individual heroism. Collectively everyone in Britain had to play their part - obeying blackout rules, growing vegetables 'for victory', not talking carelessly in case information fell into enemy hands. Children endured long periods of separation from their parents who were encouraged to send them to stay with strangers in the country for safety during the Blitz. We searched for first-hand accounts of ordinary Britons' wartime experiences and developed our characters from these sources, particularly from the BBC WW2 People's War archive.



A female radar operator's story from the archives became the model for our narrator Mary. She describes radar as 'our secret weapon' but she also adds 'Even our parents could not be let into the secret', this is the basis of the song 'Listening In'. The humorous song 'Hunting for Spies' comes from a real account by an enthusiastic evacuee who followed a nun all day thinking she was a German spy in disguise.



The Battle of Britain contains a collage of songs asking the children to sing in many different styles from the exhilaration of a pilot in the air ('The Feeling of Flying'), the sad waltz of an evacuee trying not to cry at the station, to the jaunty 'Dig for Victory', based on the colourful posters exhorting everyone to turn their flowerbeds into vegetable patches.

Our main character Charles is a young pilot undergoing a very short training of two weeks before flying Spitfires in combat. We researched the dangerous life of a fighter pilot in 1940 and used the famous 'Ten Rules of Air Fighting' from the South African commander of RAF 74 Squadron for our song 'The Rules of Fighting'. Charles flies alongside pilots from Europe (notably Poles and Czechs) as well as allies from other countries including Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, South Africa, and India. We go into London's underground tunnels to shelter from the bombing and sing 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', which is what people sang to keep spirits up during the terror of the Blitz.

The climax of the piece is a musical depiction of the Battle of Britain on September 15th when, against all the odds, the skill of RAF pilots, ground crews and radar operators stopped Hitler's 'Operation Sea Lion' – his bid for air control of Britain which would have allowed him to invade by sea. This was indeed a turning point for the war in Europe. However it was not the end of the war, so the concert finishes with 'Peace Song', a fervent prayer for peace in our time, 'a place where children are safe and war is no more' – as relevant today as it was in 1940.

