

Child labour in all its forms

Work was another of the elements that marked childhood during wartime. The need for manpower and the calls for all the population to make a patriotic effort justified the deployment, both in educational centres and in internment or refuge areas, of various forms of professional training and productive tasks. Due to the prevailing gender roles, this practical education focused, for boys, on manufacturing or, in the case of girls, sewing.

In some countries, such as Serbia, a school work service was imposed for teenagers between 14 and 18 years of age. In France, the Centres de Jeunesse model offered housing and a vocational apprenticeship for unemployed young people: in 1944 this program involved 85,000 young people in almost 900 centres.

Compulsory schooling generally lasted until the age of 14, but, due to wartime needs, many boys and girls began to work at the end of elementary school, mainly in agriculture, in the war industry or in services to private individuals. In this sense, childhood was part of what was known as the Home Front.

In Great Britain, from 1942 onwards, children over the age of 12 were allowed to work part-time and could be absent from school for up to 20 days a year. In the United States, the employment of teenagers between the ages of 14 and 17 grew by 200% between 1940 and 1944, and 900,000 children between the ages of 12 and 18 worked in violation of the law in their state.



Outdoor sewing classes. Centre for evacuees from London. Pembrokeshire (Wales), 1940. © Imperial War Museums (989)



Education and agriculture at Ashwell Merchant Taylors School, near Baldock, Hertfordshire, England. Farmer's son: life on Mount Barton farm, Devon, England, 1942. © Imperial War Museums (D8555/D9980)

The Dig for Victory campaign illustrates the relevance of agriculture on the home front and the participation of children. Legislation was especially relaxed with regard to the participation of minors in this sector, including work in school and urban gardens, such as the Italian orti di guerra. To these was added their collaboration in private cultivation, where traditionally the entire family labour force was involved.

In Germany, in the summer of 1940, school vacations were extended to allow children to collaborate in harvesting the crops. In famine-stricken regions such as Greece, the agricultural labour force stood out for its young age, as could be seen in Manos Zacharias' 1948 film *Les enfants grecs*.

In the occupied territories of Eastern Europe, schooling was limited to the age of 14, the age at which children could be required to work as forced labourers. In Poland, the compulsory regulation service of April 1940 was applied from the age of 12. In the case of minors deported with their families, the age was reduced to 10 years and, in the course of the war, this age limit was also applied to transit camps. Women with knowledge of German and "acceptable racial appearance" could be required from the age of 14. Forced labour represents one of the many traumatic experiences of childhood as a consequence of the war.



Propaganda with the slogan "Dig for victory". Great Britain and New Zealand. © Imperial War Museums (Art.IWM PST 0696/ Art.IWM PST 16807)



Teenage workers in Germany, September 1939. ©Bundesarchiv (Bild 183-E10868 / CC-BY-SA 3.0)



"This is how we work". Drawing by Thomas Geve, 16 years-old, of the camp of Buchenwald in 1945. ©Yad Vashem Art Museum (2489/52)

BATTLEFIELD

Agriculture is closely linked to childhood in many countries. Helping their families meet the basic needs of food, while being absent from school, is something that is repeated in the lives of millions of children today as well.

2024, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 27x15x20 cm.



FORCED LABOUR

That forced labour that marks forever a childhood far from play, unhappy.

2024, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 38x5x19 cm.



HUNGER

Hunger and wars, an inseparable combination.

2024, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 34x13x6 cm.

EDUCATION HOSTAGE

Education is always one of the first hostages for children in the midst of war.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 18x20x28 cm.



Bombing, siege and destruction

In a total war like WWII, the traditional distinction between military and civilians completely disappeared. Civilians, including children, were targeted more than ever. At an age when they were supposed to play and study, enjoy their childhood innocence and grow up in the warmth of the family home, children lived in a daily environment of violence and vulnerability. The indiscriminate bombing of their villages and towns, sometimes defenceless, was also part of their daily life and caused numerous civilian casualties.

