

The Victory Dogs

by Megan Rix



megan rix
The
Victory
Dogs

As the bombs fall,
two puppies will make history.



The Victory Dogs



Introductory notes

by Megan Rix

Megan Rix has written several wonderful books in which dogs are the central characters in the story. The identities and dilemmas of the animals are often more vivid than those of the humans. Rix's writing is never sentimental and tells of the powerful bond between people and animals in an informative, realistic and moving way.

Set at the time of war in Europe, the books represent a good way to study these periods. Rix provides excellent brief historical notes at the ends of the books answering many of the questions that the books provoke.

Activities address **National Curriculum Literacy** guidelines as well as the following non-statutory **History** guidelines:

- Changes within living memory. Where appropriate, these should be used to reveal aspects of change in national life.
- Children should be taught about an aspect or theme in British history that extends pupils' chronological knowledge beyond 1066.

In this book the 1940 London Blitz is portrayed and we follow the fortunes of a lost pregnant dog and the puppies she gives birth to in an underground station. There are touching connections between war-damaged humans and lost animals.

Activities are intended to encourage further reading of the books so the quoted texts have largely been chosen from the beginning of the books to avoid spoilers!

The recommendation would always be to read the whole book but these resources are designed so that this is not essential. Alternatively they could be used alongside a couple of weeks of chapter reading to the class.

There is an appendix of answer sheets as appropriate to save precious teacher time!

The passages are in order from the book but could be used in any order.

1. The Beginning p.3 (comprehension)

2. ARP p.5 (abbreviations)

3. Puppies! p.7 (word work/colour parsing)

4. Where am I? p.11 (descriptive writing)

5. Safer than houses! p.13 (drama/asking questions/factual report writing)

6. Find out more p.16 (general Knowledge)

7. Favourite parts of The Victory Dogs p.18 (reflection)

8. Appendix for teachers p.19



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1. The Beginning

Extract from Chapter 1

London, 1940

Misty had a bed of her own, by the fire downstairs, but she always chose to lie on Jack's bed. The soft, cream-coated dog with floppy ears yawned and stretched her large pregnant tummy out across the bed and watched as her beloved owner twisted the green woollen tie round his neck and then undid it again with a loud sigh.

Twelve-year-old Amy watched her older brother too.

'Can I help?' she asked him.

But Jack shook his head. He'd have to manage it by himself once he was in the army.

'Why do things like tying ties and shoelaces have to be so tricky?' he said.

Misty gave a soft whine as if she were agreeing with him.

Amy stroked Misty's furry head and began reciting the rhyme they'd been taught at school to help them remember how to knot their ties:

'The hare sees the fox and hops over the log, under the log, around the log once . . . around the log twice . . . and dives into his hole . . . safe and sound.'



W

W

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1. The Beginning

Name _____

Date _____

This is the opening passage in the book. We meet three characters and find out quite a lot about them.

From the text find out something for each bullet point.

Here are some facts to start you off. Sort them into the right place:

- is a human being
- is pregnant
- is 12 years old
- finds it hard to tie shoelaces
- has a soft cream coat
- has a dog called...

Misty

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

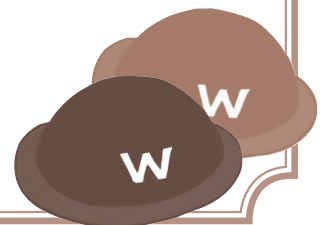
Jack

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Amy

- _____
- _____
- _____

Extension activity: Use the rhyme to practice tying a tie.



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2. ARP

There has been an air raid and in the confusion the dog Misty has run off. People's windows in their houses are blacked out so that no light escapes around the curtains which might help the enemy war planes to find and bomb the city.

Extract from Chapter 1

The blackout meant it was hard enough to see a person when they were almost on top of you. How on earth were they going to find a lost dog?

A man, wearing an Air Raid Precautions warden's uniform and tin hat, held up his hooded torch and they stopped as he peered at them.

'Who's Misty?' the ARP warden asked them.

'Our dog,' Jack told the man. 'She got frightened by the bombs and ran away.'

'She's pregnant,' added Amy. 'We've been looking everywhere for her. Have you seen her?'

'Dog you say? Who'd let a dog go out by itself on a night like this?'

Amy thought the ARP warden made it sound like Misty had gone waltzing off for a night on the town with some of her dog friends. Didn't he see how serious it was?

'I know someone who might be able to help you,' the warden said quickly when he saw the desperate looks on their faces. 'He'll see you right if anyone can, if he's not out looking for lost animals himself tonight. Works for NARPAC . . .'

'What's NARPAC?' Amy asked him.

