



LESSON PLAN: WOMEN ON THE HOMEFRONT

Elementary (4-6)

OVERVIEW

During World War II, women were not allowed to serve in combat roles in the American armed forces. However, the work done by women who served on the American homefront was a vital support to the success of the Allied forces abroad. They contributed to the war effort in many ways, including working in defense industry factories, organizing scrap drives, selling war bonds, working on farms, and serving in non-combat units as nurses, secretaries, radio operators and pilots. In this lesson, students will examine primary sources related to the experiences of two women, both buried at Arlington National Cemetery, who served on the homefront in different ways. Students will then write a one-paragraph historical fiction account based on the sources they examined. After completing the lesson, students will be able to differentiate primary and secondary sources, have a greater understanding of the breadth of primary sources and have experience analyzing and using primary sources to understand and share history.

While the focus of this lesson is on analyzing primary sources and creative writing, through the lives of the two women highlighted students will also learn about the broader meanings of service and sacrifice during World War II, both in the military and on the homefront.

This lesson does not require prior knowledge of World War II and can be taught at any time. We recommend that students already have some knowledge of primary sources. Portions of this lesson can easily be cut or simplified for a shorter lesson.

Resources include a PowerPoint, primary source packets, guiding worksheets, and a grading rubric.

Estimated time: 2 class periods or 1 class period (90 minutes) and a take-home assignment

- Part 1, Primary Sources and Historical Writing: 30 minutes
- Part 2, Analyzing Primary Sources: 60 minutes
- Part 3, Writing a Historical Fiction Story: 90 minutes or 30 minutes and as a take home assignment
 - Depending on students' writing abilities, the length of the story, and the editing process, this section can take up to two weeks.

Each part of this lesson plan can be adapted to do on its own, within a different unit/lesson, or with only one other part.



STANDARDS

Content standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following common core reading and writing standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.7: Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.3-5.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher led) with diverse partners building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.6: Compare and contrast a firsthand and secondhand account of the same event or topic; describe the differences in focus and the information provided
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.6: Analyze multiple accounts of the same event or topic, noting important similarities and differences in the point of view they represent.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will examine historical primary sources to develop close-reading and analysis skills.
- Students will compare and contrast first-hand accounts (primary sources) with second-hand accounts (secondary sources).
- Students will use primary sources to write a narrative that demonstrates writing skills including clear event sequences, descriptive details, and dialogue.

RESOURCES NEEDED

- PowerPoint
- Two primary source packets: Marion Reh Gurfein and Elaine Danforth Harmon
 - Transcripts are edited from oral history clips.
- Compare/Contrast Worksheet
- Primary Source Analysis Worksheet
- Storyboard Worksheet
- Grading Rubric

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Lesson Part 1: Primary Sources and Historical Writing, 30 minutes

- Introduction: 5-10 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 2: What is a primary source?
 - Students should know that a primary source (such as a journal entry, letter, or newspaper article) was created at the time of the historical event or by someone who experienced that event.



- Display PowerPoint Slide 3: Primary Sources
 - Primary sources are materials created during a historical event; they are a first-hand account of a historical event.
 - Ask: What are types of primary sources?
 - Optional follow-up questions: 30 years from now, how could someone know what happened today? What records do we make to let people know what happened? How did people know when [important historical event] happened? How was the information shared with other people at the time?
 - Primary sources can be written materials like letters, diaries, and newspaper articles.
 - They can be images: photographs, posters or drawings.
 - They can be interviews, or what historians call oral histories.
 - Primary sources can also be objects.
 - Optional follow-up questions: Who here has visited a museum and seen objects on display? What are some objects you saw? Those objects are also primary sources. They existed and were used during a historical event and can tell us about that historical event.
 - We know primary sources are materials created and used during a historical event.
 - Ask: But what are materials created about a historical event after the event happened? (Secondary sources)
 - We are now going to look at a primary source and a secondary source on the same event and see how they are the same and how they are different.
- Activity Part 1: 10-15 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 4: Compare and Contrast
 - These are two articles about the end of World War II. Without reading the articles, can you guess which is the primary source and which is the secondary source? Why do you think so?
Students may recognize the first article as a primary source, since it was written at the time World War II ended.
 - Optional: Pass out WWII Source Compare & Contrast Worksheet. Students spend 10-15 minutes reading and filling in the comparison table. In small groups or individually, students should read the transcripts of the two newspaper articles on the end of World War II. Then they should fill in the table comparing and contrasting the two articles. Recommended: Students form groups of two and each student reads one article. They fill out the table together.
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 5: “All City ‘Lets Go’”
 - Read aloud and analyze.
 - When was this article written?



