

When the War Comes In

About the book

During the Second World War, a battleship arrives for repairs in a northern industrial town. Jack Collier watches as his family and community work tirelessly to prepare it for something big. Through their efforts, they confront the harsh realities of war, balancing pride in their contributions with the fear of sending the crew back into danger. This story celebrates the often overlooked contributions of ordinary people to something big.

Big Cat Read On titles deal with sensitive social and emotional issues. Themes included in *When the War Comes In* are war and conflict, fear, desertion, financial hardship and workplace injuries.

Before reading

Choose from the following learning activities to help prepare children for reading *When the War Comes In*.

Laying the foundations

When the War Comes In is set in Tyneside. Establish where this is by locating the area on a map of the United Kingdom. Mark the following places: Newcastle, the River Tyne and Tynemouth.

Talk about Tyneside and its industrial past, which included shipbuilding and coal mining. As you're reading the book, you could speculate with children that Jack's surname, Collier, may show a link to the work of his ancestors.

Ask children if they know which famous football club is associated with Tyneside. Clarify that it is Newcastle United, who play at a ground called St James' Park.

Ask: Do you know the nickname of the club? (*the Toon*)

Discuss the title of the story and the blurb. Ask what they know about the D-Day landings. Explain that the characters and some of the events in the story are fictional but the ship, its repair at the Tyneside dock and its engagement in D-Day are all real.

Investigating words and phrases: subject-specific vocabulary

Before reading, introduce the children to the following tier 3 vocabulary from the text, providing them with definitions.

hull (page 2)	The hull of a boat or tank is the main body of it.
bulkheads (page 4)	A bulkhead is a wall which divides the inside of a ship or aeroplane into separate sections.
aft (page 39)	If you go aft in a boat or plane, you go to the back of it. If you are aft, you are in the back.
deck (page 42)	The deck of a ship is the top part of it that forms a floor in the open air which you can walk on.
gangplank (page 66)	The gangplank is a short bridge or platform that can be placed between the side of a ship or boat and the shore, so that people can get on or off.
funnels (page 68)	A funnel is a metal chimney on a ship or railway engine powered by steam.
cabin (page 74) (operator's cabin)	A cabin is a small room in a ship or boat.

All definitions from [collinsdictionary.com](https://www.collinsdictionary.com).

Ask children to use the ship vocabulary to label the diagram on Resource sheet: Warship.

Book talk: making predictions

Ask children to think about the title of the book and what they know about the Second World War. What do they think could happen in this book? Encourage them to share their predictions and listen to those of their peers. You could ask them to write their

predictions in their Reading Journals and refer to them when they have finished the book to see how accurate their predictions were. Children who are reading the book on their own could also think about what could happen and jot their predictions down for review when they have finished the book.

During reading

Chapters 1 and 2

Select from the following activities to support learning in chapters 1 and 2.

Connecting with characters

Ask children what they have found out about Mr Osbourne in Chapter 1. Ask them to draw a picture of him and annotate it with information from the text. Ask them to keep their picture so that they can add information to it as they read the story.

Book talk: retrieving and inferring information

Tell children that working in the shipyard was dangerous work.

Ask: What have you read in the story so far that tells you this? (*for example, Mr Osbourne's injury, Dad's injuries, Dad's callused hands*)

If children are working independently with a friend, they should talk about the examples they have found.

Book talk: snowballing

"I'm not too good at writing letters either," Frank admitted. "I never know what to say. I'm sure that's the same for your brother." (page 15)

Use snowballing to enable children to discuss why Frank and Gordon may have found it difficult to write letters home to their families.

Listen to children's ideas and collate the reasons given (*for example, they may not be confident writers; they don't know what to write; they worry about writing something they shouldn't; they don't want to alarm/frighten their families; they don't want to share their real feelings of fear*).

Chapters 3, 4 and 5

Select from the following activities to support learning in chapters 3, 4 and 5.

Book talk: building a mental model

Ask children to stop reading at this point: *A sharp ear-piercing whistle blew, making everyone freeze.* (page 23)

Ask children what they are thinking, wondering and feeling at this point (thinking – What is it making me think about something I've read before or experienced before? wondering – I wonder what may happen? feeling – How is this making me feel?).

Connecting with characters

Ask children what they have learnt about Mam in Chapter 4. Ask them to draw a picture of Mam and annotate it with information about her. They should keep their picture so that they can add to it as they read.

Investigating words and phrases: exploring informal language

After the game of football, Jack helps his dad to repair the front door of the house. When Jack is unable to find a screw of the correct size, he suggests that it will be all right as there are plenty of other screws holding up the door. His dad replies by saying: *"Everything," said Dad, calmly and carefully, "and I mean everything, is only as strong as its weakest part. No matter how small, or how big, or how important or unimportant any single part might seem ... every part matters."* (page 32)

In response, Jack looks through a crate of *widgits, doodahs and whatnots* (page 32) to find the all-important screw. Talk about these words used by people to refer to small and seemingly insignificant things. Ask children if they know or use any similar words. Create a list. You could use a thesaurus to find other words with similar meanings (*for example, thingummybob, oojamaflop*). Children could then use these words in their own writing.

