



LESSON PLAN

THE ENDURING LEGACY OF WOMEN IN WORLD WAR II

Image: The National WWII Museum.

Introduction

During World War II, American women made crucial contributions to the war effort, entering the workforce in unprecedented numbers and taking on roles in factories, shipyards, and the military. Their efforts in manufacturing essential supplies and serving in auxiliary units such as the Women's Army Corps (WAC), Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Service (WAVES), and Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) showcased their capabilities and patriotism, challenging traditional gender roles. This shift in societal perception laid the groundwork for postwar social change and the legacy of women's contributions during World War II resonates as a pivotal moment in the ongoing struggle for gender equality in the United States. In this lesson, students will analyze primary sources from the 1940s through the 1990s and participate in a group activity to explore the extent to which women's wartime experiences helped to redefine the roles and rights of women in American society.

Objectives

By analyzing a series of primary source materials, students will be able to: Describe Black women's experiences serving in the military during World War II using evidence from a variety of primary sources

- Evaluate the consequences of World War II in defining the roles and rights of women in American society
- Identify ways the US government and military empowered women during World War II
- Describe how women veterans made the transition from military to civilian life
- Explain the influence of women veterans in promoting equality in the military and society

Grade level

8-12

Time Requirement

One 90-minute class period or two 45-minute class periods



Materials

- Copies of the Our Legacy, Too Student Essay
- Copies of Primary Source Documents
- Copies of Document Analysis Worksheets (one for each student)
- Copies of Graphic Organizers

Online resources

ww2classroom.org

 Legacy of Women in Service Video

 Primary Source Documents

STANDARDS

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6

Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

8th Grade Social Studies (LOUISIANA)

8.14 Describe the causes, course, and consequences of World War II. J. Explain the sacrifices and contributions of US soldiers during World War II such as the Tuskegee Airmen, the 442nd Regimental Combat team, the 101st Airborne, Cajun "Frenchies," the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and the Navajo Code Talkers.

High School US History (LOUISIANA)

US.15 Explain the causes, course, and consequences of World War II. D. Describe the sacrifices and contributions of American service members in the war effort including the Tuskegee Airmen, Military Intelligence Service, 442nd Regimental Combat Team, the 101st Airborne, Women's Army Corps (WAC), Navajo Code Talkers, and the Army Signal Corps.

US.16 Analyze causes, major events, and key leaders of the civil rights movement. G. Analyze the goals and course of the women's rights movement of the mid-to-late 20th century, with attention to House Resolution 5056, Equal Pay Act, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Equal Rights Amendment, and the advancement of women in government and various professions.

PROCEDURES

*Note to teachers: In this lesson plan, students will analyze a range of sources grouped into three different source sets. Students will analyze the sources included in these three source sets both individually and in small groups. Before the lesson, the teacher will need to divide their class into three equal groups and assign one of the three source sets to each group. The analysis of these primary sources is broken into three rounds. In the first round, the teacher will assign each student a single source from their group's source set to analyze and fill out the Document Analysis Worksheet individually. In Round 2, the students will gather in their small groups to discuss what they each learned from their individual source and as a group complete the Round 2 Graphic Organizer. In Round 3, students will be assigned to new groups to learn about the sources in all three of the source sets and complete the Round 3 Graphic Organizer.

