



ENQUIRY BOOKLET





ENQUIRY QUESTION:

Why did so many people volunteer to fight in the Spanish Civil War?

Conceptual Focus: Causation

Historical Skills: Explanation, Source Analysis

Name:

Class:

It was not fraud or foolishness,

Glory, revenge, or pay:

We came because our open eyes

Could see no other way.

**Excerpt from poem *The Volunteer*, written by British
International Brigade sympathiser Cecil Day Lewis.**



FASCISM

Fascism was a new far-right political ideology that emerged after the First World War. It started in Italy with Benito Mussolini but was soon copied by Adolf Hitler and his Nazis, and Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists. All three men had fought in the First World War, and it seems they were brutalised by their experiences in this terrible conflict. They all had racist and antisemitic (anti-Jewish) views and spread hatred against those who were different. All three created uniformed squads of supporters who would bully, intimidate and attack political opponents. Mussolini's fascists would terrorise and murder left-wing politicians. Hitler's Nazis did the same and eventually locked them in concentration camps. Mosley's men would deliberately march through Jewish neighbourhoods in London and elsewhere to cause violence.

One of the most frightening things about Fascism for people at the time was that the rise of Fascism seemed to mean a new world war would start. This was because fascist rulers glorified war and combat and often talked about how they would use war to make their country great. After the horrors of the First World War, this meant many were afraid of Hitler and Mussolini starting a new global conflict. Mussolini famously said, "a minute on the battlefield is worth a lifetime of peace" and he showed his support for war very quickly. He spent huge sums of money building up the Italian army, navy and air force and he soon used them. In 1923, he attacked and captured the Greek island of Corfu. Then in 1935 he invaded the African nation of Ethiopia, using poison gas on innocent civilians to help him win the war. He wanted to build a huge Italian empire, like the Romans had done, and he was determined to use war and conquest to do it.

Hitler was also obsessed with war. He had written in his book *Mein Kampf* that the only way for Germany to achieve greatness again was to conquer large parts of Europe. The first thing Hitler did after taking power in 1933 was to begin a huge programme of re-armament, in which he rapidly built up Germany's military strength and almost broke his own economy



by spending so much on new tanks, planes and other weapons. He made it clear to his generals that he planned to take back the land Germany had lost in the First World War, but also that they would conquer the Soviet Union. The vast expanse of Russia would serve as a new German empire, with the living space needed for German settlers to spread out and colonise the country. In 1935, Hitler announced to the world that he now had a powerful army and air force and he introduced conscription—compulsory service in the military for all young men. In 1938 he took over neighbouring Austria and he was determined not to stop there.



Source A: Tom Clarke, Scottish volunteer in the International Brigades being interviewed in the 1980s. He was a soldier in the British Army before going to Spain.



The reason I got involved in the Spanish War started off about the time of Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. I was expecting to be called up [to fight]. But I remember one of the local lads saying, "You won't be called up. We'll do nothing to help Ethiopia. We'll probably back up Mussolini in the long run." That turned out to be the truth.

It made me think a lot about how people were being threatened, how the world was becoming threatened.

The Spanish Civil War



September 1936 - the Soviet Union decides to send help to the Republicans and the International Brigade are formed so people can volunteer to go and fight	July 1936 – the government arms its supporters in response to Franco’s uprising. Spain becomes split in two between Republicans and Nationalists	July 1936 – General Franco leads an uprising with the aim of getting rid of the left-wing government and creating a right-wing dictatorship. This leads to civil war
March 1936 – right-wing army generals begin plotting to overthrow the left-wing government	August 1936 – the British and French sign the Non-Intervention agreement, promising not to get involved	February 1936 – the left-wing wins the election in Spain, promising to share out land and wealth
July 1936 – Hitler and Mussolini agree to send weapons to help General Franco in Spain	Spring/summer 1936 – increasing violence in Spain between fascists and the left	September 1936 – it is clear Germany and Italy are ignoring the Non-Intervention Agreement

Source B: Albert Charlesworth, English volunteer in the International Brigades being interviewed in the 1980s.



There is something in my nature that compels me to go to the help of anyone who is in distress. The German and Italian involvement made me feel strongly. I knew of that before I went to Spain and that is what made it so unjust. Not just that, the whole thing was absolutely unjust, for a military man to try and overthrow the legal government, and especially when the legal government was a government of the people.

Source C: Maurice Levine, English volunteer in the International Brigades being interviewed in the 1980s. Levine was Jewish.



I should say the prime motive was the emergence of fascism and Mosley in Britain in persuading lots of people like myself to go to Spain. You see Spain might not have had the attraction if there had not been alongside this great creeping wave of fascism taking place in Europe at that time. Hitler was ranting against the Jews and here was a threat to our way of living.

Source D: Canute Frankson, an American volunteer, writing to a friend in 1937. He was a black African-American.



Why am I, a black man who has fought for the rights of my people, here in Spain today? Because if we crush fascism here we'll save our people in America, and in other parts of the world, from the vicious persecution, imprisonment and slaughter which Jewish people are suffering under Hitler. We will crush the fascists. We will build us a new society, a society of peace and plenty. There will be no color line, no segregated trains, no lynching. That is why I am here in Spain.

ASSESSMENT

Q1: How useful are sources E and F for understanding why people volunteered to fight in the Spanish Civil War?



Source E: James Lardner, an American volunteer, writing to his mother in 1938, shortly after he had arrived in Spain. He is explaining why he has gone to fight.

Because I believe that fascism is wrong and must be exterminated, and that democracy is right. Because after the war is over I shall be a more effective anti-fascist. Because in my ambitious quest for knowledge in all fields I cannot afford in this age to overlook war. Because I am mentally lazy and should like to do some physical work for a change. Because I need something remarkable in my life to make up for my self-consciousness. Because I am tired of working as a journalist. Because I think it will be good for my soul. Because I want to impress various people. The first few reasons, especially the first, are the most important ones in my opinion.

Source F: Sam Wild, an English volunteer, being interviewed in the 1981 about his experiences. He is explaining why he decided to go.



Well to me it was elementary [simple]. Here was fascism spreading all over the world, the invasion of Ethiopia, the rise of fascism in Germany and the persecution of the Jews there, and the rise of the BUF in Britain with their antisemitism, and especially their anti-Irish racism. I felt that somebody had to do something to try and stop it and when the War began in Spain and they started recruiting for the International Brigade I felt, alright, it's no good thinking about things anymore, go there and do something about it.

Q2: Why did so many people volunteer to fight in the Spanish Civil War?



You can use the following in your answer:

- Anti-fascism
- Events in Spain

You should also try to use other reasons from your own knowledge.