

# LIVING THROUGH HISTORY

**NATIONAL  
ARMY  
MUSEUM**  
TE MATA TOA

NZ History  
COVID-19 and the New Zealand  
experience in World War 2



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## He waka eke noa

We are all in this together

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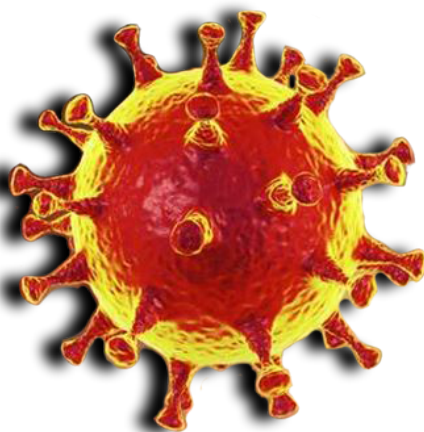
History isn't something that happens to someone else. Right now, you are living through an extraordinary event that is changing the New Zealand way of life: the COVID-19 pandemic. Future students might look back on this moment and ask: how did they feel? How did they make it through?

We can ask the same questions about another generation of Kiwis who lived through extraordinary times: **New Zealanders at home during World War 2** (1939-1945). Then, like now, a major global crisis forced everyday New Zealanders to reconsider the way that they were used to living. Many of them were scared – they didn't know whether the future would be good or bad – but they put their hope in victory, and in the men and women who went overseas to risk their lives for their country. To help the war effort, the government asked them to make changes to their lives, to give up a little so that the country as a whole would be better off at the end of it. Let's take a moment to look at the examples they set.

For each of the activities below:

- **Read** about the New Zealand experience in World War 2.
- **Reflect** on how this is similar to what you are seeing now.
- **Respond** to the questions or instructions at the end of each activity.

Share your answers with your classmates and teacher! We'll all have our own unique experiences, and we can all learn just as much from each other as we can from our nation's history.



## Activity 1: Winning with less

During World War 2, ordinary New Zealanders had to change their shopping, houses and daily activities to help get our country through the war. During World War 2 most Māori still lived in rural, and in many cases, impoverished communities.

- Food, clothes and petrol were all **rationed**. If people wanted to buy any of these things, they had to use tokens from a ration book. People couldn't buy more items than they had tokens for, so that everyone could get a fair share of the limited supplies.
- Some people bought and sold food, and other goods, illegally. This is called a **black market**.
- Coastal cities had to go into **blackout** so that German and Japanese raiders couldn't navigate using their lights. People had to block light from their windows in any way they could – thick curtains were the best, but some people just painted over their windows entirely!
- When Japan entered the war in 1941 New Zealanders began to fear a potential Japanese invasion. People dug trenches, manned anti-aircraft guns and prepared the hospitals in case a battle broke out and hundreds were wounded.

**Rationing** is when you are limited to only buying or using a little bit of something at a time. New Zealand rationed food in World War 2 so that we could send extra food to help our allies fighting overseas.

**Blackout** is when everyone must stop even the tiniest bit of light from escaping their homes in case the enemy sees it.

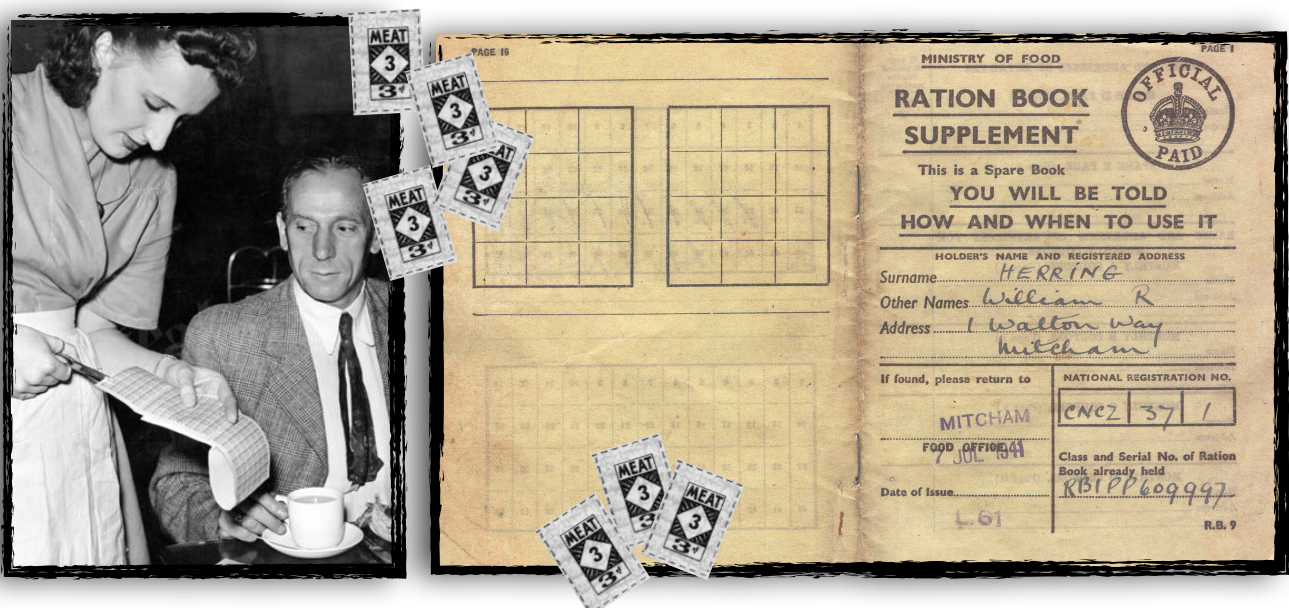
Rationing in particular was so important for New Zealand that it didn't end until 1948, *three years* after World War 2 had ended!