'It's made up of regulars from all the different animal welfare organizations, as well as a whole host of volunteers,' he told them.

'Like the RSPCA?' Amy asked. They'd collected money for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals at school.

'Yes,' the warden said, ticking the organizations off on his fingers. 'And the PDSA.'

'People's Dispensary for Sick Animals?'

'Lots of different groups came together to make NARPAC.'

And with that he set off into the darkness.



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2. ARP

Name _____

Date _____

In this passage there are 4 sets of abbreviations. Write them down and state what they mean in full. Write down what you think they do.

1. ARP Wardens _____

2. _____

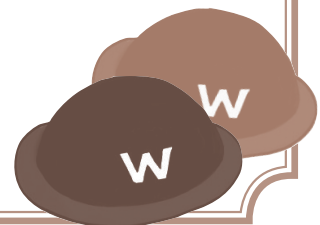
3. _____

4. _____

Two of these organisations still exist. Find out and write down which they are.

Write down some abbreviations for other organisations and their full meanings.

Extension activity: Explain why we use abbreviations. What is the difference between an abbreviation and an acronym? Why do you think acronyms develop?



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3. Puppies!

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Misty has still not been found but she has been sheltering in an underground station that becomes a central setting for much of the book. Here she meets a newly strayed cat called Sheba.

Extract from: Chapter 5 Page 43

Sheba had managed perfectly well once she was alone and hunting for herself. Wood Green Station had become her new home and provided her with more than enough rats to eat. She'd lived in the Underground for longer than most of those that came to join her. It was so long ago now that she could barely remember the feeling of human hands stroking her.

Sheba wasn't in the least frightened when she came face to face with Misty in the dark ventilation tunnel. Very little frightened Sheba – and certainly not an injured, pregnant dog.

But, as Misty slowly crawled towards the cat's bright eyes ahead of her, little whimpers and cries of pain came from the dog. Sheba made a soft soothing sound that her mother had once made, a sound that told Misty she had nothing to fear.

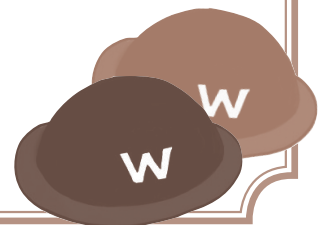
But the pain that throbbed inside Misty was now almost too much for her to bear.

Sheba had seen other cats giving birth before and a dog wasn't so different. She stayed close to Misty during the hour or so it took for first one and then a second pup to be born. Her presence calmed the new mother. Both pups were boys and, although Misty was cream-coated, her puppies were white with tan patches.

Afterwards, in the relative safety of the narrow ventilation access tunnel, Misty licked her two tiny newborn pups clean. Like all puppies, they'd been born blind and deaf and toothless. They made mewling sounds as they pressed themselves close to their mother to keep warm.

Misty made a sound she'd never made before as she nuzzled her pups. It was a low, steady, happy growl of pure love. Almost a hum.

Hers was the first smell the pups recognized. It was the smell of love and warmth and food and safety. Outside the sirens wailed and the bombs dropped, but inside the tunnel the young puppies were oblivious to it all, snuggled up against their mum's side.



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3. Puppies

Name _____

Date _____

Read the passage. It describes a touching scene in the underground station. The reason it works so well is because of the lovely descriptive words; you are going to analyse them.

Complete the sentences below using the words in colour.

Verb

Adjective

Noun

Adverb

A _____ is a thing.

A _____ is a doing word.

A _____ is tells us more about the verb (how it is done).

A _____ is tells us more about the noun (what it is like).

Now underline the word **noun** in blue, **verb** in red, **adverb** in orange and **adjective** in green. (Wouldn't it help if adjectives were called adnouns?!)

In the text underline or highlight all **nouns** in blue, **verbs** in red, **adverbs** in orange and **adjectives** in green.

Now complete the table ensuring that you only put in real words. (There is a blank table in the appendix so you can use your own words if you like.)

For some words you have to adjust the root word a little – can you spot them?



Name _____

Date _____

Ending  

	ed	ly	ing	er	s	es	y
hunt							
perfect							
live							
feel							
manage							
stroke							
certain							

Root words



Don't forget you can only put a word in if it is a real word; there will be some gaps.

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3. Puppies

Name _____

Date _____

Now you can play the game, you need:

- completed tables to give you ideas for endings
- whiteboards
- pens

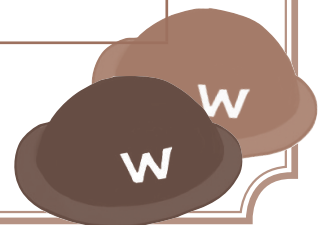
Make pairs: A & B,

- **A** writes down a root word that can have endings
- **B** writes down an ending

If the two go together to make a word you write it on the real word side of the chart, and if it does not then you write it on the nonsense side. The pair with the most real words after an agreed time is the winner.

