

The Life and Legacy of Sir Winston Churchill

What was Churchill's role in British History?

Guidance Notes and Lesson Plan

Lesson Objectives:

- To understand Churchill's diverse roles and actions in political office
- To assess the impact Churchill had on a range of policy areas
- To begin to assess the significance of Churchill's contribution to British history

Introduction

The life of Winston Churchill spanned a period of huge significance for the United Kingdom, a period that would see two world wars, the emergence of universal voting rights and the early welfare state, as well as the gradual decline of Britain's empire. Churchill's close relationship to these significant developments in British and international events makes him all the more a significant figure. Using the chronology of his working life and investigating the relationship between his work and national and global developments this lesson aims to help students understand the multiplicity of significant events that were shaping Britain through this period.

Students will develop an understanding of the range of significant events Churchill was connected to. This will add to students' prior understanding of Churchill's character and develop their knowledge and understanding of key elements of British history in the 20th century. By looking at a timeline of Churchill's life, his different roles and achievements students will be able to evaluate his significance as a historical figure.

Key Information

This lesson is designed for students aged 12 and above. It is devised for History classes.

Timings are suggested on the basis of a one hour lesson, and may need adapting based on circumstances.

The lesson is designed to follow lesson one of the scheme of work: *How should we characterise Sir Winston Churchill?*. Prior knowledge is not needed. However, recognising that students may arrive with knowledge, ideas and preconceptions is embraced and should be utilised to explore and resolve misconceptions.

Resources:

- Lesson plan
- PowerPoint
- Timeline Handout.
 - To be printed one per student, or one per group

Lesson Plan:

Starter: Connecting Thinking (8 minutes)

As students enter the classroom show the quote 'the quandary of Winston Churchill' (Slide 1) to students and invite them to consider and briefly discuss the questions:

- Does this seem like an accurate summary to you?
- What other words might you use to describe him?
- What does a statement like this add to your understanding?
- What questions would you like to ask?

Having given time for students to consider and discuss in pairs or table groups, draw the group together to collect feedback. Students may comment on terms and aspects of the quote that they were not aware of, elements of Churchill's character which they recognise, elements of Churchill's character that they feel have been missed in the quote. Students should be encouraged to critically analyse the quote and discuss any questions they raise.

The activity aims to help students to connect their learning about the complexity of Churchill from the previous lesson and set a basis for ongoing exploration into his life in this lesson, in which students will explore the range of events Churchill was involved in throughout his life.

Introduction: What was Churchill's role in British History? (2 minutes)

(Slide 2) Introduce students to the lesson by explaining that we will be looking at an overview of the main events in Churchill's career as a means of understanding him, his priorities and main achievements, and connect his character to his actions in office. Furthermore, looking at Churchill's life will give students an indication of some of the significant issues facing Britain over the course of his life.

Activity: What stands out in Churchill's Career? (30 minutes)

Distribute copies of the Churchill Timeline handout, one per student. Explain that having learned about Churchill's early life last lesson, we are now going to look at his adult career and assess what the main aspects of this featured (Slide 3 pt.1). Explain that in this activity we are focussing on understanding the range of things Churchill was involved with, rather than trying to understand each specific event in detail. This is intended to build an overview picture, but also see trends, so close reading is not essential at this point.

Give students five minutes to look over the timeline and discuss their initial thoughts in pairs or table groups. Encourage them to consider questions such as: What kind of roles did Churchill have? Where did he serve as an MP? What positions did he hold in government? What else can you see from the timeline about his life, interests, achievements? If there are things they may not have expected to see in the timeline? Would they expect him to continue to write books or pursue other past times? What do these things suggest about the person?

