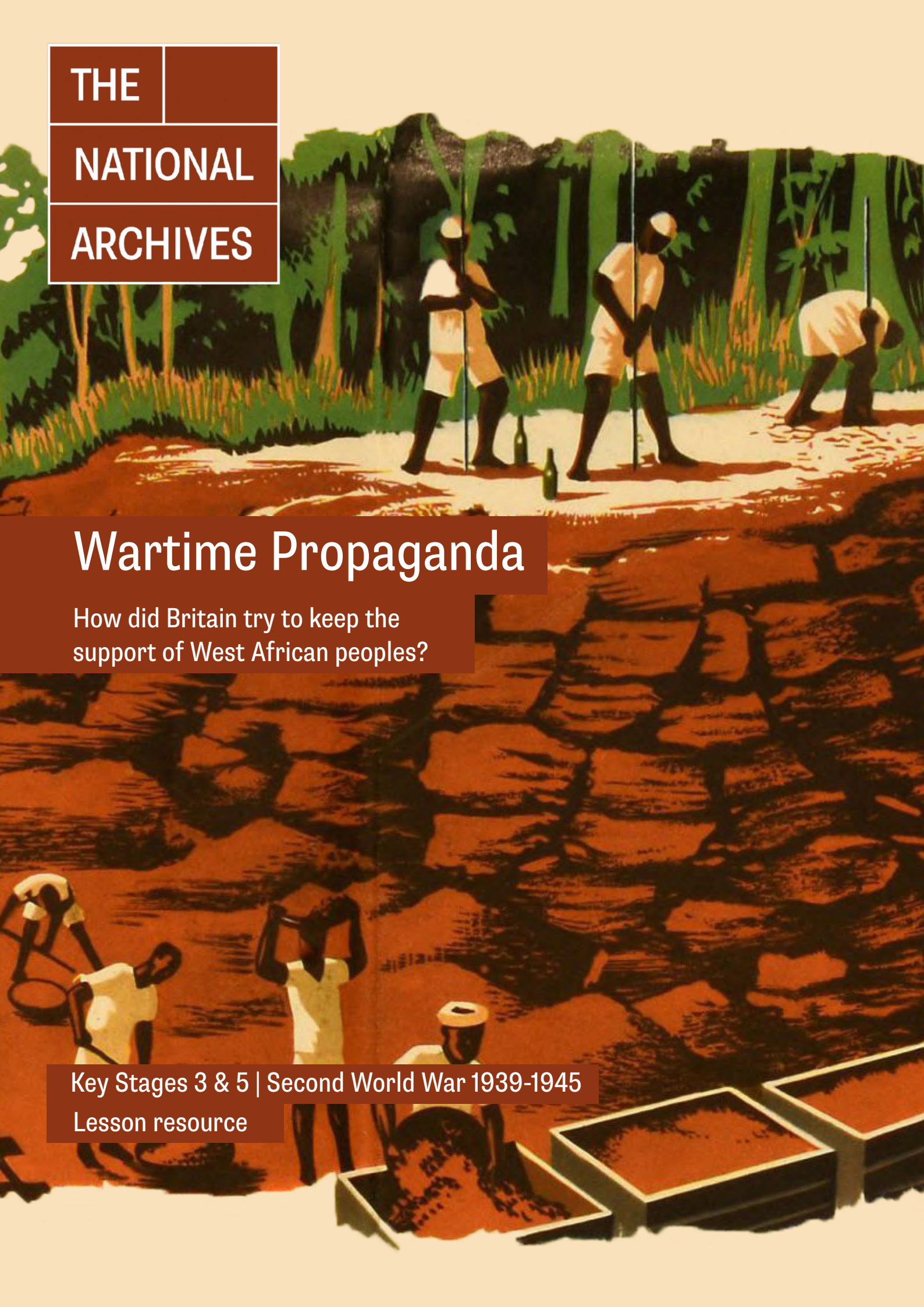




THE

NATIONAL

ARCHIVES

Wartime Propaganda

How did Britain try to keep the support of West African peoples?

Key Stages 3 & 5 | Second World War 1939-1945

Lesson resource

Introduction

Propaganda is information that is spread to promote a particular idea or cause. During the Second World War, Britain and her allies fought against Germany and the axis powers in a war which took place on land, sea and air. Both sides made use of propaganda to try and win support from other countries.