Real words	Nonsense words

Extension: This is a good game to play with word chunks as well eg. st/op, ne/st)



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4. Where am I?

Name _____

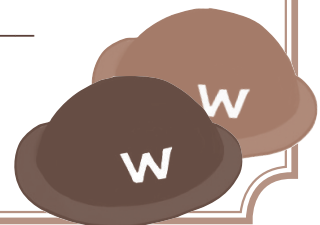
Date _____

Extract from: Chapter 6 page 57

‘The war has left so many pets homeless and unwanted,’ said Michael as he saw Amy’s look of despair. ‘When it started, lots of people thought they wouldn’t be able to look after their pets any more. Hundreds of thousands were put down at the start of the war and many more have been abandoned, left to wander the streets, and become strays. Dogs who’d once been loved now have to fend for themselves as best they can.’

Megan Rix does not give her animals voices but just this once we are going to pretend that you are a dog and that you can write. First write at least one paragraph that is about your happy life at home. Then you are going to describe how disaster strikes when a bomb falls on your house. Don’t forget that as a dog you do not know about the war and why any of this is happening.

- Are you lost?
- What will you eat?
- Have you been injured?
- Are there other dogs around?
- Are they friendly or not?
- Where will you sleep?
- What can you hear?
- What can you smell?
- Has your house gone completely?
- How do you feel?



The Victory Dogs

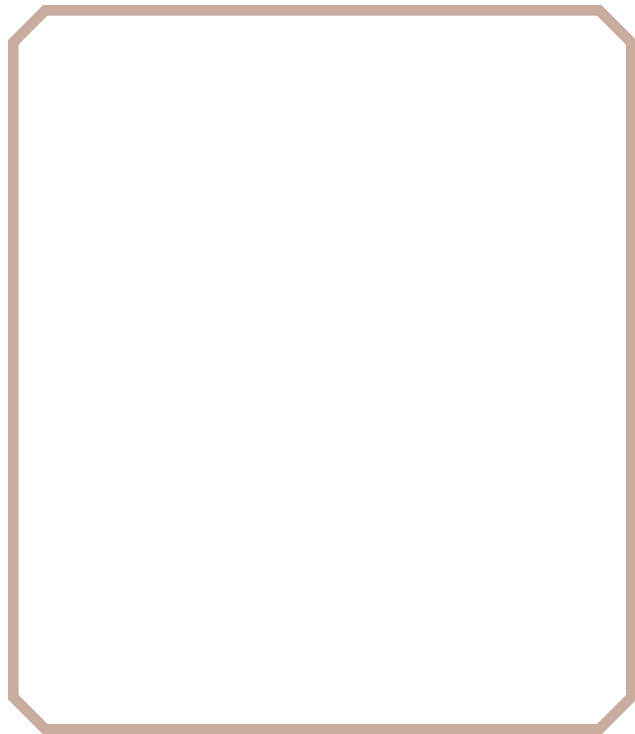
by Megan Rix



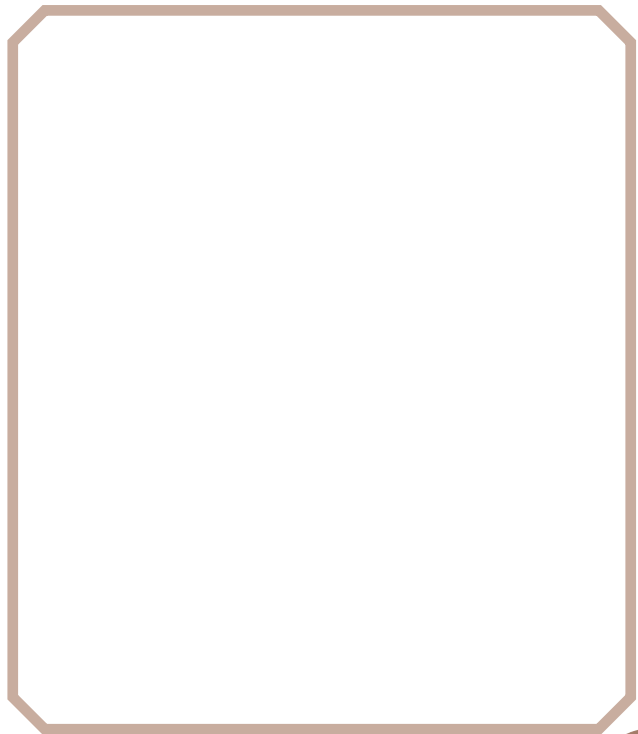
4. Where am I?