Having had time to work independently, bring the class together to collect feedback on these questions and what stood out to the students themselves. Students may identify or be drawn to elements on the timeline that they recognise or have a connection to. Gaining feedback on their initial impressions will help you to pick up on relevant themes within your class and be able to respond or return to these in the moment or at a later point in the lesson. Alongside this encourage students to reflect on the nature of historical events that Churchill was connected to throughout his life. Encourage students to consider how the world was changing during this period. (approx.. five minutes)

Having made some initial reflections, give students 10-15 minutes to analyse the timeline again, this time with a focus on specific themes within Churchill's political work over the period (Slide 3 pt.2). As they re-read the timeline students should look to identify and highlight aspects of the timeline which relate to:

- Political roles and offices
- Social issues

- War and Diplomacy
- Empire

(This task can be done as an individual task or in groups with each member looking for a different theme, before sharing their findings within their own group)

Model this activity by working through the first few entries of the timeline as a whole group, before setting the students to work independently.

Once students have annotated their timelines, conduct a class discussion on which themes stand out, which are more common, what time periods they were more or less significant and how significant Churchill's role appears to be using the questions on Slide 4 as a prompt. (approx. five-ten minutes)

Activity: Putting it all together (10 minutes)

Students have now assessed Churchill from the perspectives of his background, his attitudes, and his actions. They have looked at aspects of his personal life and upbringing, then focused on his political career. They have also developed their understanding of the context Churchill lived in, particularly his early life. In this task students will be asked to synthesise this range of information and perspectives on Churchill and British history to form a judgement on how Churchill's experiences shaped him, and how he helped to shape British history.

Give the students a minute to consider and discuss, in pairs/table groups the question on the screen (Slide 5) – how would you summarise Churchill? Hold a short group discussion on this question using follow-up questioning to enable students to develop their thinking and connect the dots between Churchill's formative experiences and later actions.

Now click on to the second question on the screen (Slide 5) and ask students to be ready to share their feelings on the question: What can we hypothesise about Churchill's impact on British history from looking over his whole career? Use the categories identified in the timeline task and specific evidence from within it as a reference to encourage students to organise their thinking and responses. Additional questioning can be used to draw out the range of significant events which Churchill was connected to, which they think were the most significant, and how his background may have impacted his attitude to these issues.

Finally click on to the challenge question: How did Churchill shape modern Britain? Explain that whilst we may not have enough information to answer this question fully, having not yet

looked at issues in detail, we can use the knowledge of his roles and actions to develop an initial response.

N.B. This discussion does not require value judgements to be made (though students may be drawn to this kind of response). The objective is to look at the range and significance of Churchill's contributions to British history rather than to judge it.

Plenary: How did Churchill shape modern Britain? (10 minutes)

Use the quote from Churchill College Cambridge, displayed on Slide 6, to frame the relationship between Churchill's history and British identity. Explain clearly that it is not our objective to 'reassess' Churchill, rather this was how Churchill College was framing a panel discussion which took place in 2020 on Churchill's legacy. Our objective is to engage with the complexity of the different interpretations and understand Churchill and British history in its messiness, not by oversimplification.

Draw the students attention to the idea that Churchill is used as an embodiment of British identity. Ask questions such as: What does this quote mean to you? How might it be the case that Churchill represents Britishness? Why do you think his name is considered synonymous with British identity? Do you think this should be the case, and why?

(Slide 7) Explain that the next few lessons will explore some of the events Churchill played a part in to see what happened and how they helped shape Britain, and the world today, as well as shaping our perceptions of what Britain is and what it stands for. Explain to students that as we look at the past, we can often learn about the present and understand better where we came from. Encourage students to notice elements of the history we study in the coming lessons that resonate with the world we live in today. Suggest that certain themes we focus on in lessons will have impacted the way we live today, and encourage students to ask questions, write notes and be ready to discuss the contemporary relevance of the history we study.

Ask students if they have noticed anything from the lesson today that has a relevance based on the theme or nature of the issue or event. You might pick out comments on Empire, Women's rights, Strikes, Democracy, Class.

Finally explain that there will be an opportunity to reflect on the contemporary issues which this history has touched upon in the last lesson of the unit and that students should keep a record of questions and thoughts they have which relate to the present day.