**1a** What are 3 ways that your daily life has been changed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

**1b** How do you think these changes will help New Zealand to beat the virus?

**1c** Do you think that **rationing** would be a good idea if the pandemic continues? Why/why not?

**1d** Which members of our communities are vulnerable and liable to suffer the most? What safeguards are needed for vulnerable people?



## Activity 2: Fighting the War

Who fights a war? Who defeats a virus? The frontlines may be different, but in many ways our fight against COVID-19 is similar to our ancestors' fight against the Axis Powers.

Around **140,000** men served overseas in New Zealand's armed forces.

**38,000** women entered the workforce during World War 2. Although they suffered from discrimination and were poorly paid, some were able to make new careers out of these jobs after the war.

**4600** women served in the WAAC.

**125,000** boys and old men served in the Home Guard.

In World War 2, soldiers, sailors and airmen went overseas to fight Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and the Empire of Japan. They took the battle to the enemy in the field, and were the face and focus of the war effort. But it was equally important that they were supplied in the field and supported at home.

Men and women transported fuel, food, ammunition and machines from New Zealand all the way to Europe and the Mediterranean. Women took jobs in manufacturing and on farms, freeing men to become soldiers, while others joined up with the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) to work overseas, particularly in hospitals. Boys and old men who were too young and too old to join the army could still serve in the Home Guard, preparing to defend New Zealand in case of invasion.

Ordinary New Zealanders could each do their part by following government instructions regarding rationing and blackouts. They could not fight the war themselves, but they trusted in our soldiers to get the job done and they made sure to support the war effort through their actions and their self-discipline.

**2a** What kinds of professions are on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic?

**2b** What kinds of professions are supporting and supplying New Zealand to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic? Is it fair that some of the essential work force facing a higher risk, for example, supermarket staff, truck drivers, cleaners, are among the lowest paid?

**2c** How does your self-isolation, social distancing, or staying at home help these professions to manage the COVID-19 pandemic?

**2d** Some iwi in isolated communities have set up checkpoints to manage who is allowed into their communities. Iwi are working with local councils and police to manage this. Do you agree with this?



## Activity 3: Staying connected

How do we know what is happening in our world? Today, television and the internet have revolutionised communications. You can find out almost anything about the COVID-19 pandemic within a few minutes, and you can also read about events from the other side of the world straight away. In this day and age, history hits us the moment it happens.

In World War 2, **telegrams** and radio were the quickest method of global communication, but most people at home relied on newspapers to tell them about current events, and letters posted through the mail to keep in touch with their loved ones. If someone in your family was serving overseas it might take weeks for letters to reach them, and just as long for their reply to get back. Mail could be lost if ships were bombed or torpedoed, and soldiers overseas would often be forbidden from telling their families exactly where they were or what was happening.

Despite this, soldiers and families keenly looked forward for news from each other. Soldiers might receive gifts of clothes and treats from their families, and even a weeks-old newspaper would remind them of the ordinary life waiting for them at the end of the war. Many of them spent their money on souvenirs, particularly when they were training in Egypt, so a steady stream of gifts and goodies headed back to New Zealand as well.

**Telegrams** were short messages sent through the telegraph network, a global mesh of communication lines that used patterns of electrical blips called **Morse code** to relay messages across the world. Trained operators could translate these messages back into writing just by listening to the pattern of dots and dashes, and then a written copy of the message would be posted to the recipient.