Its purpose was the destruction of military and industrial targets and cities. It also struck at the morale of enemy civilians, to break their will and force the capitulation of their countries. Between 1940 and 1941, the German air force employed this tactic against the United Kingdom. During the Blitz, the Luftwaffe bombed strategic points and cities, mainly London, causing more than 40,000 civilian casualties. Some 7,736 children were killed and 7,622 were seriously wounded.



◀ *Aerial bombardment at Saint-Pierre-des-Corps (France). Drawing by Suzanne Chavanne (c. 1940). ©Réseau Canopé – Musée national de l'Éducation (1979.09324.61)*



▶ *The bombing of Dresden (13 February 1945), by the Young Italian Angiolino Filippini. © CC BY-NC 4.0 / International Bomber Command Centre Digital Archive, University of Lincoln*

▶ *Clínica pediátrica bombardeada por la aviación alemana en Londres. © Archives du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge (V-P-HIST-01336)*



The British and U.S. air forces also employed this method. On the one hand, strategic bombing in occupied countries, such as France and Italy. In each country, more than 50,000 civilians were killed by bombs. On the other hand, Germany was massively bombed. In 1943, during Operation Gomorrah, the Allies ravaged Hamburg with firestorms. The goal of the operation was psychological: to terrorize civilians, especially workers.

The attacks resulted in more than 40,000 civilians killed and as many wounded. In February 1945, Dresden, an industrially and militarily non-strategic city, was reduced to ashes in one of the most controversial Allied bombing raids in Europe. The toll was more than 35,000 dead, including women, children and the elderly.

Although Germany was the most heavily bombed country during the war, one of the deadliest attacks took place over Tokyo. U.S. air force bombs killed more than 100,000 civilians, shortly before striking Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Elsewhere, strategic bombing was part of protracted military actions. It occurred in the siege of Leningrad (1941-1944), during Operation Barbarossa launched by Germany against the USSR.

By means of incendiary bombs, destruction of homes, blockade and cutting off supplies, the aim was to annihilate the resistance of the civilian population, composed almost exclusively of children, women and the elderly.



▲
Leningrad under siege (1942). The sign reads "Death to child murderers!" near a destroyed house. Author: Sergey Strunnikov. ©Wikimedia Commons

The siege lasted 900 days, trapping 3,200,000 residents, including 400,000 children, in the city. There were nearly one million civilian deaths. More than 90% perished from starvation, cold, disease and enemy fire. Until 1944, the Germans dropped 148,478 artillery shells, 102,500 incendiary bombs, and 4,638 explosive bombs on the city.

Resistance and survival in the besieged city was mainly due to women, Soviet and foreign: grandmothers, mothers, daughters, workers and fighters. Among them, more than a hundred young Spanish women evacuated to the USSR during the Civil War who contributed to the defence of the city and to the care of the inhabitants and the wounded



▲
"Children in a home destroyed by the Nazis" (author unknown, 1943). © Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow (MDF KP-1202/32 FII-12586 GC 27155292)

HIROSHIMA BOMB ---

The atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki marked a turning point in the lives of all those, both children and adults, who suffered the consequences.

2024, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 37x78 cm.



GERNIKA, 1937 ---

The terrible bombing of Gernika on 26 April 1937, and the many other bombings that took place during the Spanish Civil War, left an indelible mark on the lives of thousands of children, who were forced to spend interminable hours in bomb shelters with their families.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x60x69 cm.



ON THE BRINK OF TERROR

During the Spanish Civil War and World War II, the sound of planes was a constant source of terror among both adults and children.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x60x69 cm.

A WELL-MEASURED DOSE OF HORROR

Nothing happens by chance; during wartime, objectives are always carefully analysed and measured. Children always end up being the direct victims of objectives geared towards ensuring the suffering of the civilian population and those who are most vulnerable.