Britain was keen to have the help of the colonies she controlled within her Empire at that time, including those in West Africa, and used propaganda leaflets like these, to try and gain their support. In West Africa Britain controlled the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast (Ghana) and Nigeria. France controlled Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkino Faso, Ivory Coast and Niger.

After the Second World War independence movements swept across Africa. Gold Coast was the first West African colony to gain independence in 1957 and was renamed Ghana. Nigeria gained independence in 1960, Sierra Leone in 1961 and Gambia 1965. All the West African nations were decolonised by 1974.

Use this lesson to understand more about the nature of propaganda and how it was used to persuade West African countries to support the Allies and how West Africans contributed to the war effort.

Suitable for:

KS 3 & 5

Time period:

Second World War
1939-1945

Connections to the Curriculum:

Key stage 3:

Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world, 1901-present. Including the end of empire, Britain's place in the world since 1945.

Key stage 5:

Edexcel History GCE:
The British Empire:
Colonisation and
Decolonisation

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Teachers' notes

The lesson could be used as part of a study of government propaganda over time, a study of the British Empire or a study of the contribution of colonial forces during Second World War for Key stage 3 & 4. There are obvious links to be made with literacy and citizenship.

It is important that students are encouraged to think about of the context of both sources and the contribution that Britain's West African colonies made during the Second World War in the North African theatre, Burma and India. The nature of propaganda can be discussed, how it works to influence hearts and minds as well as the tone and attitude of this material from the perspective of a colonial power. Britain's own involvement in the history of slavery is ignored in the context of the second source especially. Again, it is important to discuss that neither source reflects the perspective of those living in the West African colonies.

Sources

- General publicity material used for Sierra Leone, 1944, Catalogue ref: INF 2/5
- Propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa. It was printed in the early 1940s Catalogue ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4.

Background

During the Second World War, Germany and her allies were keen to persuade the colonial peoples of the British Empire to take the opportunity to gain their independence. This would have weakened Britain and some of her allies who also had empires, especially the Belgians, Dutch and French. For example, the Indian leader, Subhas Chandra Bose, raised an Indian army that fought alongside the Japanese against the British. Similarly in the Dutch East Indies, the Japanese installed a government based upon local nationalist movements that, at the end of the war, forced the Dutch to grant them independence as Indonesia.

During the war, soldiers from many of Britain's existing and former colonies fought alongside the British Army. West Africa's Gold Coast (Ghana) provided both men and resources. Gold Coast was also of strategic importance to Britain as it was surrounded on all sides by potentially hostile French colonies that were under the Vichy Government which supported Hitler.

During the war, the secret 'West African Reinforcement Route', to the front in North Africa, was opened at Takoradi in Gold Coast. As there was no sea route via the Cape and the Red Sea. Planes were shipped from the UK and assembled in Takoradi then flown to the front. From 1940 to 1943, over 4,500 British aircraft were assembled at Takoradi and flown to North Africa.

10,000 West Africans joined the RAF for ground duties in Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia. The 2nd (West Africa) Infantry Brigade fought in the East African campaign then later against the Japanese in Burma in 1944–45. Two other divisions fought in India. These were the 81 (West Africa Infantry) and the 82 (West Africa Infantry) under command of XV Indian Corps.

West African servicemen had made many sacrifices and returned home to unemployment and colonial rule. There was a huge feeling of disappointment. As ex-servicemen demonstrated against lack of war pensions and jobs, riots broke out in Accra in February 1948, the capital of Ghana today. This marked the beginning of the drive towards independence which became a reality in March 1957, the first of the African colonies to become independent.

External links

These websites provide overviews of the role of West Africa in the Second World War:

- [FPIF: How West Africa Helped Win World War II](https://fpif.org/how_west_africa_helped_win_world_war_ii/)¹
- [British Military History: West Africa 1930 – 1947](https://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/docs-e-w-s-africa-1930-1947-west-africa-1930-1947/)²

Find out about the British colony of Burma (now Myanmar) during the Second World War and the [role of the Chindits](https://beta.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/secret-map-of-operations-in-north-burma/)³, a multi-ethnic brigade comprised of British, Burmese, Nepalese, Indian and, in later operations, African soldiers.

The novel '[Burma Boy](https://search.worldcat.org/title/1004570849)'⁴ by Biyi Bandele gives an account of the experience of fighting in Burma during the Second World War by a fictional Nigerian soldier based on his father's military service.

