

## A Reading and Drama

# The Battle of Dunkirk and the Evacuation of the troops (Operation Dynamo)

### Read this to the class:

*By the 10th of May 1940, thousands of soldiers in the British Army (known as the British Expeditionary Forces, or BEF) were in France and Belgium, fighting alongside the French and Belgian armies. However, the German army had used their tanks far more effectively and they advanced towards the British Army very quickly.*

*The British, as well as the French and Belgian forces, realised that they couldn't fight very well against the Germans. They were attacked from the east, the west and the south and the Germans eventually trapped them around Dunkirk. They retreated to the harbour and beaches of Dunkirk.*

*It became clear to the British that the battle was lost, and the question was now how many soldiers could be rescued and taken to England. The soldiers just sat on the beach, waiting and hoping to be rescued. Every now and then the German Luftwaffe (Air Force) would drop bombs onto the town and onto the soldiers on the beach.*

Say to the children that they should sit quietly and imagine the feelings of those soldiers. Explain that they had fought fiercely, but were now stuck with nowhere to go. Did they think they would be rescued? How would they have felt? What might they do?

Split the class into two. Ask one half to close their eyes. Ask the other half to practise showing their feelings as Dunkirk soldiers in a freeze frame. Remind them to be silent. Then count 3, 2, 1, freeze! When you say 'freeze', the children miming need to freeze and the other half need to open their eyes.

### Read this to the class:

*Just when the German Army was preparing to launch its final, deadly assault, Hitler gave the order for them to hold their ground. No one really knows why – perhaps he thought he could defeat them just with the German air force (Luftwaffe), perhaps he wanted a surrender without too much bloodshed. No one knows for certain, but the break gave the troops a chance.*

**Read this to the class:**

*The Navy sent its ships across to rescue the soldiers from the harbour at Dunkirk but the Germans bombed them and the harbour was almost completely demolished. It became necessary to take the soldiers off the nearby beaches as well. On 29th May, the evacuation was announced to the British public, and many privately owned boats started arriving at Dunkirk to ferry the troops to safety. This is when the little ships came to play their part. A variety of motor boats, fishing smacks, trawlers, lifeboats, paddle steamers and many other types of craft came over the channel to assist in the escape. Hundreds of civilians helped in the escape. Many of them rescued the men off the beaches and took them to the destroyers that were waiting offshore, but others took the soldiers directly back to Britain themselves.*

Divide the class in half. Explain that one half are going to be the soldiers on the beaches, half will be the rescuers in their boats. Role play the rescue. Stop frequently to ask what people are doing and thinking. You may want half of the class to perform their role play with the other half watching, and then swap over.

**Read this to the class:**

*By 4th June, when the operation ended, 198,000 British and 140,000 French and Belgian troops had been saved, but virtually all of their heavy equipment had been abandoned. Six destroyers had been sunk, along with eight large transport ships and around 200 small craft, from a total of around 860 vessels of all sizes.*

*The contribution these civilian vessels made to the Dunkirk evacuation gave rise to the term 'Dunkirk spirit', an expression still used to describe the British ability to rally together in the face of adversity. This was a real example of true team spirit!*

*The escape captured the minds and hearts of the British people at a time when it looked probable that we too would soon be invaded. Winston Churchill said it was 'a miracle'.*