

Winston Churchill: A Statesman for All Time

Lesson Plans

These lesson plans have been compiled by
Hillsdale College
in partnership with the Michigan Churchill Society of The Churchill Centre

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An Introduction for High School Students

Like many states, Michigan has recently increased its emphasis on the teaching of World History. The revised (10/2007) High School Content Expectations for Social Studies stress the urgent need for an understanding of the history of the world: “today citizenship in our democracy demands global understanding.” We must look to the world and its past so we can investigate the sources of our own institutions and values, learn from the experiences of people who have gone before us, and equip ourselves to engage the world as citizens.

This program has been designed with just these goals in mind. The key to a good grasp of world history is the study of outstanding figures whose actions have helped shape the world. Winston Churchill is one such figure from the past century. He exemplifies how important it is for Americans to study World History. Churchill participated in both World Wars and played a key role in the defeat of the Adolph Hitler. The study of his life encompasses these conflicts, their causes and resolutions. Churchill deserves attention not only as a great wartime leader, but also as a defender of freedom, a man who has shaped our understanding of democracy and statesmanship. In considering Churchill’s life and works, the student will find a fascinating narrative allowing him to explore the global struggle for freedom and human dignity that characterized the last century.

This program is designed to introduce high school students to the unique character of Winston Churchill. It will not merely describe his life and the events that he participated in, but will explore the greater questions he raised and contested, questions that are still relevant today. Going beyond mere facts and dates, it will provide a broad view of ideas of the twentieth century and describe the connections between America and Europe. Through the study of a British Prime Minister, the student will come to a better understanding of democracy, of America, and of its values.

These lessons can be used to prepare students for document reading and interpretation as well as history topics.

The study has been divided into three sections:

I. Portrait of a Statesman, Parts I and II: Winston Churchill

This section of the study will describe Churchill’s life and the qualities that allowed him to become a great statesman in the hour of his country’s need. It will examine the differences between a statesman and a leader. Powerful leaders of the twentieth century included Adolph Hitler and Joseph Stalin as well as people like Churchill and Roosevelt. What differentiates leaders like these? What principles should guide and restrict the actions of a public figure?

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II. Democracy and Tyranny: Winston Churchill the Defender

This section of the study discusses the causes that led up to World War II and describes Churchill's responses. Tyrannies of various kinds gained incredible power in the twentieth century, threatening to sweep over most of the world. From the example of Winston Churchill, one can see the important role individuals can play in shaping events and outcomes.

III. Global Interdependence – Winston Churchill and America

This section of the study considers the relationship between America and England in the time of World War II, and Churchill's role in developing that relationship. More broadly, it considers the global scope of the War and the effects that the individual can have within the global environment.

Much of the information from these studies comes from the Churchill Centre's website, www.winstonchurchill.org. The site contains many of Churchill's speeches, and contains more information for teachers, specifically within the "Resources" page.

Note: If using the [Audio Archive](#), The Churchill Centre recommends providing a copy of the text for students to follow along. When identifying speeches, use the date, as speeches may have multiple titles.

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Portrait of a Statesman, Parts I & II: Winston Churchill

Grade level: 9-12

Subject: World History/Leadership

Duration: While this lesson may be done in one 60-minute session, it may be best divided into two 45 to 50 minute sessions.

Introduction

This lesson introduces one of the great statesmen of the twentieth century. It describes his development, from his early experiences and political struggles through his wartime leadership and beyond. Churchill was in a position to participate in most of the main events of the twentieth century. Witnessing as he did the rise of tyranny and dictatorship in America, he stood to resist these forces and raised his country and the English-speaking peoples of the world against them. Churchill's actions make him a perfect example of a statesman, a man who not only lead his country, but did so with prudence and unselfishness. After considering Churchill's life we are able to clearly see what makes a statesman different from a leader or dictator.

PART I

A. Guiding Questions

- How did Winston Churchill rise to prominence during his life?
- What was his character in early life?

B. Learning Objective

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Recognize the early influences and characteristics in the life of Winston Churchill.