- Why was this article written?
 - What's the main idea?
 - What is the author's tone?
 - What kind of words does the author use – are they very factual, emotional, descriptive?
- Display PowerPoint Slide 6: "Fifty Years Ago: The End of World War II"
 - Read aloud and analyze.
 - When was this article written?
 - Why was this article written?
 - What's the main idea?
 - What is the author's tone?
 - What kind of words does the author use – are they very factual, emotional, descriptive?
- Display PowerPoint Slide 7: Compare and Contrast
 - After reading, which do you think was the primary source and which was the secondary source? Which one seems like it was written by someone who witnessed the events described in the article?
The first is the primary source. It was written by someone who experienced the celebration at the end of World War II firsthand.
 - How were the articles similar?
Students may identify that the articles were both published in newspapers and both were about the end of World War II, or other similarities.
 - How were the articles different?
Students may identify that the first was more emotional and the second more factual, the first was written right after the war ended and the second was written 50 years later, the first focused on the day the war ended while the second included information about the entire war and peace negotiations, or other differences.
- Activity Part 2: Why Primary Sources? 10 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 8: Why Do Primary Sources Matter?
 - Ask: Why do primary sources matter? What do we learn from them?
Students may identify that primary sources show what people thought of historical events at the time, they give personal detail about historical events, they can offer many different perspectives on an event, or other responses.
 - Optional: Display PowerPoint Slide 9: How Primary Sources Are Used
 - Explain: To study history, 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, journalists and writers then analyze information they learned from primary sources, along with



their own understanding of historical events, in order to create secondary sources.

- There are a few different types of historical writing: Academic history books and articles written by professional historians, history textbooks like the ones you use in class and historical fiction.
 - If your class has read or will read a historical fiction book, you can replace the picture of *Number the Stars* with the book your class is reading.
- Let's talk about some of the differences between these types of historical writing and how they use primary sources. Discuss as a class the differences between these types of historical writing, focusing on how much of it is based on primary sources and whether it is written like a story.
 - Academic history book:
 - Based entirely on primary source research
 - Does not include any people or events or facts that are not real or did not happen
 - Often written in a narrative style
 - Textbook:
 - Summarizes historical events and people
 - Mainly historical facts
 - No story or narrative
 - Historical fiction:
 - About a real historical event
 - Details of the story, like what people said or even the characters themselves, are not necessarily real
 - Often includes real historical people
 - Includes real historical facts
 - Based on some historical research (sometimes primary and secondary; sometimes only secondary)
 - If your class read a historical fiction book, you can reference that book and discuss which parts of the story are real and which parts are not real.
- In this lesson, you will become historians and write historical fiction. You will analyze primary sources about women during World War II, and then you will write a short story based on the primary sources you analyzed.

Lesson Part 2: Analyzing Primary Sources, 60 minutes

- Activity Part 1: Whole Class Discussion, 10 minutes per woman
To condense or simplify this lesson, you may choose to focus on either Marion Reh Gurfein or Elaine Danforth Harmon.
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 10: Marion Reh Gurfein



