

Why was the “Invisible Workforce” on the WWII American homefront invisible?

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Suggested Grade Level Range: 9-12

Student Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to
 - Evaluate evidence and create a claim using supporting evidence
 - Identify the invisible workforce of America’s homefront during WWII

Standards Addressed

- **SS.9-12.IS.5.** Gather and evaluate information from multiple primary and secondary sources that reflect the perspectives and experiences of multiple groups, including marginalized groups.
- **SS.9-12.IS.6.** Analyze evidence and identify counter perspectives to revise or strengthen claims.
- **SS.9-12.H.11.** Analyze primary and secondary historical sources from multiple vantage points and perspectives to identify and explain dominant narratives and counternarratives of historical events.

Materials Used

SQ1: <i>What was the role of women in WWII on the homefront?</i>	SQ2: <i>How did POW labor contribute to the homefront?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: “Rosie the Riveter” Poster (1942-1945)• Source B: “On the Home Front,” National Homefront Museum• Source C: WWII Posters, “Library of Congress”• Source D: Video: Home Front Heroes: Women in World War II	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Source A: Smithsonian, “German POWs on the American Homefront” (2009)• Source B: Department of the Army Pamphlet No. 20-213, “History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776-1945” (1955)• Source C: Sycamore True Republican, “Ex-Prisoner of War Here Seeks Gift of Food” (1947)• Source D: Map: Illinois POW camps locations

Procedure

Anticipatory Set/ Staging the Compelling Question

- First, start by asking students how something gets to your doorstep when you order online. Walk through every step (creating the idea of the product, making the product, packing, shipping, delivery, etc.)
- Talk about all the hands that have touched the product before you received it.
- Do you think about these people every time you buy something?
- How many people are not seen in the workforce? (not only in America, but factories overseas as


well)

- Then introduce the compelling question:

1. *What Impact Did the Invisible Workforce Have on the WWII American Homefront?*

Supporting Question 1: What was the role of women in WWII on the homefront?


Intro

- Show an image of the classic Rosie the Riveter. Have students write down everything they know about the image or things they see. Discuss as a whole class what the image was created to represent.  LOC observe reflect question.pdf

Small Group Activity

- Have students (in small groups) read [“On the Home Front”](#) and answer discussion questions [On the Home Front Discussion Questions](#)
 1. *In what ways did World War II change the American homefront?*
 2. *Why were there more employment opportunities for women during the war?*
 3. *What were the different ways in which women participated in the war effort?*
 4. *How did volunteer organizations help the country during wartime?*
 5. *What activities did women undertake as volunteers during the war?*
- After giving groups time to work. Come back together as a class and discuss the questions. Students should be leading a discussion about the questions, not just giving answers. Ask them to explain their reasoning.

Solo Activity

- Have students pick a [propaganda poster](#) from the Library of Congress featuring women on the homefront. Students will then add the poster to a Google slide and answer a few questions about the poster.  WWII Propaganda Poster

Supporting Question 2: How did POW labor contribute to the homefront?

Intro

- Open with asking the class to do a think-pair-share on what POWs are and what they do in POW camps.
- Once discussed, read the first half of [German POWs on the American Homefront](#) together as a class.
 1. Make sure to talk about how after Pearl Harbor, there was no fighting on US soil however the US housed German soldiers and Japanese Americans.
- Ask students why German POWs were more likely to be working on farms and not in factories. Lead into what other jobs POWs could have.

Solo activity

- Read an excerpt from [History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army 1776-1945](#) (p.146-147, list of jobs given to POWs)
 1. Have students pick out jobs that surprise them or they question.
 2. Ask students if they think these jobs are too rigorous or not enough.

Partner activity

- When students get a good idea of the different jobs that German POWs were given, have them look over a letter from a former German POW to the Sycamore Preserve Works interpreter. [Sycamore True Republican, "Ex-Prisoner of War Here Seeks Gift of Food"](#) Have students discuss what stands out to them.
- After reading over the source, give students the prompt “How did POW labor contribute to the homefront?”

Students (still in partners) will come up with a few sentences to POW Labor and the Homefront questions

Summative Assessment

- Create a poster explaining who the invisible workforce was in America during WWII.
 - Students will create a poster explaining how POW jobs and Women's jobs on the homefront were similar/different.
- Extension: Use other primary/secondary sources to further your connections.

[Poster Rubric](#)

Informed Action

When Americans think of WWII they think of soldiers fighting in Europe. Why do they not think of the women and others who were working to keep the US afloat? Was the labor forced or were they willingly wanting to do their part for America while others were off fighting on the battlefield?

Write a letter to the United Nations about POW labor in the US going unnoticed during WWII. Why does it matter that German prisoners of war were doing free labor and were there restrictions?

Make sure that students make the connection that this is still relevant. There are still wars happening in the world and there are still Prisoners of War.