

Fort Hancock and the WACs

Targeted Grade Level: 10-12

Type of Lesson: NJ History/Women in the Military

Program Overview:

Students will explore the role of working women during World War II. Using an oral history interview from the historic archives of Fort Hancock at Gateway National Recreation Area, Sandy Hook, New Jersey, along with attached materials and Internet resources, students will learn about the Women's Army Corps (WAC), and its place in the changing the role of women in the U.S. Army. This was a groundbreaking event in women's history. Students will also explore other contributions that women made during the war and analyze the social and economic effects these "new" working women had on American society.

The activities in this lesson are divided into five activities:

Activity #1: What is a WAC?

Activity #2: A WACky story

Activity #3: "Not my wife, sister, or daughter" A Debate

Activity # 4: "Hear me out... a persuasive letter of duty..."

Activity # 5: "A Riveting Poster"

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will explain the integration of women into the United States' Army during World War II, (emphasis on Fort Hancock, NJ)
2. Students will describe the contributions and significance of the Women's Army Corps to Fort Hancock, the Army in general, and women's social history at the time of the conception of the Women's Army Corps and at the present time.
3. Students will examine and analyze the contributions of women during World War II on the home front (i.e. Rosie the Riveter, Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), etc.

Essential Questions

During World War II, women chose to leave their homes to support the War effort.

- What were the ramifications (effects) of the creation of the Women's Army Corps?
- What other paid jobs did women fill during World War II in both military and civilian positions?
- What effect did working have on these women?

Included in this Lesson:

- Photographs of WACs during World War II, taken at Fort Hancock, NJ
- Oral History Interview

Background reading:

- Women's Army Corps, by Mary Rasa - file attached
- Web sites to be visited - list attached

Estimated Duration:

Approximate Time Required: Two to five, 40-45 minute class periods

Skills

- Reading, critical thinking, the opportunity to work independently, research using the Internet

Attachments:

1. audio file: Oral History interview with Loretta Hoffman
2. Worksheet to go along with WAC interview
3. Visual aids: six photographs of WACs at Fort Hancock
4. Annotated bibliography of websites pertaining to the WAC and civilian women's contributions to the home front during World War II (i.e. Rosie the Riveter)
5. "The Women's Army Corps", by Mary Rasa

Suggested Websites:

Bellafaire, Judith A. The Women's Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service. 16 Aug. 2003 <<http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/brochures/wac/wac.htm>>.

Lewis, Jone Johnson "World War II Posters: Women's Roles" The History Net. 16 Aug. 2003 <http://womenshistory.about.com/library/pic/bl_p_wwii_posters_index.htm>

Women's Army Corp Veterans Association. 16 Aug. 2003 <<http://www.armywomen.org/frames.html>>.

Other Helpful Websites:

<http://www.nps.gov/gate/>

<http://www.nps.gov/rori/>

<http://www.wasp-wwii.org/>

<http://rosietheriveter.org/>

<http://userpages.aug.com/captbarb/femvets5.html>

<http://www.roostweb.com/~usarra>

<http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/rosie>

http://womenshistory.about.com/library/pic/bl_p_wwii_posters_index.htm

<http://www.history.navy.mil/photos/prs-tpic/females/wave-ww2.htm>

http://www.nationalparks.org/ProudPartners/partner_time_adverts_ad9_2.shtml

NJ Core Curriculum State Social Studies Standards

STANDARD 6.3: All Students will acquire Historical Understanding of Political and Diplomatic Ideas, Forces, and Institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the World.

STANDARD 6.4: All Students will acquire Historical Understanding of Societal Ideas and Forces throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the World.

STANDARD 6.6: All Students will acquire Historical Understanding of Economic Forces, Ideas, and Institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the World.

STANDARD 6.7: All Students will acquire Geographical Understanding by Studying the World in Spatial Terms.

STANDARD 6.9: All Students will acquire Geographical Understanding by Studying the Environment and Society.

Activity #1: What is a WAC?

Synopsis: This first activity will provide students with an overview of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), later to become the Women's Army Corps (WAC), as well as the contributions of civilian women to the home front (i.e. Rosie the Riveter) during World War II. Primary resources include an oral history interview with a WAC, a woman who served in the U.S. Army at Fort Hancock, New Jersey during World War II, and photographs of WACs at Fort Hancock, New Jersey. If the teacher so chooses, he/she can also tie into this lesson the long lasting effects of women in the military and women in society as a result of the establishment of the Women's Army Corps and Rosie the Riveter.

