

Student Handout: Unit 2 Lesson 2



Causes of World War II: Canada's Entry into World War II, Who is Fighting, and Hitler's Blitzkrieg

Suggested time: 75 Minutes

What's important in this lesson:

World War II began because of the failure of the League Nations and the Treaty of Versailles. The war also began because of the rise of dictators and the world's eagerness to appease these dictators and their aggressive actions. As in the previous war, there was some division over Canada's entry into World War II. This time, however, Canadians decided their actions, not the British. There are two clear sides in this war: the Allies with whom Canada was allied, and the Axis power made up of Germany, Japan and Italy.

Complete these steps:

1. Using information from your textbook, the scrapbook, and/or the internet, answer the questions on Handout 1 "World War II: Underlying Causes".
2. Read and respond to the questions and issues on Handout 2 "Who is Fighting?"
3. Read and answer questions and issues on Handout 3 "Canada's Entry Into World War II".

Hand-in the following to your teacher:

1. Completed answers to Handout 1: "World War II: Underlying Causes"
2. Completed Handout 2: "Who is Fighting?"
3. Completed Handout 3: "Canada's Entry in World War II"

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Questions for the teacher:

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The Visit

--by Jack Nahrgang

The scene is a retirement home, where an elderly gentleman, Buster Waters is listening to the radio. There is a knock at the door, and a teenager with a backpack on his shoulder pokes his head in the room.

Teen: Uh, Mr. Waters?

Mr. Waters: Yeah, sonny, can I help you?

Teen: My name is Jesse Thorpe, and I'm from Edgemount High School. I've got to do a history project on Canada and I got stuck with, I mean, I picked the topic of Canadian labour during the 1930s and 1940s. We have to interview someone who was alive at the time, and the nurse at the desk said you might be able to help me.

Mr. Waters: (chuckling) I might. C'mon in, sit down. Now, what did you mean, you got "stuck" with this topic?

Jesse: (sitting) Well, I wanted Adolph Hitler and the rise of the Nazis, but Adam Zivku got it first!

Mr. Waters: (smiling) Hmmm, Hitler is an interesting subject, but what's wrong with Canadian labour? Everybody has to work.

Jesse: But it's so boring! I mean, I like money, and I know you have to work for it, but who cares about the history of labour?

Mr. Waters: (eyes twinkling) Well, you should care; you're part of the next generation of Canadian workers. If you don't know where labour's been, how can you know where it'll go next?

Jesse: (puzzled, but interested) What do you mean?

Mr. Waters: Jesse, in Canada's history, the working man and woman have always had a special place of importance. After all, without a dedicated and productive labour force, our economy would weaken. But labour is so much more than people struggling to make a living. Labour has fought for the rights of workers and has tried to better the working conditions for all Canadians. So, labour in Canada is a force of authority, either negotiating with businesses and governments or protesting and striking against unfair labour practices.

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Jesse: (brightening) Really? I know my dad sure gets mad when he sees people protesting. He says they're lazy bums hiding behind a union.

Mr. Waters: (smiling) But Jesse, that's just a generalization that we make today. In the early part of the twentieth century, businesses in Canada clearly had the advantage. Many business owners paid poor salaries to workers and working conditions were very dangerous. However, some individual workers decided to form together into unions. As collective organizations, unions often threatened strikes or withdrawals of services to pressure businesses for better benefits for labour. For example, workers won Sundays off from work and minimum age limits were established to stop child labour in Canada. Canadian labour organized to produce the first unions that negotiated with employers to improve working conditions and wages.

Jesse: (nodding) So, the ordinary kid like me has it better today even if I don't belong to a union?

Mr. Waters: That's right.

Jesse: (clearly interested) Well, then tell me about labour in the Second World War.

Mr. Waters: (putting up his hands) Whoa! Now slow down. You can't understand the importance of that workforce without knowing a bit of what came before.

Jesse: (puzzled) I don't understand?

Mr. Waters: Well, working men and women contributed significantly to Canada's industrial reputation during the First World War, supplying materials for the armies fighting in Europe. But after the war, returning soldiers found a shrinking labour force because jobs were scarce, and in frustration, many of them joined together in protests like the Winnipeg General Strike. That was a huge fight between businesses and the working class – some protesters even died when the RCMP rode through the crowd.

Jesse: (wide-eyed) You're kidding? In Canada?

Mr. Waters: (nodding) In Canada. And divisions between the working class and businesses grew deeper from that conflict, but the good economic times of the Roaring Twenties produced enough work to employ Canadians in a variety of jobs. Goods produced in Canada by Canadian laborers were respected worldwide. Sure, workers did

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have concerns and complaints about their jobs, but much of what they had fought for was achieved. Strike leaders who had clashed with authorities were now being elected to city councils, and to the provincial and federal governments. Imagine! And their desire for reform would inspire new political parties and change the traditional Canadian party system.