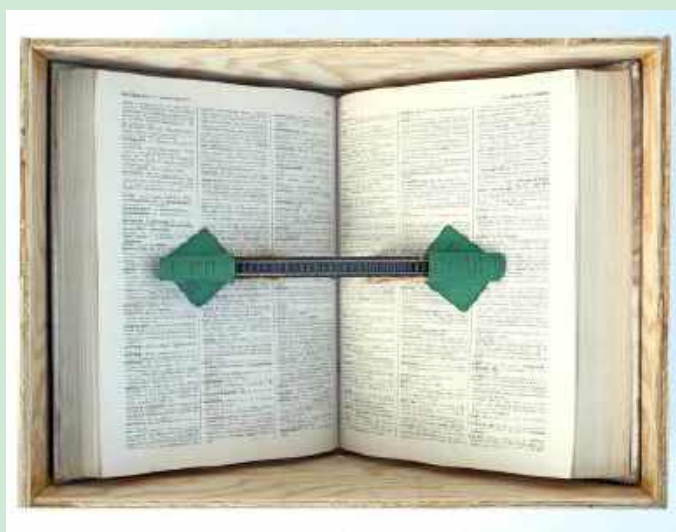
2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 48x10x30 cm.



RUINS

Landscapes that leave, for many years, evidence of the passing of violence.

2024, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 80x38x50 cm.



BRIDGES OF SOLIDARITY

Words, negotiation, never violence, to build bridges between different positions.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 48x10x30 cm.

Resistance and combat

The invasion and occupation of vast territories in Europe by Nazi Germany sowed terror, fear and submission among the civilian population. Also collaboration for ideological, racial and survival reasons. On a daily basis, civilians coexisted with the occupier who displayed uniforms, armbands and insignia, placed red flags with swastikas on buildings, and launched collaborationist propaganda, counter-propaganda and censorship.

The omnipresence of the elements of the Nazi triumph and the occupation of their countries provoked the reaction of civilians and combatants in Belgium, France, Norway, Denmark, Holland, Poland, Slovakia, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece and the USSR.

The Resistance movements expressed themselves in multiple forms: attacks and operations against troops, officers and military installations; sabotage of railroad tracks; assassination of informers; organization of protests; rescue of minors and adults; aid to fugitives; forgery of documents; obtaining and transmitting information for the Allies, etc.

Those "shadow armies" were made up of many anonymous heroes. Along with adults, children and teenagers participated, following the example of their parents, fighting for freedom with adventurous spirit, courage and recklessness.



Drawing by Pierre Cavellat. "Arrival of Germans in Quimper" (Arrivée des Allemands à Quimper), 22 June 1940. © Archives départementales du Finistère (18 Fi 167)



Act of sabotage by a youth in the Danish resistance. © Frihedsmuseet-Museum of Danish Resistance



In the French Alps, a veteran maquis shows young combatants how to use weapons. © Yad Vashem (503/5586)

Some fought on the front lines, others did so as saboteurs, messengers, spies or information agents. However, the Resistance consisted not only of them individuals. Women played key missions in risky and clandestine situations. The European Resistance included spies, liaison agents, secretaries, social workers, doctors, nurses, aviators, snipers, radio operators, etc. In addition, many of them hid the persecuted, cared for the wounded and supplied the resistance fighters.

Despite their age, the minors were resistance fighters and anonymous fighters for freedom in a Europe at war. As one French resistance fighter revealed, "My father taught me when I was very, very young to fight for freedom. Fight for your country. Fight for humanity"



Two girls assemble PPD-40 Tokarev machine guns at an arms factory in Leningrad (Author: Sergey Strunnikov, 1943). © Wikimedia Commons/Creative Commons Attribution 2.0 Generic (Public Domain)



Photograph of the youngest participant in the Warsaw Uprising, Polish survivor Różyczka Goździewska, who helped in the rebel hospital. ©Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego/ Creative Commons CCO License (Public Domain)

Among its ranks were very young heroines, such as Zinaida Portnova, who took part in acts of sabotage, distributed leaflets and collected and hid weapons for the Soviets. As a kitchen assistant infiltrating a Nazi garrison, she poisoned the food, causing a hundred casualties. She was subsequently captured, tortured and executed by the Gestapo. Another example of struggle and courage was that of the partisan and nurse María Pardina Ramos who acted on the Leningrad front, together with Spanish children taken in by the USSR between 1937 and 1938.



