

From Homemakers to Rosie the Riveter: how the workforce changed from the Great Depression to World War II

**A WebQuest for 9-12th grade
American History Students**

Kristin Gagnon

Last updated August 2013



Painting the American insignia on airplane wings is a job that Mrs. Irma Lee McElroy, a former office worker, does with precision and patriotic zeal. Mrs. McElroy is a civil service employee at the Naval Air Base, Corpus Christi, Texas. Her husband is a flight instructor

by Howard R. Hollem

How did the roles of women in the workforce change between the Great Depression and World War II?

Introduction

The roles of women in our society have changed drastically over the years. However there is still a belief that there are specific roles that women should perform and jobs that only men should be doing. There was a dramatic change from the Great Depression to World War II in terms of the roles that women played in the workforce. Did you know that women played valuable roles in the workforce during the Great Depression and World War II? That women built the ships and planes that our soldiers flew? That there were women on the front lines of the war in various capacities? This WebQuest will take a look at some of these women and compare their roles during each time period.

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Task

You will work in groups of four.

Individually, read the assigned texts and analyze the primary sources provided to learn about the roles of women in the work force during the Great Depression and World War II.

Create a newspaper pages with classified ads for positions available to women during the Great Depression and during World War II. You will be creating two separate pages, one for the Great Depression and one for World War II. Include propaganda relevant to the time on both pages. Each member of the group is expected to contribute at least two ads per page and one graphic per page. Each group member must choose two different positions for each page.

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Process

For this assignment you will be reading articles about women in the workplace during the Great Depression and World War II and analyzing photographs to help you complete your classified ads.

First you'll be assigned to a team of 4 students. Each member of the team will be creating two ads and one piece of propaganda for your newspaper page.

Read the following articles about women in the workforce:

www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/industry/12.htm
www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/worked.htm
www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/division.htm
www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/rosie.htm
www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0002.html

Read two stories of women who worked during the Great Depression or World War II. One of the women must be Dorothea Lange from Women Come to the Front.

www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/
www.loc.gov/vets/stories/voicesofwar/voices-chapter5.html#stories

Using the Primary Source Analysis Tool, analyze 2 photographs or primary sources either from one of the women you read about in Women Come to the Front or from the following sources:

www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&st=grid&co=fsac
www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&st=grid&co=fsa

Use the following sources for help with propaganda and how to set up your historically accurate newspaper page:

www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/propaganda.htm
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/highlights.html>
www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&co=wpapos
www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/its_a_womans_war_too/its_a_womans_war_too.html
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

Using what you learned from the articles and primary sources, create your own classified ads advertising open positions for women to apply for. You may type or hand write your ads, but they must be neat and your whole group needs to agree on a format. Once all group members have completed their ads and propaganda arrange your ads on a poster board. Make sure your newspaper has a name and includes all the necessary information contained on a newspaper page.

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Evaluation

You will be evaluated as a group based on the visual presentation of your newspaper and the evidence of the use of primary sources. Evaluation will be based on the following rubric:

Layout - Headlines & Captions

- 4- All ads have headlines that capture the reader's attention and accurately describe the content. All graphics have captions that adequately describe the people and action in the graphic.
- 3- All ads have headlines that accurately describe the content. All graphics have captions.
- 2- Most ads have headlines that accurately describe the content. Most graphics have captions.
- 1- Many ads do not have adequate headlines OR many graphics do not have captions.

Contributions of Group Members

- 4- Each person in the group has contributed at least two ads and one graphic without prompting from teachers or peers.
- 3- Each person in the group has contributed at least one ad and one graphic with a few reminders from peers.
- 2- Each person in the group has contributed at least one ad with some minimal assistance from peers.
- 1- One or more students in the group required quite a lot of assistance from peers before contributing one ad.

Use of Primary Sources

- 4- Evidence of the use of at least four primary sources is clearly present.
- 3- Evidence of the use of at least three primary sources is present
- 2- Evidence of the use of at least one primary source is present.
- 1- No evidence of the use of primary sources.

