

# The beginning and end of World War II

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**Lesson**  
**45 minutes**

**Lesson**  
**material**

**Diaries /**  
**Memoirs**

Date and  
event

**Belarus 22 June 1941**

Attack on the Soviet Union by German troops /  
the beginning of the German-Soviet War or  
Great Patriotic War

Witness

**Vladimir Rubezhin**

Born 5 June 1929 in Gomel. He died in 2016.

There was a note stuck to the door:

*"Volik, my son. This morning I went to the pioneer camp. But you weren't there anymore. We waited for you all day. Marik and I are leaving. We don't even know where to go. Go to Aunt Natasha's. She's a good woman and she'll help you. I hope that the war will soon be over and we'll see each other again. Love and kisses, Mum."*

For about a month he lived alone in his own flat. One day, on the way home from the Komarovskii market, where he had swapped some clothes for bread, he met the lady his Mum had called Aunt Natasha and had said was a 'good woman'. She got into his flat, accompanied by a police officer. Volodya never returned home.

Vladimir Rubezhin (1929-2016), Belarus

Date and  
event

**Belarus 22 June 1941**

Attack on the Soviet Union by German troops /  
the beginning of the German-Soviet War or  
Great Patriotic War

Witness

**Maya Isaakovna Krapina (née Levina)**

Born 20 December 1935 in Minsk. Her  
memoirs are recorded in her book *Thrice  
Born* [Трижды рожденная] (2008).  
She died in 2018.

Suddenly our house became somehow quiet. In the evening, the adults got together and discussed something in hushed tones. Their faces were serious and they looked troubled. Every now and then we heard the word "war"...

... The neighbours started abandoning their houses and hurrying out of town. We got ready to go too. Dad sat us in the cart and we joined the fleeing crowds... We soon arrived at mum's hometown, Smilovichi. Then we went along the dusty road, huddled close to mum. It was hardest for her, carrying little one-year-old Lyuba. German planes flew over our heads. We could hear the sounds of bombs exploding, the rumble of shells. We were overtaken by cars and carts. I wasn't so much hungry as thirsty. It became clear that we wouldn't be able to get far. We returned to Minsk. The city was unrecognisable: it was enveloped in black smoke, and panic reigned. People were looting warehouses, shops, window displays...

Maya Isaakova Krapina (1935 – 2018), Belarus

Date and  
event

**Germany May 1945**  
**End of war**

Witness

**Hermann Lohmann (\*1925)**  
From Deutsch Evern (Lower Saxony) was a  
soldier in East Prussia in 1944/45.

At the end of the day, in the evening, Russian soldiers suddenly started to come after us. They were shouting something at us. We didn't understand what we were expected to do, since we'd all been told to "go home to mother". Things quickly got very serious. The Russians beat us on the back with the butts of their rifles and yelled: "Davai, davai." They forced us onto a large field filled with dozens of other people. At first I thought they were all freed prisoners. Then I realized that there were more than one thousand German soldiers who'd been rounded up and sat down here. We were prisoners of war of the Russians.

Hermann Lohmann (\*1925)

Date and  
event

**Germany 22 June 1941**  
**Attack on the Soviet Union by German troops /**  
**the beginning of the German-Soviet War or**  
**Great Patriotic War**

Witness

**Günther Roos (\*1924 in Brühl, Rhineland-**  
**Palatinate)**  
Admired Adolf Hitler and fought in WWII as  
a passionate soldier of the Wehrmacht.

Today mother woke me up with terrible news. At first I thought it was a bad joke or a trick to get me out of bed. But it really was true! War! War with Russia!!! This news came so unexpectedly and is so terrible that at first it took my breath away. Now in the evening I still can't believe it. Never, never would I have believed that Russia would fight against us ... And Gustav is in the middle of it. Mother will go mad if anything happens to him. Hopefully, hopefully nothing will happen to him. God, protect my brother! ... When you think about it that way, it's a paradox. We were trying to have fun (although I couldn't, really, because I was constantly thinking of Gustav), while in the east they were killing one another ... At 9 o'clock I was back home. Mother did not return from Cologne until 11.30 p.m., where she was with her cousins. At night there was an air-raid warning. [...]

Günther Roos (\*1924)



Date and  
event

**Poland 27 September 1939**  
**Bombing of Warsaw by German aircraft**

Witness

**Janusz Tarnowski (6th grade)**  
(written on 17 June 1946)

When the war began, German planes came over and bombed Warsaw. The bombardment lasted for somewhere between three and five hours. During that time I was down in the basement with my entire family, except for my father, who had gone to fight. We stayed in the basement for whole nights or days. When we ran out of food, I went with my older friends to get food from demolished shops—it was all we could do.

Janusz Tarnowski (6th grade) from Poland

Date and  
event

**Poland January 1945**  
**Liberation of Warsaw**

Witness

**Henryk Chmielewski (born 7 June 1923)**  
Also known under his pseudonym Papcio Chmiel, is a Polish comic book artist and journalist. During WWII, Chmielewski served in the Home Army and took part in the Warsaw Uprising. After the war, he started working as a graphic artist, and also published comics.

There's a barricade made of flagstones. I cross it to get to Market Square. On Nowomiejska Street in front of house number 11 there's a figure of Christ, which has fallen from a niche in the wall of the house. ...

...I crawl on all fours over the ruins of my apartment. I recognize the burned-out window and the remains of the tiled stove. The sky above my head. I have tears in my eyes. Where is my homework table, where are the books? Where is the box with the white mice? I can see down to the basement. I recognize the skeleton of my niece's burned-out baby carriage. Flower-patterned plates, all smashed; pots ...

This is all that's left of the whole apartment.

... I attach a piece of paper to the wall: The Chmielewskis are alive; their address is ..."

Excerpt from Henryk Chmielewski (born 1923) from Poland



Date and  
event

**Russia 22 June 1941**  
Attack on the Soviet Union by German troops /  
the beginning of the German-Soviet War or  
Great Patriotic War

Witness

**Evgenia Vadimovna Shavrova (1928 – 1991)**  
Witness of the siege of Leningrad. At the time  
the diary was written, she was a schoolgirl in  
Leningrad.

It's a very clear, quiet, dewy morning. We have guests coming, and we're going to take them a long way into the forest, where they haven't been before. The landlord says in autumn there are huge numbers of mushrooms. If only there were holidays in autumn too! I'll write about our walk tomorrow. I'm in a rush, we're going to have to go soon and meet them at the station ... We didn't meet them. No one came, and on the radio at the station we heard the awful news – Germany has invaded...

Evgenia Vadimovna Shavrova (1928 – 1991), Russia

Date and  
event

**Russia 9 May 1945**  
Victory Day

Witness

**Evgenia Vadimovna Shavrova (1928 – 1991)**  
Witness of the siege of Leningrad. At the time  
the diary was written, she was a schoolgirl in  
Leningrad.

9th May. We didn't have lessons today. We arrived at school and went in an organised manner to the education department on Nevsky, from where the procession started. Everyone, friends and strangers, were exchanging good wishes. Antonina Ivanovna, our headmistress, cried all the time (her husband had died), but still bore up well. Our school is in safe hands. In the evening, people were making merry in Palace Square. Spotlights lit up the walls of the buildings from all sides. The film "The Liberation of France", which had just been released, was shown. On the stage at the foot of the Alexander Column, dancers - indispensable participants in all major events in the life of our city – once again performed. Despite the fact that there was a huge gathering of people, there was complete order in the square. We returned late and walked the quiet streets for a long time—but they probably didn't get properly quiet until morning that day...

Evgenia Vadimovna Shavrova (1928 – 1991), Russia