Duration: One or two 45 minute class periods

Materials:

- annotated bibliography of websites pertaining to the WAC and civilian women's contributions to the home front during World War II
- Women's Army Corps, by Mary Rasa
- Worksheet to accompany Oral history interview.

Key visual elements:

- Six Photographs of WACs at Fort Hancock, NJ.

Key Audio Visual elements:

- Video of Oral History Interview with Loretta Hoffman

Suggested Procedure:

1. Students will view an oral history interview videotaped with Loretta Hoffman, a woman who served in the Women's Army Corp during World War II, stationed at Fort Hancock, Sandy Hook, NJ. They will be asked to answer questions about the interview, using the attached worksheet.
2. Next, the class can be divided into six groups. The teacher will then distribute a different picture of WACs stationed at Fort Hancock during World War II to each group. In these groups, the students will answer questions such as:
 - a. What are some of the jobs/activities the WACs are participating in? Why do you think these jobs/activities were an integral part of the war effort?
 - b. What do you notice about the uniforms the WACs are wearing? What do you notice about the ages of the women in the photographs?
3. Then, each group will share its picture with the class and present its answers to the posed questions. After each group presents its picture and answers, the other students may offer their opinions and answers to the questions.

Activity conclusion: As a group in class assignment or as a homework assignment, the students will be given a list of websites that provide information about the WAC and women and the war effort, and asked to review these websites (as well as any other appropriate subjects that they find) and write a short summary of at least three of the sites. The students can either hand their summaries into the teacher the following day, or keep them as a personal reference for the remainder of this lesson. Website addresses should be saved to be available for use in the other Activities 2-5.

Worksheet: Videotaped Interview with Loretta Hoffman

The following questions are intended to go along with the Interview of Loretta Hoffman. The questions can also be used for research purposes or they can be modified and used as an extension for the students to take part in their own oral history interviews.

1. How were the WACs treated by the male soldiers stationed at Fort Hancock? Does Hoffman discuss any particular instances in which she felt the male soldiers treated the WACs as being inferior to them?
2. Were the WACs able to socialize with the male soldiers? What types of recreational activities were there at Fort Hancock that promoted socialization between the WACs and male soldiers?
3. What types of discipline problems does Hoffman discuss? Why do you think she makes a point to mention that discipline problems were kept quiet?
4. Hoffman notes that women had to be high school graduates to join the WACs. However, male soldiers did not have to be high school graduates to join the military. Why do you think this difference in admission standards existed?
5. What was Hoffman's job while at Fort Hancock? What do you think the importance of her job was to the war effort?

6. What comments does Hoffman make about African American women in the WAC? Compare and contrast the issue of race and gender in the military today.

7. What is one comment made by Hoffman that you found to be interesting? Why?

Activity #2: A WACky story

This topic allows for a number of activities for the classroom. The following activities can be used alone for the entire class or together in smaller groups (depending on the amount of time planned to be spent on this topic).

Synopsis:

Using the photographs and their internet research, the students will be assigned the task of creating a story to parallel the photograph their group was given in Activity #1.

Duration:

- One class period – approximately 45 minutes

Materials:

- Internet research results

Key visual elements:

- Six photographs from Activity #1

Suggested Procedure:

1. The students will regroup into their groups from the previous day. Then, the teacher will redistribute the photographs of the WACs stationed at Fort Hancock.
2. Next, relying on the information learned in class the previous day, and their own internet research, the students will be assigned the task of creating a story to parallel the photograph that their group was given. Some guidelines for the story are as follows:
 - a. The story should be at least 2 pages in length.
 - b. The story should contain at least one exchange of dialogue.
 - c. The story should contain a minimum of two historically accurate facts about the WACs and a minimum of two historically accurate facts about World War II itself.
 - d. The students are encouraged to be creative in regards to this assignment and have the choice of creating a humorous, dramatic, or other type of story of their choice.
 - e. The students may also choose to illustrate their story further, by drawing their own pictures, or finding additional appropriate pictures of WACs on the Internet or in books.