- When most people die, they're buried or have some kind of marker or memorial to help people remember them. What can we learn from Marion's headstone at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia?
 - Birth and death date
 - She was the wife of Joseph Ingram Gurfein
 - She was a mother
 - Her husband served in the Army in WWII, Korea and Vietnam
 - Her husband's birth and death date
 - She and her husband were Jewish
- This is some good information, but we want to learn more. What did she care about? Where did she live? She wasn't famous, so we can't just look her up on Google. Where should we look for more information?
 - Quick brainstorm: Students should list different types of primary sources that could be useful to learn more about Marion. Examples: Letters, diary, interview, photos, etc.
- Teacher background on Arlington National Cemetery:
 - Arlington National Cemetery was created during the Civil War to bury soldiers who died in the war.
 - It is one of many national military cemeteries throughout the country.
 - In general, only members of the U.S. military and their spouses or dependents can be buried at Arlington National Cemetery.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 11: Marion Reh Gurfein Sources
 - We actually do have a good number of primary sources about Marion. We have a photograph, a card she sent to her husband during the war, and an oral history.
 - Watch the oral history clip (the video is embedded on the PowerPoint slide; click to play). Ask: What did you learn from this?
 - Tell students they'll have time to look at the primary sources in more detail later.
- Display PowerPoint Slide 12: Elaine Danforth Harmon
 - Elaine Danforth Harmon is also buried at Arlington National Cemetery. During World War II, she served as a member of the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), an organization that supported the U.S. Army Air Forces.
 - The WASP was created in 1943 so that men who spent time testing aircraft, delivering aircraft to locations throughout the U.S., and training new pilots could be freed up to fight the war abroad.
 - Women had to already know how to fly in order to join the WASP.
 - Let's examine Elizabeth Danforth Harmon's headstone to see what we can learn about her from it.
 - Birth and death date
 - She served in WWII
 - She earned the Congressional Gold Medal



- She was a WASP
- Display PowerPoint Slide 13: Elaine Danforth Harmon Sources
 - In addition to photographs of Elaine, we have an oral history.
 - Watch the oral history clip (the video is embedded on the PowerPoint slide; click to play). Ask: What did you learn from this?
- Optional: Display PowerPoint Slide 14: WASP
 - There are not too many primary sources specifically on Elaine Danforth Harmon, but there are a lot on WASP. We can use primary sources about other members of the WASP to learn about Elaine.
 - I'm going to play this short video about the WASP. In the video you'll see primary source videos of WASP pilots in Sweetwater, Texas, where they were stationed. You'll also see short clips of former WASPs speaking about their experience. On your primary source worksheet, take notes about what you notice and learn about WASP from the video and we'll discuss afterward.
 - Play video: <https://youtu.be/gMCqXZEEQug>
 - Ask: What did you notice/learn from the video? Possible answers include:
 - About 1,000/75,000 chosen
 - Plane names: B-17, B-26
 - Other WASP pilots: Betty Blake, Dawn Seymour
 - WASP pilots had physical fitness training and lessons in math, reading, physics, navigation, and code
 - Ground school in morning; flying in the afternoon
 - They needed 35 hours of flying time to join
 - Training in flight simulators
 - 6 people per dorm; Lights out at 10:00
 - Marched to class, to the mess (dining hall), etc.
 - Flight equipment/uniforms were made for men
- Display PowerPoint Slide 15: Your Job
 - Students analyze the primary sources and then write a one-paragraph historical fiction story about one woman based on what they discover in the primary sources.
 - If you choose to focus on only one woman, edit the other out of the PPT.
 - If you choose to include both, allow students to decide who to focus on or pre-assign.
 - Optional: Students only analyze sources and discuss with no writing assignment. If so, edit PowerPoint and grading rubric to reflect.
 - Students should include at least 2 references to a primary source. The references should be from different primary sources.



- Activity Part 2: Small Group Analysis, 30 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 16: Analyzing Your Sources
 - Split students into small groups with about four students per group. Give each group a primary source packet and the Primary Source Analysis Worksheet.
 - Set 1: Marion Reh Gurfein
 - Photograph
 - 3 oral history clips/transcripts
 - “D” Day card
 - Set 2: Elaine Danforth Harmon
 - 3 oral history clips/transcripts
 - 2 photographs
 - WASP video
 - In their groups, students should close read and look at each primary source to learn about Marion or Elaine. They should use the worksheet to take notes.
 - As students analyze their sources in small groups, stop by each group to help facilitate their analysis.
 - If students will eventually write a story and they are finding facts, but not connecting it to writing as story, ask: That’s a really interesting topic/fact. How might you include it in your story?