[The National Archives blog: The Forgotten Army: West African Troops in Burma, 1945](https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-forgotten-army-west-african-troops-in-burma-1945/)⁵

¹ https://fpif.org/how_west_africa_helped_win_world_war_ii/

² <https://www.britishmilitaryhistory.co.uk/docs-e-w-s-africa-1930-1947-west-africa-1930-1947/>

³ <https://beta.nationalarchives.gov.uk/explore-the-collection/stories/secret-map-of-operations-in-north-burma/>

⁴ <https://search.worldcat.org/title/1004570849>

⁵ <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/the-forgotten-army-west-african-troops-in-burma-1945/>

Tasks

Source One

General publicity material used for Sierra Leone, 1944. Catalogue ref: INF 2/5

Take a look at an example of propaganda material for Sierra Leone, a British West African colony.

- How has this publicity material used images to explain its message?
- What does it suggest about the relationship between Britain and Sierra Leone?

Source Two

Another propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa. It was printed in the early 1940s. Catalogue ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4.

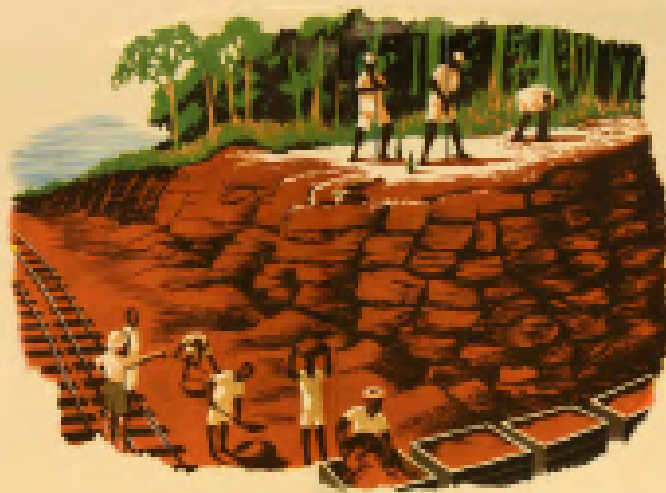
This leaflet is designed to persuade the reader and uses different ways to convince the reader to support its message. Its purpose is to sway opinion and push a particular idea. At the time it was produced, Britain was a colonial power which is also reflected in the tone and content of the leaflet.

Read the leaflet and look at the pictures to work out how it tries to persuade West Africans to support Britain and her allies during the Second World War.

- How does the leaflet use language in different ways to persuade/influence the reader?
Comment on the following:
 - Alliteration (a phrase in which the words start with the same letter)
 - Use of personal pronouns e.g., 'you' or 'your'. How often are these used?
 - Why does the text often refer to the readers' children?
 - What is the significance of using 'loaded language' like words 'partner' or 'slave'? When are these used?
 - Why are similar ideas repeated in the leaflet?
- Why is the leaflet illustrated and printed in colour?
- What do the pictures suggest about possible life under German occupation?
- How are (a) Germans (b) West Africans portrayed in this leaflet?
- What is the key message of the leaflet?
- What aspect of British history does the leaflet ignore when showing life under German occupation?
- What does the leaflet suggest by its tone/attitude about the relationship between Britain as a colonial power and West Africa?
- What does this leaflet reveal about the nature of propaganda?
- Compare both sources. Which one reveals more about how propaganda works? Give your reasons.

Source 1: General publicity material used for Sierra Leone, 1944.

Catalogue Ref: INF 2/5



**Your Iron Ore makes front-line
TANKS and GUNS**



*Thank you
Sierra Leone!*

Source 1: Transcript

Your iron ore makes front-line tanks and guns

Thank you Sierra Leone!

Source 2: Another propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa, early 1940s. Page 1/4. Catalogue Ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4

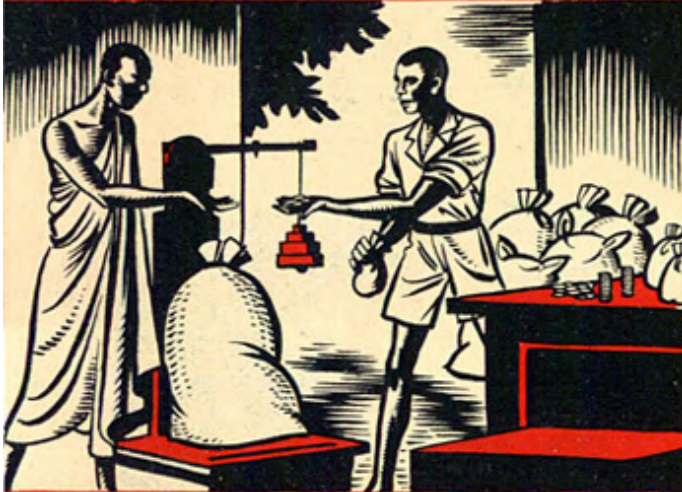
VICTORY IS VITAL!