Activity Conclusion:

At the end of the class period, each group should give a brief summary of their story. If time allows in your schedule, the students may read or act out their stories to the class the next day or later in the week. The students who are listening to the stories should come up with at least two questions or comments and some of them may be discussed after each story.

Activity #3: “Not my wife, sister, or daughter:” A Debate

Synopsis:

Essential to fully understand the contributions of the WACs and civilian women during the war, it is important for the students to understand the positions and opinions of the majority of both military, as well as civilian men, about the WACs and “Rosie the Riveters” during World War II.

Duration:

One class period – approximately 45 minutes

Supplies and Materials:

- Quotation from Judith A Bellafaire’s brochure: The Women’s Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service

Suggested Procedure:

1. The class can be divided into either two large groups and participate in one debate, or several smaller groups and participate in a number of debates.
2. The students will be presented with the following quotation from Judith A. Bellafaire’s brochure The Women’s Army Corps: A Commemoration of World War II Service

“Concerned soldiers believed that WAACs were not fit company for their sisters and girlfriends, and many forbade their wives, fiancés, and sisters to join the WAAC, some even threatening divorce or disinheritance” (pg. 12)

3. Each group will then be assigned a side to argue in the debate, loosely based on the quotation. (The students are encouraged to come up with their own arguments as well). The students’ arguments should contain factual evidence from their research. The students may use verbal evidence, statistical evidence, and or even photographs to support their positions. Some issues that can be debated include:
 - a. Reasons to join:
 - i. Freeing a man for combat
 - ii. Women’s rights/equality
 - iii. Hope to bring a man home sooner/Helping the war effort (Patriotism)
 - iv. Job opportunities
 - b. Reasons not to join:
 - i. Men felt women were not fit to serve with them
 - ii. Men feel the WACs are like prostitutes
 - iii. Women needed at home (cooking, cleaning, etc.)
 - iv. Unwanted change in the social structure at that time

Activity Conclusion:

The teacher can debrief the class about the debate. Point out strong arguments made by each side and arguments that were weak, but have the potential to be stronger. The students can then write a summary of the debate for homework.

Activity # 4: “Hear me out...a persuasive letter of duty...”

Synopsis:

Students will write a letter from the perspective of a family member (male or female) who is opposed to their wife, sister, daughter...etc., joining the Women’s Army Corps or from the perspective of a female to her husband, brother, sister, mother, father...etc., who is seeking to join the Women’s Army Corps.

Duration:

- One class period – approximately 45 minutes

Supplies and Materials:

- Information gathered in previous activities

Suggested Procedure:

” Individually the students will write a letter from the perspective of a family member (male or female) who is opposed to their wife, sister, daughter...etc., joining the Women’s Army Corps or from the perspective of a female to her husband, brother, sister, mother, father...etc., seeking to join the Women’s Army Corps. The letters should be persuasive to attend to either side of the argument, and contain at least three pieces of evidence from the students’ research on either side of the argument. The letter should follow the style of a persuasive essay and be at least five paragraphs in length.

1. The students are encouraged to share their letters with the class.

Activity Conclusion:

The students are encouraged to share their letters with the class.

* As an extension of this activity, the students can switch letters with someone in the class and write a response to that person’s letter. The person the student switched with will do the same.

Activity # 5: “A Riveting Poster”

Synopsis: Using historic images from 1940s media, students will create posters of working women during World War II.

Duration:

One class period – approximately 45 minutes

Supplies and Materials:

- Poster board
- Crayons, color pens, etc
- Historic Images of working women during World War II from the internet, newspapers, magazines, etc.

Key visual elements:

- World War II advertisements

Suggested Procedure:

1. In small groups the students can create a picture poster (with captions) of the jobs women who took on men’s jobs during World War II took over. Pictures for this assignment can be found in books, on the Internet, old newspaper articles, and the like. The students may be encouraged to find pictures of “Rosie the Riveters” or Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP), for example.
2. The captions should include the name of the photographed (if available), the date when the picture was taken, and the job the woman/women is/are carrying out. The students may get creative with the captioning of their posters.
3. The students are also encouraged to share their posters with the class, and the teacher encouraged to display the posters in the classroom as a remnant of this lesson.

Activity Conclusion:

The teacher can ask each student to write an “exit statement” telling what he/she has learned from this activity to be handed in on the students’ way out of the classroom.