### International Morse Code

A	● —	U	● ● —
B	— ● ● ●	V	● ● ● —
C	— ● — ●	W	● — —
D	— ● ●	X	— ● ● —
E	●	Y	— ● — —
F	● ● — ●	Z	— — ● ●
G	— — ●		
H	● ● ● ●		
I	● ●		
J	● — — —		
K	— ● —	1	● — — — —
L	● — ● ●	2	● ● — — —
M	— —	3	● ● ● — —
N	— ●	4	● ● ● ● —
O	— — —	5	● ● ● ● ●
P	● — — ●	6	— ● ● ● ●
Q	— — ● —	7	— — ● ● ●
R	● — ●	8	— — — ● ●
S	● ● ●	9	— — — — ●
T	—	0	— — — — —

**3a** How do you think people in New Zealand felt about waiting days or weeks for news about the War?

**3b** Imagine that there's no internet and you still have to send telegrams to each other. Write a message in **Morse code**, send it to a classmate, and see if they can translate it!

**3c** How has modern communications technology (internet, mobile phones, television) helped New Zealand to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic?

**3d** Culture survives by being adaptive and dynamic. Māori are being asked not to hongi (press noses) in greeting during the Covid 19 pandemic. Churches are being asked not to hold services. How are we adapting our behaviour during this pandemic?

## Activity 4: Inspiring hope

In World War 2, the government came up with **slogans** such as “Dig for Victory”, “Your Country Needs You” and “Keep Calm and Carry On” to encourage people to stay hopeful and keep working toward the common good. These slogans appeared on posters with bright, heroic images to inspire people to follow their messages. War posters encouraged people to:

- Join the military
- Give money to help the war effort
- Use less to waste less
- Stay positive
- Find work at home that would help win the war

A **slogan** is a short sentence that is easy for people to remember. Companies use slogans to advertise their products. Can you think of any examples from today's ads?

**4a** How can you challenge yourself to cheer people up? In a sentence or two, write a **slogan** that would encourage other New Zealanders to stay strong and hopeful during today's pandemic.

**4b** Now, draw and colour a poster to illustrate your slogan. As a class, share and discuss your posters with each other!

**4c** Some people are putting teddy bears in their windows. Why?

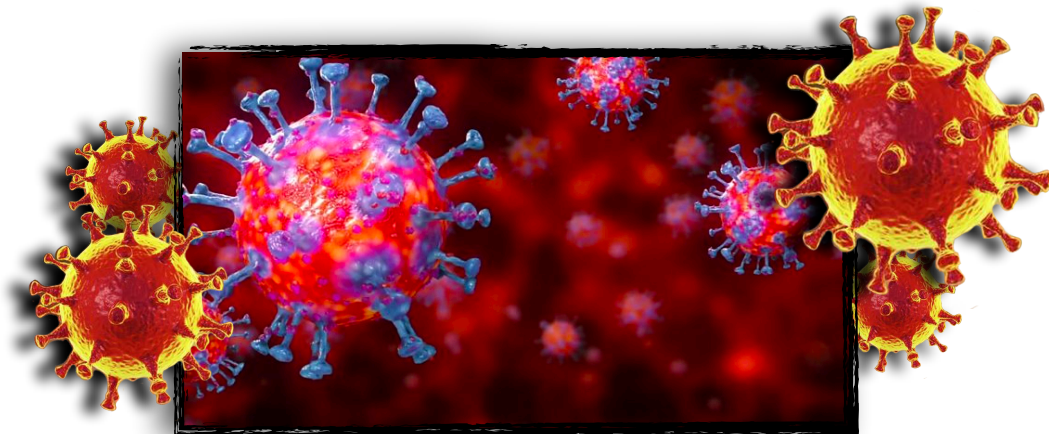
**4d** What can neighbours do for each other?



## Beyond the Worksheet

These activities have shown you just a few examples of how past New Zealanders kept up with a national crisis and came through it together. But history doesn't stop happening, and there's more you can do to make sure that the times you live in aren't forgotten. Here are a couple of activities that could tell future historians what you lived through, how you felt and how we as a nation made it through COVID-19 together:

- **Keep a diary.** Diaries are important because they tell us how individuals saw the world changing around them. A thousand records telling you *what* happened *where* and *when* will never be able to show you *how* someone felt about it. Other reflective pieces of writing such as poetry can help you to express your unique feelings and perspectives.
- **Take photos.** If the COVID-19 pandemic has changed things about your house or your local neighbourhood (for example, a busy street being empty, signs up in shop windows etc.), take photos! Just as a diary tells you how you felt on a certain day, photos will help you and others to remember what was different about your life during the COVID-19 pandemic, and what the country was doing to contain it. **Note:** if the government has currently instructed you to stay at home or restrict unnecessary travel, do not go out to take these photos. It is more important that you keep yourself and others safe by taking these instructions seriously.
- **Letters.** Write a letter to your grandparents/whanau. Draw or design a picture on your device.
- **Baking.** Bake biscuits/treats with only 4 ingredients! How creative can you be?



References:

**Challenges.** <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/second-world-war-at-home/challenges>, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 20-Dec-2012

Oulton, R. (2020). *New Zealand Wartime Food (WWII)*. <https://www.cooksinfo.com/new-zealand-wartime-food/>