Name _____ Date _____

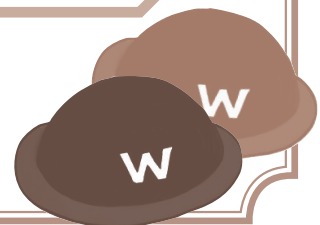
Add your drawings



Before the bomb fell



After the bomb fell



The Victory Dogs



5. Safer than houses

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This passage describes the beginning of the Blitz; the period of German bombing that went on in 1940-41 in London and other major UK cities. London was bombed for 57 nights in a row!

Extract from: Chapter 10

When Mr Dolan came home, he told them how people had been coming into the Underground station, where he worked, all day long and buying penny tickets, but not using them.

‘Wise souls,’ Amy’s grandpa said and Mr Dolan raised an eyebrow.

‘They’ll be wanting somewhere safe to shelter if there’s more bombs tonight,’ he said. ‘And there’s naught safer than the Underground. That’s where we went in the Great War. Safe as houses down there, much safer than houses to be honest!’

‘Can’t be very comfortable,’ Mrs Dolan said. Although the truth was they weren’t very comfortable in the Anderson shelter either.

‘No, but you’d be safe,’ Grandpa said and Mr Dolan nodded.

Mrs Dolan set about making a flask of tea and some sandwiches and Mr Dolan brought down the cardboard suitcases they used when they went on holiday to put their blankets and pillows in.

No one wanted there to be any more bombs that night, but if there were they’d be ready. An hour later the air-raid siren went off. There wasn’t time to get to Wood Green Station so they hurried to the Anderson shelter. But, once the all-clear sounded, they headed for the station.

‘All right, Jim?’ Mr Dolan’s fellow station clerks greeted him and he nodded. They went down the steps to the platform that was already crowded with people – many of whom they knew.

Mrs Dolan laid out their bedding and looked enviously at the people who’d brought portable mattresses with them. Her hip wasn’t going to like lying on the hard concrete floor at all. But at least it was warm down here, unlike the Anderson shelter, almost too warm.



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5. Safer than houses (cont...)

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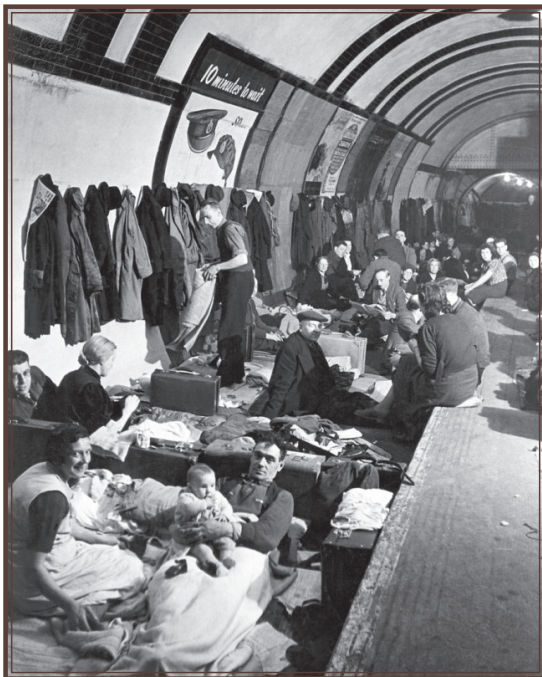
'Night night,' Amy's grandpa said and a moment later he was sleeping like a baby, while all around him other people chatted and played cards and knitted and laughed.

There was a strong sense of camaraderie among the Londoners: a camaraderie that had only been strengthened by the bombing. They wouldn't be beaten by a bully they told each other, no matter how many bombs he dropped on them.



Bombed Out

Credit - Reg Speller / Hulton Archive / Getty Images / Universal Images Group



Sheltering In Tube

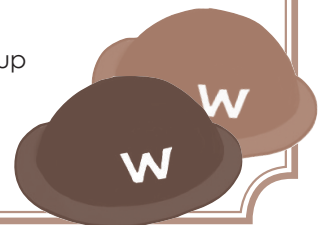
Credit - Fox Photos / Hulton Archive / Getty Images / Universal Images Group



Bombed Bus

Credit - H. F. Davis / Hulton Archive / Getty Images / Universal Images Group

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5. Safer than houses

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Name _____

Date _____

You are going to take it in turns to pretend to be

- London Cockneys suffering from the Blitz
- Journalists visiting from America.

