

Blackout at home

With an adult helper, stand outside your house or flat at night and look at how much light is escaping. During the war everyone had to obey the rules about the blackout so that enemy bombers could not find their targets. Here are some rules for how to prepare your home and street for the blackout:

Blackout rules

Every window, door or skylight that can show light through it must be fitted with a blackout curtain made from heavy, black, cotton material.

No light can escape from a house or flat at all.

Do not use a light in a room unless the blackout curtain is drawn.

All porch lights must be out.

No lights can be on in the garden.

No smoking cigarettes outside.

All car headlamps must be covered up at night, with only a thin slit to let light through.

All streetlights must be dark at night.

Water mains are painted with a white stripe so they can be found at night.

Lampposts and curbs are painted white so they are more visible.

In the country, cows are painted with white stripes in case they wander into the roads.

Traffic lights must be covered up with only a tiny slit to let light out.

Questions

1. Pretend that you are an air-raid warden for your street or building. Make a list of things you would need to do to prepare your street (or your building, if you live in a large building) for the blackout and to make sure everyone is obeying the blackout rules. Write down exactly how you would follow the rules to prepare your street or building for the blackout. For example, how many windows would need blackout curtains? Are there street lights or traffic lights on your street?



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2. During the blackout it was completely dark outside. How safe do you think you would feel walking home in the pitch black? What dangers would you need to look out for?



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Teacher's sheet

Based on **pages 18 and 19** of *Children in the Second World War*

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Age range

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

Resources

Copies of the worksheet. Sample of a blackout curtain.

Using the worksheet

During the Blitz, everyone had to be prepared for the blackout. Buildings were kept dark so the German bombers would not be able to choose a specific target – the hope was that if they could not see specific buildings then they would drop their bombs randomly and so some of the bombs would land in fields or other unoccupied areas.

Air-raid wardens in each neighbourhood were responsible for making sure that everyone obeyed the blackout rules. Although they were volunteers, they took their jobs very seriously.

The blackout was more than a nuisance, but it is difficult to understand just how difficult it was to get around in the dark because today there are so many street lights and house lights. In fact, a large number of people were injured or killed in car accidents and other accidents on darkened roads and streets. Cars crashed into people, trams and other cars; people tripped on curbs and other obstacles; and women were more vulnerable in the pitch dark.

You might like to begin this lesson by discussing how you would go about blocking out all the light in your classroom. Students could also make a blackout curtain or screen from dark material and a wooden frame (you could use thin wood stapled into a frame). You could also put a dark curtain up on one window. Students could see that light still gets through around the curtain. They could then try to think of ways to completely block out the light from the window.

Younger students

Some of the students may need help with answering the questions.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand what was involved in the blackout.
- Understand how people prepared their homes and neighbourhoods for the blackout.

Older students

The students can work on their own. They may want to draw a plan of their house or flat and street and label everything that would need to be prepared for the blackout. Students may also want to perform the following exercise: If they can obtain permission, buy a 25-watt light bulb and ask an adult to use it to light a staircase or a room in their house or flat. At night, with all other sources of light switched off, see how dim the room or staircase has become. Write about how it might feel to get down a long staircase, in this dim light, with hundreds of other frightened people pressed into the same dark space.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Understand what was involved in the blackout.
- Understand how people prepared their homes and neighbourhoods for the blackout.