Poster showing Zina Portnova, created by Semyon Bondar y Naum Karpovsky (1972). ©Historical State Museum of the Southern Urals (CHOKM OF - 3102 / 44. GRF - 91 / 21)



Rescue of Jewish Children

Arpillera, Ana Zlatkes, 2011

Conflict Textiles Collection

Ana's arpillera depicts the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during the second world war, in her view the theme is universal and current: "Genocide continues, changes in form and geographical location, but it is still a reality and it is the responsibility of all of us to try to prevent it."





MULTIPLE TARGETS IN ONE

There are many direct targets in a war, some military, others propagandist. Both types undermine the morale of the intended victims.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x38x18 cm.

WHAT SHALL I PACK IN MY SUITCASE? _____

Resist, fight, flee (how and where to)? Key existential doubts that are so present during wartime and which have influenced and continue to influence the lives of millions of people.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 44x34x12 cm.



Persecution, deportation and extermination

Over 1.5 million children and teenagers in Germany and the occupied European countries were murdered by the Third Reich and its collaborators for racial, biological and political reasons. During the Holocaust, nearly one million Jewish children perished in deportation or in ghettos, victims of starvation, disease and subhuman conditions; in concentration camps, as a result of forced labour, brutal medical experiments and dehumanization; and in extermination camps, as children under 13, pregnant women and those over 50 were sent directly to the gas chamber

Their destinations were the ghettos of Poland, Ukraine, Hungary and Romania, the Baltic States and the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, and the death centres of Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka

Other "undesirable", "asocial" and "racially inferior" children, such as Roma and Sinti minors, also victims of Nazi systematic extermination or Porrajmos, arrived in some of these camps.



Autobiographical painting of the deportation of children, women and men from Vilna, Poland (present-day Lithuania), by Arie Singer, based on his memories as a 13-year-old partisan. © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2006.125.34)



Painting by young Latvian Jacob Barosin of a Roma woman and her children. © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (31762)

During WWII, some 500,000 Roma were subjected to deportation in Poland; internment in the special camps of Marzahn (Germany), Lackenbach and Salzburg 2 (Austria); imprisonment in the concentration camps of Bergen-Belsen, Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Dachau, Mauthausen, and Ravenbrück.

The Zyklon-B tests at Buchenwald, the medical experiments at Ravensbrück, Natzweiler-Struthof and Sachsenhausen, the gas chambers at Auschwitz and the mass shootings in Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia and Albania caused the deaths of thousands of Romani minors.

In a tragically shared fate, Roma children, Jews and non-Jews perished together with their families in the mass shootings perpetuated by the SS-supported mobile execution squads (Einsatzgruppen) in the German-occupied Soviet territories. One of the most tragic chapters of the "Holocaust by bullets" was written in the Babi Yar ravine near Kiev in September 1941.

The largest murder of Jews, Roma, Ukrainian civilians and Soviet prisoners of war during WWII took place there. The massacres continued until the autumn of 1943, with 100,000 Jewish and non-Jewish victims, mostly children, women, the sick and the elderly



The Last Walk or Taken to the Slaughterhouse - Babi Yar (1947). Oil painting by Russian artist Yosef Kuzkovski. Photograph: Michael Amar. ©Kneset Archives

Among other tragedies of innocents was the annihilation of the Czech village of Lidice. Nazi troops committed a cruel revenge against its population as punishment for the attack of a Czechoslovak commando against the "Butcher of Prague", Reinhard Heydrich, the governor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and one of the ideologists of the "Final Solution". Civilians were falsely linked to the bombing and Heydrich's subsequent death.

The Germans executed 173 men and teenagers, deported 203 women and young girls to Ravensbrück, and gassed 42 girls and 40 boys at Chelmno. A memorial was erected in their memory and that of so many other innocents.



Memorial to the child victims of the war in Lidice (Marie Uchytlová & Jiří V. Hampl). © Creative Commons Atribución-Compartir Igual 4.0 Internacional

TRAIN

The extermination and disappearance of the most vulnerable members of society reflect horror at its very worst, inhumanity taken to unthinkable extremes.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 22x10x30 cm.



