

Post war rationing

Here is a story describing how one person felt about rationing.

Remember – there was no refrigeration in people's homes then, (nor such things as cling film or tin foil) and people would buy daily what they needed. But some things were bought longer than for a day, and would sit and age...

Cheddar cheese. A block would be purchased and it would age, and get harder and drier each day. Fresh vegetables and fruit were in short supply. One day, towards the end of the life of the cheese, when it was hard and dry and almost tasteless, mother couldn't stand that this was all that we had to eat. So she waited until it was dark, then stole out into the garden; she tiptoed quietly, squeezed through the neighbour's fence, and stole an onion from their vegetable patch. She sneaked back inside, and with great, great pleasure sliced it – and ate it with the cheese.

Tea leaves were used, saved, and used again. And maybe, even again.

I had a plaid skirt to wear to school, with a white blouse. Year 1: it had straps that went over my shoulders, crossed at the back, and buttoned at my waist, with the hem falling below my knees. Year 2: it had straps that went over my shoulders and buttoned at the back at my waist, falling to my knees. Year 3: the hem was let down; the straps were attached at the front with safety pins to the very edge of the fabric, and it went over my shoulders to the waist, falling above the knees. Shame is what was felt at wearing this outfit.

My brother started school 3 years after me and he was dressed in my winter coat and woolly hat. He was embarrassed at having to wear this outfit.

Friday night is chicken for dinner. Friday – soup made with half the chicken, a potato and carrots in it; Saturday: half the chicken for parents and children. youngest child (my brother – gets the wing; Father gets the drumstick and thigh; Mother gets the breast; I get.... I don't remember... small pieces).

Post war rationing

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheets.

Using the worksheet

It is one of the great ironies of post war Britain that although Britain (and the other allies) won the war, they still had rationing for many years. To be fair, conditions in Germany and most other parts of Europe were far worse, but people were resentful at having sacrificed so much and yet still having to ration bread and butter.

The reason rationing continued is that Britain had almost bankrupted herself in fighting the war. That, and the fact that most aid from countries that could spare it was going to Germany and other defeated areas in order to prevent starvation and chaos.

If you have already studied World War II, then students would have had a chance to study rationing during the war. But you may like to explain that the fact that rationing continued for so long affected people's attitudes towards life. When rationing ended, people tended to cut loose and really try to enjoy life. Some younger people also began to rebel against some types of authority, because they had been living by strict rules for a long time and wanted to be freer.

Younger students

The students could answer the questions on page 28 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

1. Daily.
2. It would get harder and drier.
3. An onion.
4. 3 years.
5. The author's coat and hat.
6. Two meals for four people each.
7. Answers will vary, possible answers include shame, hunger, sadness, anger.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that rationing of food and clothes continued in Britain after World War II ended.
- Understand a little of how people felt at having to live with rationing.
- Extract information from a text.

Older students

The students could answer the questions on page 29 to test their comprehension of the text.

Answers

1. There was no refrigeration in people's homes.
2. Answers will vary – she was tired of having nothing to eat, she was hungry.
3. The author grew taller, but there was no money for a longer skirt.
4. Answers will vary and may include: her skirt was too short, she had to wear the same skirt every year.
5. Answers will vary and may include: because he was a boy wearing a girl's clothes; the clothes did not fit.
6. Answers will vary.


Outcomes

The students can:

- Know that rationing of food and clothes continued in Britain after World War II ended.
- Understand a little of how people felt at having to live with rationing.
- Extract information from a text.
- Give opinions based on a reading.

Questions (i): Post war rationing

1. How often did people buy food?


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2. What happened to the cheddar cheese over time?



3. What did the author's mother steal?



4. How many years did the author have to wear the same skirt to school?


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5. What did the author's brother have to wear to school?



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6. How many meals did the family eat from one chicken?



7. How do you think the author felt at not having new clothes or much food?



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Questions (ii): Post war rationing

1. Why did people have to buy their food every day?



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2. ☐ Why do you think the author's mother stole an onion?



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3. Why do you think the writer's skirt was below the knee in length the first two years at school, and above the knee the third year?



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4. Why do you think the author felt shame at having to wear the same skirt for three years?



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5. Why do you think the author's brother felt shame at having to wear her hat and coat?



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6. How do you think the author felt at not having new clothes or much food?



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