



# LESSON PLAN

## TELLING THE STORY OF WORLD WAR II

### High School

### OVERVIEW

Arlington National Cemetery is the final resting place of thousands of servicemembers and military family members, each with a unique perspective on American history and the military. In this lesson, students will use primary and secondary sources that illuminate the experiences of individuals buried at Arlington National Cemetery to examine different perspectives on World War II. These perspectives include African American women of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion, fighter pilots who served the Pacific Theater, Japanese Americans, military wives, and survivors of the Holocaust. Students select a perspective, read an article related to that topic, and then watch an oral history interview with an individual who lived through World War II. After completing their own study, students participate in a discussion on the uses of primary and secondary sources. They will discuss how primary and secondary sources on their chosen topic contributed to their understanding of World War II as a whole.

We recommend that this lesson be used at the end of a unit about World War II so that students are already familiar with basic information about the war.

**Estimated time:** 2 class periods; 10 minute introduction, at-home examination of sources, 30-40 minute in-class discussion and activity

### STANDARDS

*Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.*

#### National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D1.5.9-12: Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.
- NCSS.D2.His.8.9-12: Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.
- NCSS.D2.His.11.9-12: Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.
- NCSS.D2.His.5.9-12: Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives.

#### Common Core Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.



- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will describe the distinctions between primary and secondary sources, and how each type of source contributes to their understanding of history.
- Students will describe how different groups' and individuals' perspectives on World War II contribute to their understanding of the war as a whole.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

- Copies of the student worksheet (1 per student)
- Student access to the primary and secondary sources document
- Student access to the Library of Congress Veterans History Project and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum websites, as noted in the primary and secondary sources document
- Large sheets of paper (1 per topic group)
- Markers (at least 1 per topic group)

## LESSON ACTIVITIES

Introduction: 10 minutes

- *Notes for introducing lesson:* World War II was the largest war in history, involving nearly every country in the world. Although its major battles were not fought on American soil, the scale of U.S. mobilization for war meant that the life of every American was affected in some way. About 10 percent of the American population served in the military during the course of the United States' involvement in the war (from the U.S. declaration of war against Japan on December 8, 1941 to Japan's surrender on August 15, 1945). Even if an individual did not personally serve or know anyone who served, most Americans were affected by wartime rations of goods like sugar, butter, meat, gasoline and rubber. However, if World War II affected all levels of American society, it also affected different groups in different ways; race, ethnicity, class and gender were especially important in shaping individual experiences of the war. Thus, the United States' history during World War II can be studied through many different lenses. For instance, studying the experiences of fighter pilots in the Pacific will give you a much different perspective on the war than studying the experiences of military wives on the homefront.

To study history through these different lenses, historians use primary sources: documents, images and other artifacts from the past that offer firsthand information on events and experiences as they were happening at the time. Historians then analyze information they learned from primary sources, along with their own understanding of historical events, in order to create secondary sources: writings about the past, which offer analysis and interpretation. Today, you are going to use both primary and secondary sources in order to 1) explore a



specific perspective on World War II and 2) analyze how these different types of sources contribute to your understanding of the war.

Working with Sources: 60-90 minutes. *Since the oral history interviews are around 50 minutes long, we recommend that this be done at home, unless students do not have access to the internet.*

- Students select (or are assigned) one of five topics/perspectives to study and complete a worksheet. The topics and their accompanying sources are:

#### The African American Women of the 6888<sup>th</sup> Central Postal Directory Battalion

- Article published by the U.S. Army Center of Military History  
Kathleen Fargey, "6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion (Women's Army Corps)," U.S. Army Center of Military History, last modified February 14, 2014, <https://history.army.mil/html/topics/afam/6888thPBn/index.html>
- Oral history of Mary Crawford Ragland, available here: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.91851/>

#### Fighter Pilots in the Pacific Theater

- Excerpt from the book *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority*  
Alvin D. Coox, "Air War Against Japan," in *Case Studies in the Achievement of Air Superiority*, ed. Benjamin Franklin Cooling (Washington, D.C.: Center for Air Force History, 1994), 383-452.
- Oral history by Jerome Yellin, available here: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.95409/>