SHOOTING

Death, shooting, terror, absence.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x11x30 cm.



EXHIBITION IN THE GUERNICA PEACE MUSEUM



Liberation and postwar

From May 1945, military and civilians celebrated the Allied liberation and victory in a Europe in ruins. That victory followed the death of some 70 million combatants and non-combatants, with the USSR, China, Germany and Poland being the countries that suffered the greatest human losses. During the war, civilian populations were its victims, suffering countless violations of their rights. In addition, millions of civilians, minors and adults, had to leave their homes, becoming displaced persons and refugees. On a daily basis, children, women and the elderly lived with and faced war, destruction, hunger, deprivation, disease and climatic extremes.



Drawing by Hungarian Ervin Abadi, representing the arrival of the liberators (Germany, 1945). © United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (George Bozoki, 36760)

The situation of children mobilized humanitarian organizations which, on the basis of religious, humanitarian, ethical, charitable or philanthropic principles, acted on the ground to alleviate their suffering. One such organization was the Commission Mixte de Secours, which helped children and teenagers in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland, Italy and the Baltic countries.



◀ *"Children suffer". Croix-Rouge suisse- Secours aux enfants poster. ©Bibliothèque de Genève (SGA 56.20)*

This rescue work was aided by the Croix-Rouge Suisse- Secours aux Enfants, whose humanitarian action with food, medicines and vitamins focused on French, Belgian, Finnish, Greek, Italian, Serbian and Croatian minors. The Œuvre de Secours aux Enfants established a network of 25 houses to protect Jewish children, remove them from French camps or evacuate them abroad in collaboration with the American Friends Service Committee. The Quakers distinguished themselves by their work in French camps and hospitals, feeding refugees, caring for minors in colonies, and running food services for children.



Children collected daily by Red Cross nurses in Yugoslavia (1942). © Archives du Comité International de la Croix-Rouge (V-P-HIST-03168-13)

During the war and post-war period, the protection of children was made possible by female humanitarian aid volunteers, nurses, doctors, caregivers, educators and teachers, who worked for the physical and mental protection of children. In fact, more than 40% of the staff of the great post-war humanitarian organization, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), were women. In 1945, UNRRA began its work in Greece, a country that suffered a terrible famine after the German occupation.



Asprangeli schoolchildren (Greece) enjoy UNRRA food (1945). ©UNRRA, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum (61-173-11)

Until their dissolution in 1947, UNRRA missions and their humanitarian aid with food, clothing and medicine reached Austria, Germany, Albania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Ukraine, Belarus, Finland, Italy, as well as African and Asian countries.

The organizations of the time had to cope with unprecedented waves of refugees and a humanitarian crisis of enormous proportions that devastated civilians. The post-war period witnessed the existence of millions of deported, refugee or displaced, unaccompanied, abandoned or orphaned children. Also the tragedy of thousands of children with "Aryan characteristics", taken from their homes by Nazi forces in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Belgium, Holland, Norway or the USSR and sent to Germany for Germanization in Lebensborn-Heime centres or through adoption.



Mothers and children in a cave in Naples (Italy). © United Nations Archives and Records Management Section (UNRRA, S-0800-0003-0004-00012)

Unfortunately, history repeated itself. Many war orphans were separated from their adoptive families or stolen by the victors to repopulate their territories. The physical and psychological aftermath of the conflict haunted those war children, often for life. The same was true of the children who survived the atomic bombs dropped on the civilians of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Shortly thereafter, Japan surrendered, marking the end of World War II.

EXODUS II

The trauma of having to abandon your home, your school, your friends – everything you have ever known – to go someplace where you are often not welcome, where you understand no one and no one understands you, has disrupted and continues to disrupt the childhood of millions of children during both wartime itself and the postwar period.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x40x52 cm.



EXODUS III

If war is terrible, so is the postwar period, during which fleeing is often the only solution left for those struggling to survive in the face of hunger, injustice and persecution.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 10x30x18 cm.



EXODUS IV

On foot, by car, by lorry... fleeing is always a nightmare.

2022, an object poem made using the assemblage technique, 8x24x16 cm.