**GERMANS WOULD ROB
WEST AFRICANS OF THEIR PRODUCE**

Source 2: Another propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa, early 1940s. Page 2/4. Catalogue Ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4

PARTNERS WITH BRITAIN



You are paid a fair price in cash for your produce



You buy where you like, and anything you need



Big ships carry your produce to Britain and bring back goods for you

You are honestly paid in money for the produce you sell. If you like, you can save some of your money in the Post Office Savings Bank. The Post Office pays you to save, for your own future.

With the money you receive, you can buy cloth for yourself and your children, kerosene to give you light at night, food, a bicycle or a sewing machine, or anything else you like from the store.

When Britain has defeated Germany, more ships will be set free to carry your produce to many countries, and your trade will improve. In spite of the war, the British Government is paying you a fair price for your produce.



Source 2: Another propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa, early 1940s. Page 3/4. Catalogue Ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4

SLAVES UNDER HITLER

The Germans rob people whenever they can and they never pay cash for what they take. So you would have no money to buy food or anything else that you wanted, for yourself or your children.

You would be allowed only enough food to keep you working for Germany. You could not build your own house and you could not even have a small business. You could not have bicycles or sewing machines.

You would be a slave, working always for the Germans, from childhood to old age. The produce you bring to market would not be your property at all. You would receive no money and there would be no profit from your work.



You would not receive cash payment for your produce



You would have no money for goods and could not buy where you wished



Germans would take your produce and give you no goods in return

Source 2: Another propaganda leaflet designed for distribution in West Africa, early 1940s. Page 4/4. Catalogue Ref: INF 2/1 pt. 4



Britain is your friend and
believes in progress for all



Germany is your enemy and believes
in slavery for all non-Germans



Source 2: Transcript

[Page 1:]

Victory is vital
Germans would rob West Africans of their produce

[Page 2:]

Partners with Britain

You are paid a fair price in cash for your produce
You are honestly paid in money for the produce you sell. If you like, you can save some of your money in the Post Office Savings Bank. The Post Office pays you to save, for your own future.

You buy where you like, and anything you need
With the money you receive, you can buy cloth for yourself and your children, kerosene to give you light at night, food, a bicycle or a sewing machine, or anything else you like from the store.

Big ships carry your produce to Britain and bring back goods for you
When Britain has defeated Germany, more ships will be set free to carry your produce to many countries, and your trade will improve. In spite of the war, the British Government is paying you a fair price for your produce.

[Page 3:]

Slaves under Hitler

You would not receive cash payment for your produce
The Germans rob people whenever they can and they never pay cash for what they take. So you would have no money to buy food or anything else that you wanted, for yourself or your children.

You would have no money for goods and could not buy where you wished
You would be allowed only enough food to keep you working for Germany. You could not build your own house and you could not even have a small business. You could not have bicycles or sewing machines.

Germans would take your produce and give you no goods in return
You would be a slave, working always for the Germans, from childhood to old age. The produce you bring to market would not be your property at all. You would receive no money and there would be no profit from your work.

[Page 4:]

Britain is your friend and believes in progress for all.
Germany is your enemy and believes in slavery for all non-Germans



Why do our hyperlinks come with footnotes?

Our resources are designed to be printed and used in classrooms, which means hyperlinks aren't always accessible digitally. We include the full link at the bottom of the page so that you can type in the address without distracting from the main text of the lesson materials.

Did you know?

The National Archives Education Service also offers free workshops onsite in Kew and online in your classroom.

Our [Onsite Workshops](#) are available for free here at The National Archives and allow students to experience genuine original documents reflecting over 1000 years of history. From Elizabeth I's signature to the telegrams of the sinking Titanic, students love the wow-factor of being able to see real history on the desk in front of them.

Our [Online Workshops](#) allow our Education Officers to teach through your projector, leading discussions and guiding students through activities based around original documents. All you need is a computer with a projector, webcam and microphone. We'll arrange a test call before your session to check the tech is working.

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