Ask children to create their own wordsearches for homework to challenge their friends and family to find the *whatnot*-words.

Writing: empathising with characters

"We've been told to write a letter home," Frank continued, his voice becoming shakier, "before we depart from Tyneside. We were told to resolve any family disputes. I'm worried this will be the last letter I ever write. You see ... I think something big is going to happen." (page 39)

Ask children to imagine that they are Frank. How would they feel if they had to write this letter? Listen to their thoughts.

Ask children to write a letter to their family, imagining that they are Frank. Ask them to try to exemplify the mixed feelings – wanting to ensure their family know that they love them, but without upsetting or frightening them about what could happen.

Chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9

Select from the following activities to support learning in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Book talk: conscience alley

Read the text up to: *"Look," said Mam, wringing her hands, "we're not saying this is perfect. But if Frank doesn't want to get back on that ship, then we'll do all we can to make sure he doesn't."* (page 48)

Divide children into two groups. One group should think about reasons why Frank should consider deserting; the other group should consider why he should return to the navy. They should use reasons from the story and their knowledge of the war as they consider the consequences of each side.

Undertake a conscience alley activity with the group to help them decide the best decision for Frank.

Talk about the conscience alley and the reasons the group came up with. What do they think Frank should do? As an additional reading activity, children could write a short discussion text about what Frank should do.

Carry on reading to the end of Chapter 9. Do the group think Frank made the correct decision?

Book talk: retrieving and inferring information

Ask children to talk about the food that was left for Frank. Who do they think left it? Ask them to compare this with the meal eaten by the Colliers. Can they find

other places in the text where food is mentioned? What do they notice about who eats the best food? Why do they think this was the case?

Extend the learning by asking children to find out about rationing during the Second World War. This could be done as homework.

Book talk

Jack had his farewell speech prepared. Ever since his brother had got on that train, he'd regretted not having the right words. So many times, he'd imagined that scene, and all the words he should have said. Tonight, Frank was going to get some of those words. But before Jack could speak, the sound of the air-raid siren screeched into life. Shouts from the ship called for Frank to get onboard. (page 67)

Ask children to imagine that they are Jack. What would they have planned to say to Frank? Ask them to share their thoughts with their Reading Partner.

Book talk

Talk about how the resolution of a story is brought about by bringing together information given earlier in the story. Ask children to talk to their Reading Partner about what was already known about Mam and Mr Osbourne and how this was used in Chapter 9. Encourage them to find the relevant information in the earlier parts of the story. If they completed the character studies about Mr Osbourne and Mam, they could refer to these to help them.

Chapters 10, 11 and 12

Select from the following activities to support learning in chapters 10, 11 and 12.

Fluency

Ask children to read from the start of Chapter 10 to *With that, he stormed off.* (page 87) Ask them to note the use of capitals and italics and discuss how these direct us to read. Also point to the reporting clauses used in the dialogue and how they help determine how the words may be spoken. Ask children to reread the text to a partner who should assess their expressiveness. You could use Rate my Reading to do this.

Book talk

He gestured with his head to point it out to Mam and Jack, and whispered, "The curious case of the mysterious steak has been solved."

When they saw it, they smiled – (it was a torn copy of Knitting for Victory. (pages 101 and 102)

Ask: What mystery does this solve? (*It solves the mystery of who left the steak for Frank; it was Mr and Mrs Lachut.*)

Find the place in the text that links to this information. (page 58)

Investigating words and phrases: tier 2 vocabulary

The dry dock had been closed off, leaving the crumpled remains of the crane a sombre sight – a reminder to everyone of that night. (page 97)

Definition of 'sombre': serious, sad, or gloomy

Example sentence: The children were in a sombre mood.

Task: Ask children to work with a friend to complete Resource sheet: Frayer model, for the word 'sombre'.

Discuss children's Frayer models, sharing examples across the group to build deeper understanding.

Chapter 13

Book talk

This day became known as D-Day. It was the start of the end of the Second World War. The brave military personnel are rightly remembered for their actions that day, and on the many days that followed. But it is sometimes forgotten that many, many other people played their part too, and every part matters. (page 105)

Ask children to form groups of four. Ask them to discuss Mam, Dad, Mr Osbourne and Mrs Lachut and the part they each played in ensuring that the *Warspite* was able to join Operation Neptune. Listen to children's contributions and encourage them to use them in a group discussion about how each of the characters contributed to the war effort. Children who have read the book on their own could share their thoughts with you.

After reading

Select from the following activities to support learning after the text has been read.

Book talk: talking about themes

Explain to children that the narrative of a story is about the events that take place. The theme of a story is the message or moral that the author wants readers to think about.