C. The Life of Churchill

Early life—Winston Leonard Spencer Churchill was born November 30, 1874, to a famous family with a strong military and political background. His mother was an American. As a boy, he lacked “cleverness, knowledge and any capacity for settled work” and had “a great talent for show-off, exaggeration and make-believe,” according to his own father. In his formative years, he developed a keen interest and then talent for the English language, both written and spoken. In his early 20s he served in the military in India, Sudan and South Africa. While in Sudan, he made a name for himself by rescuing an ambushed train and escaping from a Sudanese prison. At age 24, Churchill ran for Parliament and lost. Two years later, he tried

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again and earned himself a seat. He served and saw combat in The Great War, which we now call World War I.

It is recommended that the teacher select a passage from *My Early Life*, a short autobiography of Churchill, for the class to read. Also, read the recounting of the [armored train incident](#) summarized by Larry Arnn.

PART II

A. Guiding questions:

- What characteristics made him a great statesman?
- Is there a difference between statesmanship and leadership?
- Can one be a good leader, and yet a poor statesman?

B. Learning Objectives

- Know the basics of Churchill's contributions to WWII.
- Think critically about the nature of leadership and statesmanship.

C. Background Information

Students should have a general conception of World War II and the causes that led up to it. Though Churchill also participated in World War I and remained in politics during the 1950s, he manifested his qualities as a statesman most strongly during the Second World War, and a general familiarity with this conflict will allow the student to get the most from the study of Churchill.

World War II—From virtually the start of the war, after the French defeat, Britain stood alone in Europe defending itself and, as Churchill saw it, democracy, freedom and Western civilization, against the tyranny of Adolph Hitler and Nazi Germany. Churchill himself became Prime Minister in 1940, and was instrumental in securing the defeat of Hitler. His impressive oratorical skills, in particular, made him extremely important for the Allied forces. Churchill lifted the spirits and restored the hope of the war-torn English people: “Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, ‘This was their finest hour’” (June 18, 1940 – House of Commons). He was unwavering in his stand against Hitler, despite devastating losses and internal disruptions. Churchill also sought the support of America in the war, and fostered a close alliance between the two countries.

After the War—Churchill was voted out of office just days before the end of the war in Europe, and reelected in 1951. His grasp of world affairs, his prescience,

however, never left him. In 1946, he spoke in Missouri and related that “It is my duty however, for I am sure you would wish me to state the facts as I see them to you, to place before you certain facts about the present position in Europe. From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent.” This was the earliest recognition (or at least the one that caught on) of the Soviet threat and the occupation of Eastern Europe that continued until Communism’s collapse in Soviet Russia in 1991. Though he had helped to defeat the Nazi forces in Europe, Churchill was still concerned with checking the spread of tyranny in any form it might appear.

D. The Qualities of the Statesman

Before going further, one must distinguish between a leader and a statesman. Leaders can sway their nations to unwavering devotion, bring economic wealth, and restore national pride. Adolf Hitler, among others in history, could be called a good leader, but at what cost? What did he lead his people to but destruction, shame, and evil? A statesman on the other hand, has the wisdom to recognize evil and the courage to face it head on. He balances the interests of the individual with those of the nation as he seeks to ensure safety and justice. Steadfast and resolute, a statesman adheres to wise counsel but is not afraid when necessary, to stand alone. With their vision and valor, statesmen shape the character of society for the betterment of the world.

Churchill describes dictatorship as “the fetish worship of one man” in his broadcast to America on October 16, 1938. Read his speech, [The Defence of Freedom and Peace](#), sometimes entitled “The lights are going out” or “We must arm!”

Listen to an audio excerpt that includes the phrase [“We Must arm!”](#)

Such a man is no doubt a leader, commanding as he does the will of the people. But can such a man be called great when he leads his country into cruelty and hatred? The statesman, in contrast, may never rise to such enormous popularity, but he will seek justice for his nation, rather than power.