Lesson Part 3: Writing the Narrative, 90 minutes or 30 minutes + homework

- Activity Part 1: Whole Class Discussion, 30 minutes
 - Display PowerPoint Slides 10-14: Recap Primary Sources
 - Students should reference their completed Primary Source Analysis worksheets for the discussion.
 - Display PowerPoint Slide 17: Writing Your Story
 - As a class, discuss what students discovered in the primary sources and brainstorm the different ways the primary sources students analyzed can be used to construct a narrative and where students might need to fill in holes.
 - Students who analyzed sources related to Marion Reh Gurfein should share what they found and how they might use that information within a short story. Students who analyzed Elaine Danforth Harmon should do the same.
 - If students are mainly sharing facts, prompt the entire class to think about that fact and then how that fact might be used in a story.
 - While their story is historical fiction, it should mainly be based on historical facts. The fictional part will be the details rather than the topic. For example, in one of Marion’s oral history clips, she said she’d go the park to talk with other women. We do not know the details or specific words of those conversations, but we know they happened. So the fictional part is the words of the conversation and



the names of the women she spoke with, while the historical part is that she had conversations in the park with other mothers whose husbands were in the military.

- After your class discussion, students should have a good understanding of what historical information is within the primary sources. They will now use that information, and the sources themselves, to write a narrative about the homefront during World War II.
- Activity Part 2: 60 minutes or homework
 - Optional: Storyboarding, 20 minutes
 - Pass out the Storyboard Worksheet
 - For a one-paragraph story, the storyboard can help, but is not necessary. Its inclusion depends on your time limits and students' need.
 - Before writing a story, you need to plan what you are going to write. You can use this storyboard to plan your story. Every story needs a beginning, middle and end, as well as characters and a setting. Some questions to consider while you decide this are:
 - Does your story take place over one day, one week, one year, multiple years?
 - What is the main thing you want people to understand about Marion or Elaine from your story? Is it the letters that Marion talked about? Or that she lived in an all-woman society? Is it Elaine's decision to learn to fly? Or her experience as a WASP attending lessons on math and practicing her flying skills?
 - Who are the characters in your story?
 - Where does your story take place? Is it all in one place or does it have multiple settings?
 - While you may want to include everything you learned, it will be easier to write a story if you focus on only one or two things.
 - Writing, 40 minutes
 - Students write a one-paragraph story. At the bottom of the page, they should note the two primary sources they used and referenced.
 - If you assign a longer writing assignment, consider having students edit each other's stories before turning in their final draft.



LESSON EXTENSIONS

- Plan a field trip to an archive, library special collections, or historical society near you for students to see primary sources in person and meet someone who works with primary sources for a living.
- 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>

PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?

Marion Reh Gurfein and Elaine Danforth Harmon are both buried at Arlington National Cemetery. You can use the ANC Explorer app to visit their graves, or complete the World War II Walking Tour to learn about how the war affected people from many different backgrounds.



GRADING RUBRIC

Criteria	Feedback	Points
Narrative was organized and events unfolded naturally. It had a beginning, middle and end.		____ /20
Used dialogue and description to develop events and show character responses to situations.		____ /20
Used transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.		____ /10
Referred to information within primary sources at least two times.		____ /20
Completed storyboard.		____ /10
Completed Compare/Contrast worksheet.		____ /10
Engaged in discussions with classmates on the primary sources.		____ /10
Totals		____ /100



SOURCES

Feinberg, Alexander. "All City 'Lets Go'." *New York Times*. August 15, 1945.

"Fifty Years Ago: The End of World War II." *Washington Post*. August 27, 1995.

Gurfein, Marion Reh. "Marion Reh Gurfein oral history interview conducted by Sarah Rouse." Marion Reh Gurfein Collection (AFC/2001/001/00799), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. May 16, 2002. Video. 56:13.

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

Harmon, Elaine Danforth. "Elaine Danforth Harmon oral history interview conducted by Beverly Lindsey." Elaine Danforth Harmon Collection (AFC/2001/001/30070), Veterans History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. March 19, 2004. Video. 31:28.

<https://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp-stories/loc.natlib.afc2001001.30070/>

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. "Women on the Wing." YouTube Video, 5:39. March 26, 2013.

<https://youtu.be/gMCqXZEEQug>

Elaine D. Harmon, family photograph.

Elaine D. Harmon on a PT-17, family photograph.