Ask the following questions:

- What do you think the theme of *When the War Comes In* is?
- What parts of the story make you think this?

For children who may need support, provide them with a range of themes to choose from, some of which may or may not be closely linked to the story, for example, war and peace; everyone is important; overcoming fears.

Book talk: devising and answering questions

Ask children to read the book club questions from the back of the book and to use them in a discussion about the book. They could also devise their own questions about the text and use these in their discussion. Children who have read the book on their own could use the book club prompts and their own questions in a conversation with you or their parent/carer.

Homework: research

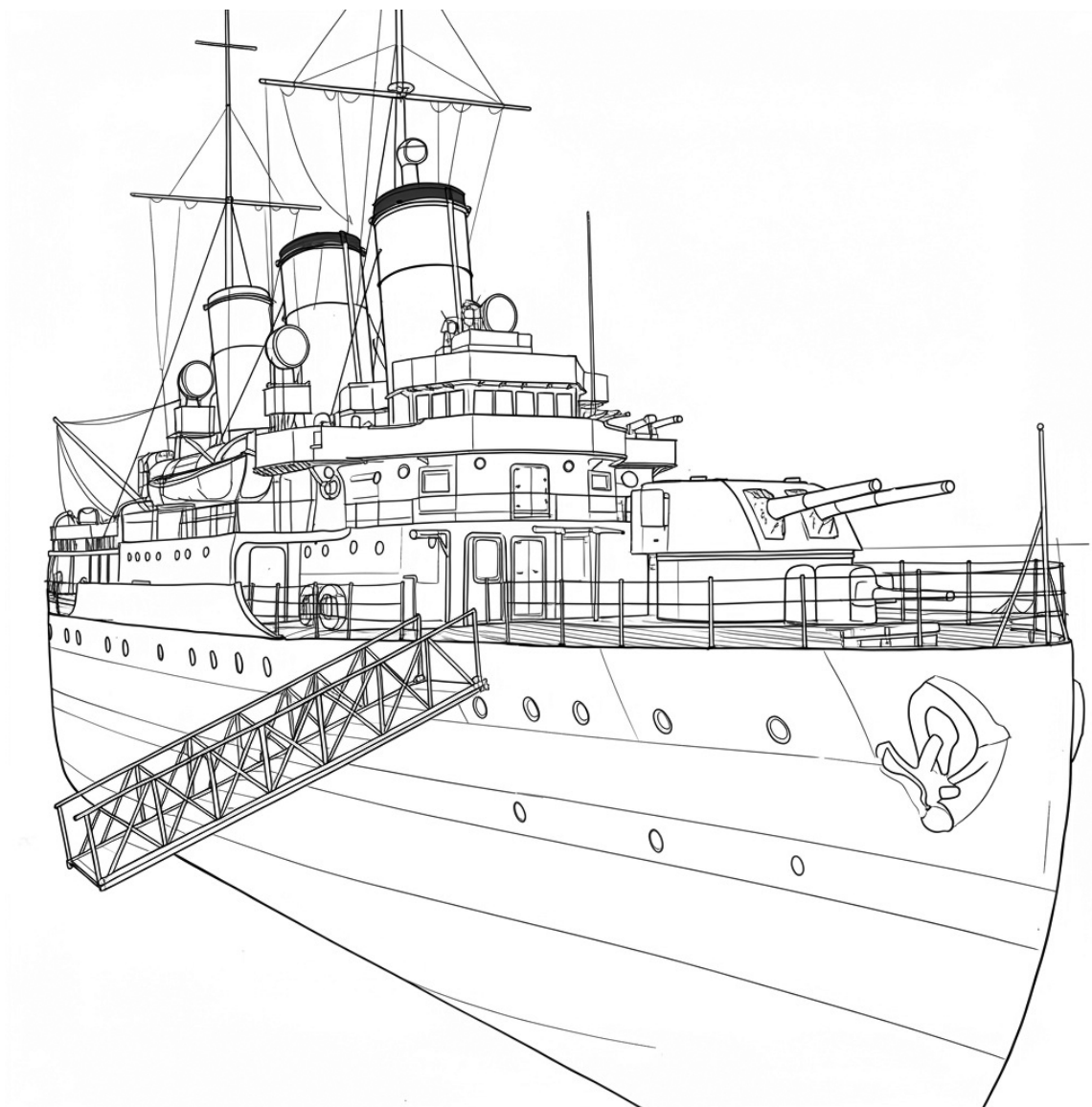
Ask children to talk about how the family pass the time telling jokes, reciting tongue-twisters and playing Mam's clapping game. Ask them to find out about other games that people played both inside and outside during the Second World War, such as Battleships, ball games and skipping described in the following article: Children could then draw and play their own games of Battleships.

Resource sheet: Warship

Name: _____

Use the following ship vocabulary to label the diagram:

Hull, bulkheads, deck, gangplank, funnels, cabin (operator's cabin), aft



Collins
BIG CAT
Read On

Complete the frayer model for *sombre*