#### Japanese Americans – Internment Camps and Military Service

- Article published by the National Park Service  
"Japanese Americans At War," National Park Service, May 12, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/wwii/learn/historyculture/japanese-americans-at-war.htm>
- Article published by the American Translators Association  
Kayoko Takeda, "Nisei Linguists During WWII and the Occupation of Japan," *The ATA Chronicle*, January 2007, 14-17, [https://www.ata-chronicle.online/wp-content/uploads/3601\\_14\\_kayoko\\_takeda.pdf](https://www.ata-chronicle.online/wp-content/uploads/3601_14_kayoko_takeda.pdf)
- Oral history by Warren Michio Tsuneishi, available here: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.02153/>

#### Military Wives

- Excerpt from the book *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and At the Front During World War II*  
Emily Yellin, *Our Mothers' War: American Women at Home and at the Front During World War II* (New York: Free Press, 2004), 5-36.
- Oral history by Marion Reh Gurfein, available here: <https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00799/>



### Survivors of the Holocaust

- Article published by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum “Introduction to the Holocaust,” United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, last modified March 12, 2018, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>
- Oral history by Eddie Hellmuth Willner, available here: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn504739>

### In-class Discussion and Activity: 30-40 minutes

- After students have completed their worksheets, lead a short discussion about students’ experiences using the primary and secondary sources. Suggested questions:
  - What kind of information was best conveyed through your primary source? How about through your secondary source?
  - What were some limitations of your primary source? What were some limitations of your secondary source? Some limitations to consider: What is the source unable to tell you? Whose voices or perspectives are not represented in it?
  - Which source did you prefer working with? Why?
  - What additional sources would have helped your understanding of your topic?
- After the discussion, place students in groups based on the topics they studied. Give each group a large sheet of paper and markers to create a poster that includes the following information:
  - Topic
  - Five “big ideas” they learned from their secondary source
  - Five things that stood out to them from their primary source
  - Two advantages and two disadvantages of their secondary source
  - Two advantages and two disadvantages of their primary source
  - Three sentences about how learning about this topic added to their previous understanding of World War II
- After all groups have created their poster, allow students time to walk around the room and read the posters created by other groups. Once students have looked at all the other posters, have them complete the final question on their worksheet.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Share your students’ favorite moments from the oral histories with Arlington National Cemetery: Post on Twitter using the hashtag #ANCeduWWII.
- Plan your own oral history collecting project using the guidance from EDSITEMENT, a partnership between the National Endowment for the Humanities and National Trust for the Humanities: <https://edsitement.neh.gov/teachers-guides/oral-history-educational-experience>.
- Explore the thousands of personal accounts of American war veterans available through the Library of Congress Veterans History Project: <https://www.loc.gov/vets/vets-home.html>.



- Explore interviews, home movies, memoirs, and diaries of Holocaust victims, survivors, rescuers and liberators available through the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum:  
<https://collections.ushmm.org/search/>.

## PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

All of the oral histories used in this lesson document the lives of individuals who are buried at Arlington National Cemetery. You can use the ANC Explorer app to visit their graves, or complete the World War II Walking Tour in order to learn about even more differing perspectives on the war.

Gravesites:

- Mary Crawford Ragland: Columbarium Court 7, Section PP, Column 2, Niche 5
- Jerome Yellin: Columbarium Court 9, Section N11, Column 8, Niche 3
- Warren Michio Tsuneishi: Columbarium Court 7, Section TT, Column 29, Niche 4
- Marion Reh Gurfein: Section 67, Grave 1850
- Eddie Hellmuth Willner: Section 60, Grave 15





# SOURCES

## Primary Sources

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<https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00799/>

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<https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.91851/>

Tsuneishi, Warren Michio. "Warren Michio Tsuneishi oral history interview conducted by Sarah Rouse and Jurretta Heckscher." Warren Michio Tsuneishi Collection (AFC/2001/001/02153), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. July 2, 2002. Video. 45:30.

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