Activities

Once Churchill’s life and the meaning of statesmanship have been introduced, discussion should play a key role in the class. Students should list and discuss the qualities that leaders and statesmen have in common, and the things that make them

different. They could also list examples of each type and describe how their statesmanship and leadership have affected the nations for good or ill.

Another possible activity that might allow the students to understand this distinction more clearly would be to allow the students to play the role of leader and statesman. Present them with a situation, from history or the imagination, and ask them how a leader and a statesman might respond.

A useful document for the class to read and analyze with regard to this subject is Churchill's short [War Speech](#) at the beginning of WWII, delivered two days after the Nazis invaded Poland.

- How are Churchill's qualities as a statesman evident in this speech?

Democracy and Tyranny: Winston Churchill the Defender

Grade level: 9-12

Subject: World History

Duration: 45-60 minutes

I. Introduction

We will begin to discover the meaning of the word “democracy” by looking at a number of quotations and a speech. Churchill saw an unbridgeable gap between tyranny and democracy—the two are based upon different principles. Tyranny poses a great danger to democracy. Churchill’s comments and his actions prove his commitment to and understanding of democracy.

II. Guiding Questions

- What are the differences between tyranny and democracy?
- Why did Churchill and others (like Reagan) rally so strongly against tyranny?
- Can democracy continue on its own, or must someone protect it?

III. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand what a democracy is and why it is opposed to tyranny
- Articulate the general merits of democracy and explain the significance of statesmen in the leadership of a democracy

IV. Background Information

A. Churchill on tyranny

“You see these dictators on their pedestals, surrounded by the bayonets of their soldiers and the truncheons of their police. Yet in their hearts there is unspoken-unspeakable!- FEAR. They are afraid of words and thoughts! Words spoken abroad, thoughts stirring at home, all the more powerful because they are forbidden. These terrify them. A little mouse, a tiny mouse, of thought appears in the room, and even the mightiest potentates are thrown into panic.”

Winston Churchill, *Blood, Sweat and Tears*

Hear the paragraph above in an audio excerpt of the speech *The Defense of Freedom and Peace*, sometimes entitled “The Lights Are Going Out” or [“We Must Arm.”](#)

“Dictators ride to and fro upon tigers which they dare not dismount. And the tigers are getting hungry”.

Winston Churchill, *Step by Step*

B. Churchill on Democracy

“No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

Winston Churchill, *Europe Unite*

“How is that word “democracy” to be interpreted? My idea of it is that the plain, humble, common man, just the ordinary man who keeps a wife and family, who goes off to fight for his country when it is in trouble, goes to the poll at the appropriate time, and puts his cross on the ballot paper showing the candidate he wishes to be elected to Parliament—that he is the foundation of democracy. And it is also essential to this foundation that this man or woman should do this without fear, and without any form of intimidation or victimization. He marks his ballot paper in strict secrecy, and then elected representatives and together decide what government, or even in times of stress, what form of government they wish to have in their country. If that is democracy, I salute it. I espouse it. I would work for it.”

Winston Churchill, House of Commons, 8 December 1944

C. Churchill on democracy’s response to tyranny

“We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and of suffering. You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us; to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy.”

Winston Churchill, *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat*

This excerpt is from Churchill’s first speech as prime minister on May 13, 1940, [“Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat.”](#)

A BBC recording of the speech is in the [Audio Archive](#). Select: 1940 May 13 – The New Administration. Because speeches in the House of Commons were not recorded, Churchill read the speech for the BBC after he delivered it in the Commons.

When faced with the threat of tyranny and terror democracy, under the direction of statesmen, does not shrink or falter. If anything, citizens are united more strongly in the cause for freedom. The words of statesmen during times of crisis are critical and impacting. By examining a specific time in history when freedom and peace came under

terrible danger, much can be learned about the responsibility of democracies. Virtuous, democratic nations, as Churchill explains, cannot help but confront evil.