Jesse: (curious) You mean there weren't as many political parties back then as there are now?

Mr. Waters: No. Just the Liberals and the Conservatives, and both might want the working Canadians' votes, but governments still favoured businesses. Labour's fights in the early 1930s helped to form alternative political parties.

Jesse: (frowning) But how did this happen when you said the old parties sided with the businessmen?

Mr. Waters: (impressed) You were listening! Good. Well, let's see. It's a bit complicated. By 1929, the availability of jobs was slowing as worldwide demand for manufactured goods was dropping. Wages fell, and when the stock market crashed in 1929, many Canadian workers lost their jobs as factories closed or slowed production. Prime Minister Mackenzie King was defeated in a general election in 1930 because he could not find a way out of the economic downturn, but his replacement, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, had no better fortune -- the Depression worsened. By the winter of 1932, one third of Canada's workforce was unemployed.

Jesse: (shocked) That's horrible. All those people out of work.

Mr. Waters: (quietly) Yes, and families actually had to encourage some of their children to leave home if they could not feed them. I was one of those kids.

Jesse: Really?! What did you do?

Mr. Waters: Jesse, you must understand, the country was filled with young, unemployed, homeless men drifting from one place to another, looking for work that did not exist. We rode in on trains to any town where work might be, and as a group, we frightened many middle-class Canadians; being unemployed people, we were watched by police, often arrested as vagrants, and kicked out of towns because we had no permanent address.

Jesse: (concerned) Was there no help from the federal government?

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Mr. Waters: (bitterly) Prime Minister Bennett's help was to establish a federal government policy of Unemployment Relief Camps that would offer work, food, and shelter to homeless men, while keeping them away from concerned communities. Over 175 000 Canadian men were sent to the camps which often felt more like prisons. We were paid 20 cents a day, had substandard food, and poor accommodations. Most of the camps were isolated from urban centers, deep in the woods. We worked hard, clearing land for roads and airport runways, while others plugged away at "make work" tasks such as digging ditches or building remote roads in isolated areas.

Jesse: (astonished) Did this camp idea work?

Mr. Waters: (proud) No, but there were other ideas. When the government showed its inability to combat the Depression, labourers – even those of us who were unemployed – offered alternatives. As I said before, Canadian workers were one of the core founding members of a new political party formed in 1932. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), a western Canada party that attracted the interest of Canadians who were unhappy with the current economic conditions. The CCF certainly had a labour focus in its policies, insisting on public ownership of key industries and the establishment of government relief to help all Canadians who faced hunger or homelessness. Through the CCF, labour protested for a national minimum wage and a system of social insurance for workers. Although the CCF did not win many seats in the 1930s, the policies set by labour were often taken and adapted by the Conservative and Liberal parties.

Jesse: (impressed) So, it's like you said; you worked within the system.

Mr. Waters: (stern) Not always. Workers could influence political policy, but at times they also could explode into anger. Due to the poor conditions of many work camps, we workers finally organized ourselves into a union and rebelled. In 1935, thousands of us left the camps in British Columbia, and led by our new Relief Camp Workers' Union, we decided to leave for a mass protest in Ottawa. To get there, the men had to hitch rides on railway boxcars, and this journey became known as the On-to-Ottawa Trek.

Jesse: (wide-eyed) Cool! What was it like going to Ottawa?

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Mr. Waters: (frowning) I never got there. At first, the movement grew; as we left the West coast, we picked up support from other relief camps. When the Trekkers reached Saskatchewan, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police stopped us, letting only the union leaders move on to the nation's capital. Our leaders met with Prime Minister Bennett, but he called them troublemakers. When no progress was made, the federal government ordered that all the rest of us workers detained in Saskatchewan be dispersed and told to go home.

Jesse: (puzzled) So, I'm confused – did you win or lose?

Mr. Waters: (proudly) Well, we might not have won that day, but as a force of unemployed workers, we served notice to the government that labour would not be bullied either.

Jesse: (curious) How did things get better?

Mr. Waters: Strangely enough, you mentioned Hitler before. Our problems were soon lessened when the Second World War broke out in 1939. The economy which had been idling for so long now sprang to life. War material would be needed and Canadian labour responded. The large numbers of Canadians volunteering to fight meant that manufacturing plants found themselves short of workers. Those who stayed working on the home front put in long hours. Once again, women joined the work force, taking the place of men overseas.

Jesse: (surprised) Women in factories? I thought they'd do office work.