Spelling and Proofreading

- 4- No spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people read and correct the newspaper.
- 3- No more than a couple of spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people read and correct the newspaper.
- 2- No more than 3 spelling or grammar errors remain after one or more people read and correct the newspaper.
- 1- Several spelling or grammar errors remain in the final copy of the newspaper.

Graphics

- 4- Graphics are in focus, are well-cropped and are clearly related to the time periods they represent.
- 3- Graphics are in focus and are clearly related to the time period they represent.
- 2- Most of the graphics are clearly related to the time period they represent.
- 1- Many of the graphics are not clearly related to the time periods OR no graphics were used.

Layout - Flag

- 4- The name of the newspaper is centered and is in a font that makes it stand out from other content. The date and edition of the newspaper appear below the name in a smaller font.
- 3- The name of the newspaper is in a font that makes it stand out from other content. The date and edition of the newspaper appear below the name in a smaller font.
- 2- The name of the newspaper is in a font that makes it stand out from other content. Either the date or the edition number of the newspaper appears below the name in a smaller font.
- 1- The name of the newspaper does not stand out OR both the name and edition of the newspaper are missing on one or more pages.

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Conclusion

Now that you have looked at how women influenced the work force in the Great Depression and World War II, write a paragraph about their influence. Make sure you include any questions you would ask the women you researched and include how you think this is different from the role of women in the workforce today.

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Credits and References

Designed by Kristin Gagnon, 2013, **Kristin Gagnon** as part of the *WebQuesting at the Library of Congress* professional development course offered through **Teaching with Primary Sources at Waynesburg University**.

Teacher Resource Page

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Introduction for Teachers

This WebQuest is designed as an accompaniment to your unit on World War II. This lesson is meant to inform students of the important role that women played during World War II. It could also be used as a bridge between the Great Depression and World War II.

School District and State: Biddeford School Department, Maine

Textbook Publisher/Title/Date/Level: McDougall Littlell, The Americans

Unit or Chapter Number and Title: Chapter 22 The Great Depression Begins and Chapter 25 The United States in World War II

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About the Learners

This lesson is designed for students in an alternative setting between grades 10 and 12. The students are varied in ability and age. They are also varied in background knowledge.

The students will need to have a basic knowledge of events of World War II and the Great Depression.

This lesson could be modified for students with disabilities by having the information read to them, or by using the recordings about women in the Voices of War exhibits. This assignment could be modified for gifted and talented students by raising the expectations of the written piece in the conclusion.

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Academic Standards

- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6](#) Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7](#) Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10](#) Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.1](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.2](#) Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.3](#) Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5](#) Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3](#) Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4](#) Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6](#) Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

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Process for Teachers

Students will be working in groups. These groups will be created by the teacher to determine the best group dynamics.

This lesson will take your students multiple periods to complete. They will need a period or more to read all the articles and another period to complete classified ads and organize them.

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Resources for Teachers

You will need the following sites to complete this WebQuest:

- www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/industry/12.htm
- www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/worked.htm
- www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/division.htm
- www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/rosie.htm
- www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/wcf0002.html
- www.loc.gov/exhibits/wcf/
- www.loc.gov/vets/stories/voicesofwar/voices-chapter5.html#stories
- www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&st=grid&co=fsac
- www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&st=grid&co=fsa
- www.nps.gov/pwro/collection/website/propaganda.htm
- <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/highlights.html>
- www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=women%20workers&co=wpapos
- www.archives.gov/exhibits/powers_of_persuasion/its_a_womans_war_too/its_a_womans_war_too.html
- <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

You will also need to print out multiple copies for each student of the Primary Source Analysis Tool:
www.loc.gov/teachers/usingprimarysources/resources/Primary_Source_Analysis_Tool.pdf

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Evaluation for Teachers

Students are evaluated on the creativity of their newspaper ads, as well as their historical accuracy. The other important aspect of the assignment is the concluding paragraph. This paragraph should make connections between the assignment and the current view of working women. It will also give teachers the opportunity to look at anything they didn't understand in the assignment (from the questions they ask) and areas where some extra teaching is necessary. See rubric on Student Page for further information on evaluation.

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Conclusion for Teachers

My hope for this lesson is that students have a greater appreciation for women in the workforce and how important their contributions are, especially during national crises.

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