V. Activities

Discussion can begin by students offering their ideas about what a democracy is and providing some examples. The class could then discuss how their idea of democracy differs from their idea of a tyranny. They could then respond to the ideas expressed in Churchill's above quotations, and see how these distinctions become more sharp and vital in a time of conflict.

To explore these ideas more fully and in a specific historical context, the students should read the following Churchill speech. Delivered the year before World War II began, it is an appeal to the American people to see the way democracy is falling to tyranny across Europe.

[*The Defence of Freedom and Peace*](#) or "*The Lights Are Going Out,*" Oct. 16, 1938.

VI. Assessment

Either through more discussion or through a written response, the students can reflect on Churchill's words and determine how they think a democracy should react to tyrannical governments. They might also consider what Churchill's role as a statesman was in this conflict. Connecting this discussion with Churchill's actions before and during the War may be especially illustrative of the statesman's specific responsibility to protect his country from tyranny.

Global Interdependence: Winston Churchill and America

Grade level: 9-12

Subject: American History/World History

Duration: 45-60 minutes

I. Introduction

We will consider how Britain and America became allies to resist tyranny. We will read two speeches of Winston Churchill, and analyze his attempt to persuade Americans of the threat posed by Hitler and his Nazi regime, and the need for the Americans to abandon their isolationist policy. In examining these speeches and the relations between Britain and America, we will learn about the values that unite the two nations and the importance of this global interdependence.

II. Guiding Questions

- How did Churchill convince the American people that democracy in Europe as well as in the United States was in danger of being destroyed?
- What common values did Churchill emphasize?
- How did these values draw the two nations into an alliance?

III. Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

- Understand the threat to American and British democracy as envisioned by Churchill.
- Understand how the study of Churchill relates to American History

IV. Background Information

Winston Churchill always felt a close relationship with America. His mother, Jennie Jerome, was herself an American. Throughout his life, Churchill believed that a strong Anglo-American relationship was needed to preserve democratic principles, and this idea was no more prevalent than with the rise of fascist governments in Europe between 1932 and 1941.

In 1931 Churchill visited the United States on a lecture tour that addressed the relationship of the English-American people. When he returned to Great Britain he continued to “woo” America so as to soften their isolationist stance regarding world affairs and especially to the threat of Nazism. A major theme in many of Churchill’s speeches and magazine articles during this period was the importance of the United

States joining England in resisting the tyrannical governments of the world. His efforts helped to establish the “special relationship,” as he famously called it, between the two English-speaking countries.

In 1963, John F. Kennedy awarded Churchill honorary citizenship in the United States. For facility of discussion, the American foreign policy of the 1930s, and specifically isolationism, should be introduced to the students before examining Churchill’s speeches. The causes of World War II, and the timeline of British and American involvement in the War, should also be familiar to the students. The study of Churchill and his speeches should draw all of these elements into focus and help explain the significance of American involvement as a part of the struggle between democracy and tyranny.

V. Activities

Reading out loud or individually, consider as a class the following speeches delivered by Churchill to the American People:

[“Hush over Europe,”](#) August 8, 1939.

[The Birth Throes of a Sublime Resolve](#) or “The Old Lion,” June 16, 1941.

Possible points for discussion about “Hush over Europe” may include:

- To what does Churchill want the American people to “listen”?
- How does his appeal treat the American’s response to the events of Europe?
- Churchill defends against the argument that Britain is acting as an aggressor. How does he deal with this accusation? How would an American isolationist react to such claims?

Possible points for discussion about “The Old Lion” may include:

- Who is the “old lion with her lion cubs at her side”?
- What is the significance of Churchill’s ending thought that, “United we stand. Divided we fall.”? What great American speech and politician is he referring to? Why do you think Churchill used this reference?

What kinds of arguments does Churchill use to appeal to the American people in both speeches?

What does he say about themes like

- The defense of democratic principles
- The stopping of aggression
- The rightness of democracy versus the evil of Nazism
- The need to combine forces to defeat evil

How is the threat to European democracy a danger for America as well as for Britain?

What has been the relationship between America and Britain in the past?