Mr. Waters: (laughing) I wish my Marcie was here to hear you say that – she'd tell you a thing or two! I met my wife in Toronto at a Lancaster bomber plant. She was a riveter. Jesse, women worked at a variety of heavy industrial jobs and they were invaluable. Single women were in great demand as factory workers, as they often had limited family obligations and could work long hours. But Marcie's sister Anna was married and she also found factory work. That's when Canada's modern daycare movement came into being. In Ontario and Quebec, where most munitions factories were located, the provincial governments began to provide money for daycare facilities so that young mothers like Anna would be free to work. Many war workers, especially single women, moved from rural areas to the industrial cities.

Jesse: (curious) But with all those workers, where did everyone live?

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Mr. Waters: Companies built dormitories to house us close to the factories, and sometimes right on site. With travel time cut to a minimum or eliminated completely, it was easy to arrange a three-shift system of production. That's why Canadian labour was so successful in the war – we produced so much. Dormitory residents were charged a low rent and given free or subsidized meals. The cost was generally handled by the federal government.

Jesse: (questioning) You said “us.” You didn't live near Toronto?

Mr. Waters: (smiling) No. After the On-to-Ottawa Trek, I moved back to the family farm. When the war started, I wanted to volunteer but I had hurt my leg on a train – nothing too serious for farm work, but enough of a limp that the army couldn't use me. So, I told my dad I was going to move to the city to help out building planes.

Jesse: (surprised) What about the farm? Didn't your dad need you?

Mr. Waters: (knowingly) Oh there were government programs put into place to relieve the shortage of farm workers. The Ontario Farm Service Force, for example, was aimed at women aged 16 and over. If a woman made a promise to work on a farm for a minimum of four months over the summer, the government would provide return transportation and board at a rate of 5 dollars a week. These women worked hard, up to 10 hours a day, Monday to Saturday, and some times on Sundays during the harvest season.

Jesse: (astonished) Wow. I never knew that so many Canadian women helped out during the war.

Mr. Waters: (proudly) My Marcie sure did her bit. Although she and most women returned to their homes or their previous jobs after the war, their wartime experiences were the beginning of a gradual change in the structure of Canada's workforce. It would not just be males in the future.

Jesse: (curious) Mr. Waters, my dad says that families should stick together in the rough times. Did the government, business and labour do that in the war?

Mr. Waters: (impressed) Good question, Jesse. There were sacrifices by labour. Workers extended working hours, surrendered its holidays, and in its determination to increase and proceed with greater production, many veteran workers taught the young and the inexperienced the ins and outs of complicated trades. Canadian labour started to

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specialize and young people were taken on in apprenticeship programs.

Jesse: (intrigued) Hey, we have those apprenticeship programs at school – I thought they were something new. But what about the government? You said that the mainstream political parties didn't always care for labour.

Mr. Waters: (thinking) I recall that the government did its part. Ottawa remembered lessons from the First World War when many businessmen took advantage of workers – paying little and keeping lots of profits. In the Second World War, the government quickly introduced a system of wage and price controls to control inflation and stop companies from overcharging for goods.

Jesse: (curious) So what about the union movement in Canada? It must have slowed down if the government was looking after its concerns. I mean, why join a union when times are good?

Mr. Waters: (insistent) Ah, but Jesse, times are NOT always good. Past experiences told workers that being alone wasn't always great. So, to answer your question, most workers sought membership in unions, and moved from small craft unions to the now well-established international unions like the Committee for Industrial Organizing (CIO). Unlike in the 1930s, these unions now had the financial and organizational resources to assist industrial unionists in Canada. By the end of the war, the Canadian Congress of Labour's (CCL) membership had tripled to 314,000 and the Trades and Labor Congress' (TLC) increased from 132,000 to 356,000. Despite such support and the enthusiasm of Canadian organizers and members, employers continued to resist the unionization of their shops.

Jesse: (questioning) You said that one of labour's weapons is the strike. Were there any strikes during the war?

Mr. Waters: (nodding) Yes. There were violent strikes by gold miners in Kirkland Lake, Ontario and by steelworkers in Sydney, Nova Scotia and Sault Ste. Marie.

Jesse: (surprised) Wasn't the public mad? There was a war on.

Mr. Waters: (confident) No, public opinion started to shift distinctly in labour's favour. Remember those new political parties I mentioned? Well the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party won remarkable support by supporting labour rights. In 1943, the CCF

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nearly formed provincial governments in Ontario and British Columbia. The next year the CCF produced a stunning victory in Saskatchewan. In national opinion polls the party threatened the historic dominance of the Liberals and Conservatives.

Jesse: (amused) That must have made the federal government nervous!

Mr. Waters: (smiling) It did. Labour's pressure in the workplace and in politics forced the government to change. In early 1944, the ruling Liberal government passed an emergency Order-in-Council that protected the workers' right to organize and required employers to recognize unions chosen by a majority of workers. This emergency law was extended by two years after the war's end to make certain of labour stability in the transition to a peacetime economy. So, there was no repeat of the violence like the Winnipeg General Strike. This central change in Canada's labour laws had long term effects on industrial relations in Canada. It meant that employers now had to bargain with legally certified organizations of their employees.

