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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Teacher Introduction</i>	v
<i>Overview: The U.S. Home Front During World War II</i>	vii
 <u>LESSONS</u>	
1. Changing Roles of Women	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	1
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	3
2. Internment of Japanese Americans	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	5
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	7
3. Navajo Codetalkers	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	9
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	11
4. Propaganda	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	13
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	15
5. Rationing	
<i>Teacher Page</i>	17
<i>Student Worksheet</i>	19
Culminating Activities	21
 Appendix	
<i>Answer Key</i>	25
<i>Selected Documents</i>	29
<i>Related Web Sites</i>	33
<i>Rubrics</i>	35
<i>Suggested Curriculum Materials</i>	41

DOCUMENT-BASED ACTIVITIES ON WORLD WAR II: THE HOME FRONT

TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Description:

In this unit, students gain an appreciation for sacrifices and contributions made by Americans not necessarily in uniform during the World War II years. Students will investigate the roles played by women, minorities, and others to assist in the effort to defeat the Axis Powers. Paintings, songs, first-person accounts, and maps provide a variety of different types of sources for students to analyze.

Unit Objectives:

Knowledge: students will

- analyze the goals and methods of home front propoganda
- assess the roles played by civilians and minorities in the war effort
- understand the reasoning behind the internment of Japanese Americans and both the short-term and long-term effects of internment on Japanese America as well as America as a whole

Skills:

- analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary source documents
- discuss and debate issues
- use evidence to draw conclusions

Prior Knowledge Required:

Students should have studied the 1930s and causes of World War II. They should also be familiar with major events and battles of World War II.

Lesson Format:

Each lesson consists of two parts: a teacher page containing an introduction, objectives, URL(s) used in the lesson, teaching strategies, wrap-up questions, and an extension activity; and a reproducible student page with a brief introduction which sets the context for the lesson, URL(s) used, and questions to be answered about the source.

Assessment:

Most questions on the student handouts are short-answer questions for which a suggested answer key can be found in the appendix. Other questions require anywhere from a couple of paragraphs to a page or more in response. In general, the lessons are flexible enough so that you should easily be able to pick and choose which questions you want students to answer and how long their responses should be. It is recommended, however,

that you evaluate student worksheet in conjunction with their involvement in class discussions. Suggested rubrics are included in the Appendix.

Additional Sources:

The Appendix contains answer keys, primary source documents, an annotated list of Web sites on the U.S. home front during World War II, rubrics, and supplementary materials available from www.socialstudies.com.

OVERVIEW: THE U.S. HOME FRONT DURING WORLD WAR II

There is a mysterious cycle in human events. To some generations much is given. Of other generations much is expected. This generation of Americans has a rendezvous with destiny.
—Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1936

When FDR made this fateful statement, America was still reeling from the Great Depression. Millions of Americans were concerned about jobs, prices, and the stock market; there were too many problems at home for them to worry about events in Europe and in Asia. However, with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December, 1941, American isolation ended and the Second World War began to affect nearly every household.

While GIs fought at places such as Guadalcanal, Iwo Jima, Normandy, and Anzio, millions of ordinary Americans back on the “home front” assisted in the “Great Crusade.” Millions of women worked in industrial plants helping to create an “arsenal of democracy,” while nearly 250,000 women enlisted in various military “auxiliary” units during the war.

The war also affected many minority groups. Native-born Americans of Japanese ancestry (the Nisei) were considered to be a danger to national security and were placed into “internment” camps, where their civil liberties were greatly restricted. While African Americans were drafted into military service and fought for human rights around the world, back at home they still lived in a segregated society. Nearly 25,000 Native Americans also enlisted during the war years.

In the war years, scientific development and research also continued, and civilians benefited from medical and scientific advancements made by scientists employed by the U.S. government. Radar and sonar turned out to have valuable non-military uses, DDT was used not only to keep soldiers from being harassed by insects but also to keep insects away from crops, and “miracle drugs” such as penicillin became common.