1. Prepare for the lesson by dividing your class into three equal groups, each of which will work with one of the three provided source sets in Rounds 1 and 2. Assign each student to a group and a specific source within the source set for that group.
2. Before facilitating this lesson plan, the teacher can assign students the *Our Legacy, Too* Overview Essay to read before class. Alternatively, students can read and annotate this essay together as a class. Read-aloud tools can be used for students who need accommodation. Middle school and high school reading levels of this essay can be found online at ww2classroom.org. In addition, teachers can show the *Our War Too* Legacy Video (also found online at ww2classroom.org) to provide the context needed for this lesson.
3. Begin the lesson by reviewing the role that women played in the American war effort to provide context for the lesson. Use information from the *Our Legacy, Too* Overview Essay as needed. In a whole-class discussion, ask students: **What roles do you think women played during World War II?** Follow up this discussion with the question: **How do you think the roles of women in World War II impact the rights of women in American society?**
4. After this opening discussion, share with students the lesson objectives, especially that today's goals will be to analyze a range of primary sources to answer the focusing question: **How did women's military service in World War II help to redefine the roles and rights of women in American society?**
5. In Round 1, students will analyze one assigned source individually from their group's source set and complete the Document Analysis Worksheet. Students will read a brief overview that provides context for the source set and then use the Graphic Organizer to analyze their assigned source and answer the supporting question.
6. In Round 2, students will meet in their preselected small groups with the other people assigned to their source set (all students who looked at a document in Source Set #1, all students who looked at a document in Source Set #2, etc.). Each student will share their individual source and response to the supporting question from Round 1. Then, using the **Round 2 Graphic Organizer**, the group will decide which of the three sources has the most reliability and weight in answering the supporting question, and will rewrite a collective answer once they have seen all of the sources. Teachers can remind students of how to evaluate a source's validity and credibility before this activity if needed.
7. In Round 3, provide each student with a copy of all of the sources from their source set to use with their new group. In this round, students will meet in small groups with people who looked at the other two source sets. Each student should share their source set and collective response to the supporting question they answered in Round 2. After each student has shared, the group should use the **Round 3 Graphic Organizer** to discuss and create a response to the lesson's focusing question: **How did women's military service in World War II help to redefine the roles and rights of women in American society?** Group responses should draw on evidence from across the three source sets. The Round 3 Graphic Organizer can be used as a formative assessment for student learning.
8. To wrap up the lesson, have a spokesperson share each group's answer to the focusing question and discuss



similarities and differences across the group responses. Teachers can provide students with the option to write their findings on chart paper, a Padlet, or other collaborative electronic platform to make sharing with the whole class easier.

DIFFERENTIATION AND EXTENSION

Differentiation

Depending on time constraints and length of class periods, teachers can break up this lesson over two days. Alternatively, teachers can select fewer primary sources out of those provided for students to examine.

Teachers can use read-aloud tools such as text-to-speech readers for the Overview Essay and primary sources for students who need accommodations. Alternatively, instead of instructing students to individually analyze assigned sources as outlined in Round 1, the teacher can instruct students to analyze these sources in their small groups. Each small group can read aloud each source in their assigned source set and complete the Document Analysis Worksheets as a small group instead of individually.

Teachers can employ an “I Do, We Do, You Do” or gradual release approach. The teacher will model filling out the Document Analysis Sheets and Graphic Organizers before asking students to complete the activity as a class and then independently.

Extensions

The experiences of individual women have been captured in interviews that are available from sites like The National WWII Museum, the Library of Congress and the Women Veterans Historical Project at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Students can listen to one or more of these and compare them to other accounts from this lesson.

ABOUT THE LESSON AUTHORS

KASON DALTON teaches history and psychology in South Carolina. She received the Gilder Lehrman South Carolina History Teacher of the Year Award in 2018. She has presented on historical thinking at the NCSS and the NCHE annual conferences.

MARC TURNER teaches history and government in South Carolina. He chairs the South Carolina Council for History Education and is a James Madison Memorial Fellow and a Master Educator for The National WWII Museum.





SOURCE SET #1

WOMANPOWER IN WWII

Read the overview below and complete the Graphic Organizer as you analyze your assigned source. Be prepared to share your source and response with your group in Round 2.



Supporting Question

To what degree did the US government and military empower women during World War II?



OVERVIEW

Women have always worked outside the home but never before in the numbers or with the same impact as they did in World War II. Prior to the war, most of the women that did work were from the lower working classes, and many were minorities. There were a variety of attitudes toward women in the workforce: Some thought they should only have jobs that men didn't want while others felt working women should give up their jobs to unemployed men, especially during the Great Depression. Others held the view that women from the middle class or above should never lower themselves to go to work. These and other viewpoints would be challenged with the United States' entry into World War II.

With men off to fight a worldwide war across the Atlantic and the Pacific, women were called to take their places on the production line. The War Manpower Commission, a Federal Agency established to increase the manufacture of war materials, had the task of recruiting women into employment vital to the war effort. Men's attitude toward women in the workforce was one challenge to overcome, but, surprisingly, women's own ideas about work outside the home had to change as well.

After the war, most women were let go from their defense-industry jobs and returned home. Their jobs, again, belonged to men. However, there were lasting effects. Women had proved that they could do the job and within a few decades, women in the workforce became a common sight.



DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Source #	
Type of document	
Date and author	
What is the document talking about? Write a one-sentence summary.	
Why did the author write this document?	
Who is the intended audience for this document?	
What do you think is the purpose of this document?	
Using the overview and source, answer the supporting question: To what degree did the US government and military empower women during World War II?	





SOURCE SET #2

WOMEN IN POSTWAR AMERICA

Read the overview below and complete the Graphic Organizer as you analyze your assigned source. Be prepared to share your source and response with your group in Round 2.



Supporting Question

How did women veterans transition to life after World War II?



OVERVIEW

Demobilization of the women's military corps at the end of World War II moved quickly. Even though there was still a need for the skill sets women brought to the military, most were discharged by 1946 and returned to their civilian lives. For many, returning to their roles of wives and mothers was welcomed after war. This transition proved to be challenging for other women. The societal expectations and economic conditions of the 1940s and 1950s did not make it easy for women to find jobs and independence. Many women veterans were able to use the GI Bill to start or continue their college educations. Women pursued bachelor's and advanced degrees in significant numbers. While many women veterans took advantage of the GI Bill after the war, women veterans of color faced many challenges in using the same benefits due to segregation and discrimination. In the late 1940s, Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, and many women enlisted. The Women's Armed Services Integration Act granted women the right to serve as regular, permanent members of the Armed Forces instead of in separate auxiliary branches. Overall, the number of women in the workforce increased from 34 percent at the end of the war to 38 percent in 1960 and 43 percent by 1970.



DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Source #	
Type of document	
Date and author	
What is the document talking about? Write a one-sentence summary.	
Why did the author write this document?	
Who is the intended audience for this document?	
What do you think is the purpose of this document?	
Using the overview and source, answer the supporting question: To what degree did the US government and military empower women during World War II?	





SOURCE SET #3

WORLD WAR II AND WOMEN LEADERS

Read the overview below and complete the Graphic Organizer as you analyze your assigned source. Be prepared to share your source and response with your group in Round 2.



Supporting Question

How did women veterans fight for equality in the military and society?



OVERVIEW

The 1960s and 1970s were decades of significant social change in the United States. Baby boomers actively fought for civil rights, and by the 1970s, the fight over the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was underway. Women veterans of World War II were reluctant to describe themselves as “feminists,” even though they often acknowledged their trailblazing decision to serve during the 1940s. In this era, they continued to be agents of change. Due to careers in the military and their active participation in veteran organizations after the war, these women were in a position to join the fight for equal rights in important ways. Women were influential in dismantling some of the limitations they faced within the military. Others, like the WASPs, fought for recognition of their wartime service and securing the benefits that they had been denied since they were disbanded in 1944.



DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Source #	
Type of document	
Date and author	
What is the document talking about? Write a one-sentence summary.	
Why did the author write this document?	
Who is the intended audience for this document?	
What do you think is the purpose of this document?	
Using the overview and source, answer the supporting question: To what degree did the US government and military empower women during World War II?	





GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

ROUND 2

1. Each student should share their source and their response to the supporting question with the group.
2. After reviewing each of the sources from your source set, decide as a group which source(s) seems to have the most reliability and weight in answering the supporting question and why. Complete the Graphic Organizer below to record your group's responses.
3. Finally, create a revised group response that answers the supporting question using evidence from all of the sources in your source set. Be prepared to share your group's source set and response in Round 3.

Source Set	
What is the supporting question for your source set?	
Which source(s) seems to have the most reliability and weight in answering the supporting question?	
Why?	
Identify at least one weakness of using this source to answer the question.	
Group response to the supporting question.	



GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

ROUND 3

1. Each student should share a brief description of their sources and their response to the supporting question with the group.
2. Decide as a group how you want to answer the focusing question. Complete the Graphic Organizer below to record your group’s responses.
3. Be prepared to share your group’s answer with the class.

Focusing Question	How did women’s military service in World War II help to redefine the roles and rights of women in American society?
Which answers or pieces of evidence from Rounds 1 and 2 provide the strongest support in answering the focusing question?	
Why?	
As a group, write a response to the focusing question citing evidence from the source’s analyzed in today’s lesson.	