The London cockney accent is quite easy, your teacher may be able to demonstrate. You can put on a strong American accent when you are the interviewer.

To prepare for the interview write down some questions to ask the Londoners about the Blitz (you can decide if the war has just started or whether it has been going on for a long time). Make notes while you are interviewing the Londoners.

Here are some ideas to get your questions started:

- Sounds of the planes/sirens
- Food/water/clothing
- Feeling safe
- Precious things

1. _____

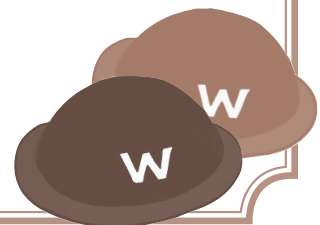
2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____



The Victory Dogs



5. Safer than houses

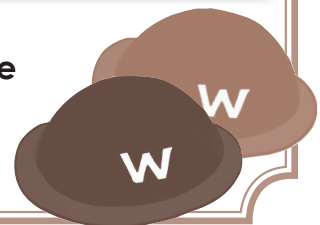
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Name _____

Date _____

Have a look at some newspapers to help you write an article about what you have seen after you have returned to America following your visit to London. Think of a good headline to get people to read your article and draw a picture of the bomb damage in London. Do some research to help you with the pictures.

Extension activity: Investigate the differences between newspapers in the 1940s and the present.



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6. Find out more

Name _____

Date _____

Use reference material to help you answer the questions (the back of **The Victory Dogs** has a handy afterword).

1. What was the name of the Prime Minister during most of World War Two?

2. What month and year did the war start?

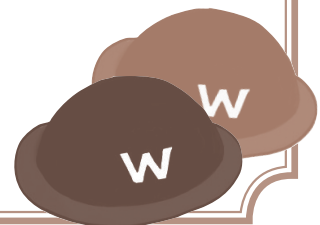
3. What month and year did the war end?

4. What food was rationed during the war?

5. When did rationing begin and end?

6. What was the Dickin Medal?

7. What is the difference between an Anderson Shelter and a Morrison Shelter?



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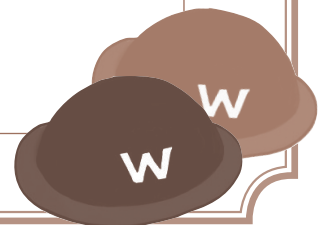
7. Favourite parts of The Victory Dogs

Name _____ Date _____

Score these on a scale 1 to 5 (1 being poor and 5 being fantastic!)

	1	2	3	4	5
Finding out about dogs.					
Finding out about World War Two.					
Reading the story.					
Will you read the rest of the book?					

Draw a picture below of the part of the project that you enjoyed most and say why you liked it.



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8. Appendix

Answers to 1. The Beginning:

Misty...

- has her own bed downstairs by the fire.
- sleeps on Jack's bed.
- has soft cream coloured fur.
- has floppy ears.
- is pregnant.
- loves her owner.

Amy...

- is 12 years old.
- went to the same school as Jack.
- is kind to her brother and animals.

Jack...

- finds it hard to tie ties.
- finds it hard to tie shoelaces.
- is about to join the army.
- has a younger sister.

Answers to 2. ARP

1. ARP Wardens Air Raid Protection Wardens
2. NARPAC National Air Raid Precautions Animal Committee
3. RSPCA Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

4. PDSA People's Dispensary for Sick Animals

Two of these organisations still exist, they are:

RSPCA & PDSA

Answers to 6. Find out more

1. What was the name of the British Prime Minister during most of World War Two?
Winston Churchill
2. What month and year did the war start?
September 1939
3. What month and year did the war end?
May 1945
4. What food was rationed during the war?
Bacon butter and sugar were the first to be rationed, then meat, jam tea, biscuits, breakfast cereals, cheese, eggs, lard, milk canned & dried fruit. Almost all food apart from vegetables and bread were rationed by 1942 and there was some food still rationed until 1948.
5. When did rationing begin and end?
(January) 1940 – 1948
6. Was anything else rationed?
Clothes and petrol.
7. What was the Dickin Medal?
A medal named after the founder of the PDSA (People's Dispensary for Sick Animals) to honour the work of animals during the war. 54 Dickin medals were awarded during WW2 32 to pigeons, eighteen to dogs and one to a cat.
8. What is the difference between an Anderson Shelter and a Morrison Shelter?
An Anderson Shelter was built in the garden and covered with soil to camouflage it, a Morrison Shelter was inside the house for shelter in the event of a bomb blast and is used as a table in the book.

Appendix for Activity 3

Root
words

Ending