Hollywood also became involved in the war effort. Directors made films (such as Frank Capra’s “Why We Fight” series) which were used to build morale and rally public support against the Axis nations. Entertainers such as Bob Hope, Bing Crosby, Jack Benny, and others led efforts to entertain troops and sell war bonds. Many “greats” in the entertainment field enlisted in the service and became role models, including Henry Fonda, James Stewart, and Clark Gable. Journalists such as Ernie Pyle, Edward R. Murrow, and William L. Shirer became household names as millions of Americans came to depend upon their stories to let them know what was happening in the war.

Sports heroes of the 1940s also enlisted in the armed forces, including Joe Louis, Ted Williams, and Joe DiMaggio. Although many major leaguers left for war, President Roosevelt requested that professional baseball continue in order to maintain morale at home. Depleted rosters altered the traditional balance of power in baseball and allowed teams that were perennial losers to become winners, such as the St. Louis Browns, who won their only league pennant during the war years. Women also found opportunities in

sports when Chicago Cubs owner Philip Wrigley created a women's professional baseball league. Most sports teams also began playing the National Anthem prior to contests during the war years in an effort to promote patriotism.

The U.S. government, which had already become a daily part of citizens' lives during the New Deal, further increased its control through various federal agencies that attempted to maintain supplies of needed materials for the war effort. Agencies such as the Office of Price Administration froze wages, prices, and rents in order to reduce inflation. The OPA also rationed scarce food items such as meat, butter, cheese, vegetables, sugar, and coffee. The War Production Board played a crucial role by strictly allocating fuel and materials considered vital to the war effort, including heating oil, gasoline, metals, rubber, and plastics. Millions of ordinary Americans assisted in the war effort by conserving scarce goods and organizing "scrap drives" to provide needed materials. Ration "stamps" became common, and people found themselves not only having to budget their finances, but also having to keep track of how many stamps it took to buy scarce items.

In order to provide funds for the war millions bought war bonds, while thousands of Americans found themselves doing what they had never done before—paying income taxes. For many people, the new tax rates took a bigger portion of their incomes, and most lower- and middle-income Americans for the first time became subject to tax withholding and tax liability.

Many Americans also became involved in civil defense, concerned about a possible invasion of the United States. Ordinary citizens found themselves ensuring that blackout conditions were maintained, running draft boards, ensuring that rationing was smooth, and scanning the skies for enemy aircraft.

The combined strength of the Allies (the U.S., Great Britain, and Russia) eventually forced Axis surrenders in Europe and Asia. The world entered the "atomic age" with detonation of nuclear devices at Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Veterans returned home to find that the country had changed greatly, and also found a wealth of new opportunities open to them. Members of what Tom Brokaw would later call "The Greatest Generation" benefited from the GI Bill and attended college, bought homes, started businesses, and in general began to build prosperous new lives for themselves. Many veterans also married and became parents, beginning the "Baby Boom" of the 1950s and 1960s.

While the war cost billions of dollars and thousands of American lives, it also changed American society and government forever. Though the Axis threat had been defeated, Americans who believed they could resume their normal lives found that the country now faced new threats from communism in the Cold War, and some veterans found themselves being called back into military service to fight communist aggression in Korea.

Changing Roles of Women Teacher Page

Overview:

Many women abandoned traditional female roles and assumed some masculine roles as many men went to war. The first primary source for this lesson is an oral-history interview from the “What Did You Do In The War, Grandma?” Web site. Women such as Ms. Wilma Briggs assumed more male-oriented roles during the war years, including playing professional sports, and women continued to assert themselves after the war ended. The second resource includes song lyrics and a poster of “Rosie the Riveter,” a well-known character from the war years. Both resources exemplify the changes in women’s lives during the war, bringing the era home to students in a personal way and getting them to consider the impact of the war on ordinary Americans.