Jesse: (smiling) Hey, Canadian workers have sure accomplished a lot.

Mr. Waters: (proudly) Jesse, we should always remember the sacrifices that all our military men and women gave for this country, but Canadian labour was valuable, too. Do you know that we produced so much war material that we were known as the "arsenal of democracy"? Little old Canada. Jobs were created in production, transportation, processing and supplying services to other industries. For the first time in our country's history, agriculture was not the most important sector of the economy. Canadian cities and their surrounding industrial areas became huge economic engines in Canada.

Jesse: (curious) But what about after the war? Did labour still have influence?

Mr. Waters: (pleased) They did, Jesse. After the war, there was a strike at a Windsor car plant. A judge, Justice Ivan Rand, made a decision that still affects all workers today. He ruled that the union be allowed something called the compulsory check-off of union dues. What this meant was, all workers benefited from a contract whether you were in a union or not. Therefore, Rand decided that every worker must pay union dues, although they did not have to join the union.

Jesse: (puzzled) You are smiling -- why is this Rand decision a good thing?

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Mr. Waters: (pleased) This decision meant a degree of financial stability for unions never previously enjoyed. This formula created the legal framework for labour relations in Canada for the next 30 years. So Jesse, you have a lot to be thankful to Canadian workers from the past.

Jesse: (thoughtful) You are right. I never thought of workers in such a way before. I sure appreciate you taking the time to talk to me, Mr. Waters. It has been very useful.

Mr. Waters: (hopeful) Maybe you'll stop by again, Jesse. I sure enjoyed recalling those memories and talking to you. Perhaps I could get a copy of your report that you will give to the teacher?

Jesse: (enthused) You bet. I'll bring it round myself. Well I better get going. It will soon be time to get home and watch the OC.

Mr. Waters: (puzzled) The OC? What's that?

Jesse: (smiling) It's my favourite tv show.

Mr. Waters: (shaking his head) Television? Bah! I'd rather read a book.

Jesse: (grinning) You should try it Mr. Waters – you might learn something yourself.

Both of them laugh and Jesse heads out the door, waving goodbye to his new friend. Mr. Waters walks to his apartment window and sees Jesse get on his bike. He smiles, and waves once more . . .

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Who is Fighting?

There were many reasons for the start of World War II, but the main reason was that Germany, Japan and Italy wanted to expand their power over many countries.

Germany had already invaded Poland and Czechoslovakia before war was declared on Germany by Britain, on September 3, 1939. Other countries declared war on Germany shortly afterwards.

Throughout the war, countries either fought with Germany or against Germany. Those countries that fought against Germany were called **Allies**. Those countries that fought with Germany were called the **Axis** powers.

Allies	Axis
Britain	Germany
France	Japan
Canada	Italy
New Zealand	
Australia	
Russia (1941)	
United States (1941)	

To Do:

1. (a) What was the name of the countries that fought *with* Germany?

- (b) What was the name for the countries that fought *against* Germany?

- (c) List five countries that fought against Germany?

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Canada's Entry into World War II

Background:

After the end of World War I, Canada had won her independence from Great Britain. By 1939, Canada had full authority over her own foreign policy decisions. So, while Canada was automatically at war in 1914 when Britain declared war, Canada was not automatically at war in 1939 when Britain declared war on Germany.

Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King and the Canadian parliament took a full week after Britain declared war on September 3, 1939, before it declared war on Germany.

Here are some statements made in the House of Commons during that week of debate:

Viewpoint One

“There was never any doubt that Canadians would act to defend freedom as they did twenty five years ago. However, our party felt that it should be done in a unified way from coast to coast and that Parliament should make the final decision.”

Viewpoint Two

“As a British subject, we are part of the British Empire and, therefore, bound to participate in this war. We are fighting against anti-Christian and anti-democratic policies in order to save justice, honor and liberty.”

Viewpoint Three

“Wars have never settled anything in the past.....personally, I can't agree with a bill that will drag us into another war. While I respect a man who gives his life to fight for what he believes in, I also respect the man who refuses to enlist and kill his fellow human beings. In this war it would include killing women and children as well.”

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1. Read over the quotations from “Canada’s Entry into World War II” and fill in the chart below. You can also add reasons of your own.

Reasons why Canada should go to war	Reasons why Canada should not go to war

2. Using the points listed in the chart above, write a paragraph of at least five sentences responding to one of the following prompts:

a) Why Canada should or should not have joined the fighting in World War II.

OR

b) Whether or not you personally would have enlisted in the war effort in 1939.
