

THE SPIRIT OF '45



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DIRECTED BY: Ken Loach

CERTIFICATE: U

RUNNING TIME: 98 mins

COUNTRY: UK

YEAR: 2013

SUITABLE FOR: history, English, citizenship, government and politics

SYNOPSIS

An impassioned documentary about how the spirit of unity, which buoyed Britain during the war years carried through to create a vision of a fairer, united society.

1945 was a pivotal year in British history. The unity that carried Britain through the war allied to the bitter memories of the inter-war years led to a vision of a better society. The spirit of the age was to be our brother's and our sister's keeper. Director Ken Loach has used film from Britain's regional and national archives, alongside sound recordings and contemporary interviews, to create a rich political and social narrative. *The Spirit of '45* hopes to illuminate and celebrate a period of unprecedented community spirit in the UK, the impact of which endured for many years and which may yet be rediscovered today.

TEACHERS' NOTES

The Spirit of '45 invites us to consider the mood of post-war Britain and raises questions as to what we want our collective future to look like. This resource is designed to encourage young people to watch the film and familiarise themselves with its official digital project (www.thespiritof45.com), as a pre-cursor to engaging in intergenerational conversations within the context of learning English and history.

Although the specific learning objectives for students of English and history are different, the focus on intergenerational dialogue about memories of the past makes these activities highly relevant for both subject areas.

For teachers who require tangible outcomes (in a range of formats including writing, video and presentations), there are suggestions of how to build on the intergenerational speaking and listening activities in the 'follow-up ideas' towards the end. The activities are suitable for all students of secondary age English and history from ages 11+ including for GCSE English language: spoken language study and for the historical enquiry elements of GCSE and A level history.

It is important to remember that the access your students will have to people who lived through the end of the war in Britain will depend heavily on your student cohort and the backgrounds they come from. In some cases you may wish to invite volunteer speakers from local day centres or residential homes or elderly relatives of students or teachers. For the purpose of these activities, people over the age of seventy are most likely to remember the events represented in the film.

GETTING STARTED

1. Before you watch the film, in groups of three-four draw a spidergram including everything you know about the period 1945 – it is a good idea for everyone in the group to retain a copy of this as it will be useful to return to later. Remember, this date marks the end of World War II and the beginning of a new Labour government. Here are some prompt questions to get your discussion going:

- What hardships did British people suffer before and during the war?
- Who won the war? What ways might victory have been celebrated?
- What types of clothes, hairstyles and music were fashionable at this time?
- How was life different from now? What role has technology played in changing society?
- What films have you seen set during this period? How is Britain represented in these films?

2. Watch *The Spirit of '45* – ideally with someone who lived through the period. The film is on general release from March 15th and there will be coordinated nationwide screenings at 3pm on Sunday March 17th. These will include a live question and answer session with the director Ken Loach broadcast via satellite and viewers will have the opportunity to send in questions beforehand.

For full listings of where these screenings will take place, go to www.thespiritof45.com/screenings

As you watch the film, try to think about whether the notes you made in your spidergram match with the information presented.

3. After watching, in groups, make a list of impressions given by the film. You can use these questions as a prompt:

- How would you describe the mood of 1945 as represented in the film?
- What details from the different interviews can you remember about life during this time?
- How does the film represent society changing from 1945 onwards?
- How did the film make you feel about Britain then and now?

4. Now, prepare a list of questions to ask older people about their personal memories of this period. Aim to ask 'open' questions that require the interviewee to say more than 'yes' or 'no'. These can often begin with 'Tell me about...'. Try to recount particular details from the film that you can ask them about. By doing so, you can test the authenticity of the representations in the film whilst finding out more about this period from people who actually remember it. Here are some questions to get you started:

- Tell me about your childhood – what were your favourite games? What food did you love? What are some of your most vivid memories as a child?
- Tell me about where you lived...

MEMORIES

As well as listening to the interviews hosted on the digital project site at www.thespiritof45.com, try to find out more from other people who lived during this time. Your teacher might arrange for a visiting speaker to come to talk to you or you might prefer to speak with your own or your friends' elderly relatives.

For those of you whose families were born and brought up outside Britain, try to find out from elderly relatives about whether 1945 was such a significant date outside of Britain and why.

It would be fantastic if you could actually watch the film together with one of these people at the March 17th screenings. For more details, go to www.thespiritof45.com/screenings

If this isn't possible, make sure to tell them about the parts that had the most impact on you as the basis for talking to them about their personal memories.

To stimulate these memories, and in addition to the questions you prepared earlier, you might like to show the still images on page 4 from the film:



If at all possible, and of course with the permission of the person you are speaking to, it would be great to record your conversation, maybe on your mobile phone. This gives you the opportunity to share your conversation with others and to draw out the best parts to include later in writing or in a presentation.

COMMUNITY

A strong theme in the film is the power of community. Ken Loach is keen to stress the importance of working-class solidarity and collective actions that benefited everyone in society, one of the most durable being the National Health Service (NHS). As you talk to older people about their personal memories, try to tease out their attitudes and beliefs about community life during this period.

- Were they and their families members of a trade union, for example?
- How did they celebrate the end of the war?
- What do they remember about the setting up of the National Health Service (NHS) and the creation of planned social housing?
- To what extent does the film present an impression of community that is similar to their own memories?

FOLLOW-UP IDEAS

The time you spend on this work and where it fits in with your other studies in either English or history will depend on how you bring together your findings from your intergenerational conversations.

Here are some ways to share what you've learned:

- Using stills images and recorded interviews, create a presentation for your class or year group about *The Spirit of '45*. Try to show understanding both of the film itself, the period it presents and the personal memories of those you spoke to.
- Using your ideas about the film and your notes from your intergenerational conversation(s), draft a proposal for a historical enquiry into this period. Consider the key questions to investigate and draw up a list of sources you will rely on.
- Write an article for your school or local community newspaper or website explaining the work you have been doing around *The Spirit of '45* including what you have learned from both the film and the subsequent intergenerational conversations.

For more ideas and approaches to developing intergenerational dialogue, see www.englishandmedia.co.uk/agetoage/