Objectives:

Students will:

- read and investigate an oral history of the war years and make inferences from it
- speculate on the impact of women’s professional baseball on domestic morale as well as American society in general during the 1940s.
- make inferences about other changes in women’s roles in American society during the World War II years

Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

The Briggs account is located at http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/FarmGirlBaseball.html. The entire “What Did You Do In The War, Grandma?” Web site is located at http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/tocCS.html. Further information about the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League can be found at the following sites:

1. The home page for the All-American Girls’ Professional Baseball League can be found at <http://www.AAGPBL.org/index.html>.
2. Britannica.com offers a resource for the AAGPBL at http://www.britannica.com/women/articles/All-American_Girls_Professional_Baseball_League.html

The “Rosie The Riveter” link is at <http://www.zapix.com/laurel/rosie.html>

Other related links:

The “Rosie The Riveter Trust”: <http://www.rosietheriveter.org/>

The United States Army Ordinance Corps “Rosie The Riveter” page:
<http://www.goordnance.apg.army.mil/rosie.htm>

Strategies:

Introduce the lesson with a brief discussion about how the war changed the everyday lives of Americans on the home front, especially for women who assumed roles previously reserved for males. You may want to place special emphasis on the two roles featured in the handouts. You may also want to emphasize why it was necessary to have women take societal roles usually reserved for men (industrial workers, baseball players, etc.).

Distribute the worksheets (or ask students to access the Briggs account and the “Rosie The Riveter” materials online) so that students can review both resources.

Student answers for each question may vary, but should average 3–5 sentences. Responses to question 4, 9, and 10 may range from one paragraph to a maximum of one page, depending on time available.

Wrap-Up:

After students have completed the worksheets, have a discussion focused on the following issues:

1. In what ways did World War II change gender roles in American society?
2. To what extent has participation in sports provided equal rights for women in today’s society?

Extension Activity:

Individually, or in pairs, students can create a “Women’s Baseball Hall of Fame” and make “baseball cards” of women who participated in the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League. (Note: there is a comprehensive list of players and photos at the AAGPBL site at <http://www.AAGPBL.org/index.html>).

Changing Roles of Women Student Worksheet

Introduction:

During the Second World War, women found their roles in society changing dramatically. Some women went to work in factories building war materials, others farmed, others served in uniform during the war, and some women even found an opportunity to play professional sports. “Rosie The Riveter,” a fictional character designed to symbolize and glorify female factory workers, became representative of thousands of women who gave up traditional female roles during the 1940s.

Directions:

“Rosie The Riveter”

Go to <http://www.zapix.com/laurel/rosie.html> and look at the illustration and song lyrics for “Rosie The Riveter.”

Answer the following questions about the “Rosie The Riveter” resources:

1. Describe “Rosie’s” appearance. What type of clothing is she wearing? What emotion do you think the expression on her face conveys?
2. In your view, does the illustration highlight “Rosie’s” femininity, or downplay it? Give examples that support your view.
3. How do the song lyrics located next to the “Rosie” illustration explain the role of women in the war effort?
4. Do you think a woman living in the early 21st Century would be flattered or offended by the portrayal of “Rosie” in the resource? Write a short statement about how women’s roles have either been maintained or changed since the 1940s.

“What Did You Do In The War, Grandma?”

Go to: http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/FarmGirlBaseball.html, and read the interview with Wilma Briggs, a farm girl who played baseball in the All-American Girls' Professional Baseball League.

5. Describe Wilma Briggs's daily routine on the farm.

6. What was the role of baseball in her daily life?

7. How did Wilma's clothing reflect her life and daily responsibilities?

8. What opportunities and rewards did playing professional baseball provide for Wilma?

9. How do you think Wilma Briggs's experience compares to women in the early 21st century who participate in athletics, either on the professional or amateur level? Explain your answer.

10. Compare the two resources you've seen and write a paragraph arguing that the World War II years provided great opportunities in the area of women's rights.