I. Introduction

World War II brought many changes for Americans. Most importantly, it ended the Great Depression and provided jobs, which, in turn, strengthened the U.S. economy. Factories which had once produced toy guns were now shipping real ones overseas for allied defense. Men, however, were not the ones working in these factories. An estimated 15 million U.S. troops answered the call of duty, compared to only 2 million in World War I.

The mobilization of the U.S. economy and resources, in turn, mobilized citizens to the war effort. Everyone was expected to do their part on the American homefront in order for our troops the return victorious. Children collected scrap metal and watched the skies for foreign planes, families planted victory gardens and rationed meat, and celebrities like Bing Crosby donated golf balls for ammunitions.

It was the women of the homefront, however, that truly kept the country running. Encouraged by the image of Rosie the Riveter, women donned their overalls and bandanas and stepped out into the working world; an alien territory once exclusive to men. The roles in which these women played during the war broke social molds, challenged established norms, and paved the way for the Women’s Liberation Movement of the 1970’s.

This text set embodies a variety of women who experienced the war in different ways; the Rosie, the minority worker, the spy, the nurse, the lonely lover, the baseball player, and the Japanese girl in an internment camp. Through the use of fiction, biography, autobiography, film, poetry, an array of primary source documents, and a multimedia presentation, students will gain a better understanding of how WWII changed the lives of American women forever.

II. SOL Connection

Conflict: The World at War 1939-1945

VUS.11 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the effects of WWII on the Homefront by
   a. explaining how the U.S. mobilized its economic, human, and military resources
   b. describing the contribution of women and minorities to the war effort
   c. explaining the internment of Japanese Americans during the war
   d. describing the role of media and communications in the war effort
III.  Text Set  
(Presented in subcategories)

Love, Longing, and Loss  
The following three selections of the text set revolve around a central theme- the lovesick woman on the homefront; each reinforcing the same material/concepts concerning how women coped with the long term absence of their loved ones.  
For the married woman or girl with a young lover off to war, much time was spent writing letters.  For many women, as these text reveal, the sensing of longing would never subside; for many letters there were no replies.  These letters reveal much about the life on the homefront and the consequences of war.
Other women felt their call to duty was to provide comfort and company to U.S. troops.  Working as USO girls, many found steadfast friends and serious love interest at dances, dinners, and church services.  Their experiences are also part of this particular portion of the text set material.

Dream When You’re Feeling Blue  
This historical fiction book, with a Fry Readability level of Grade 7, is a light-hearted read for students because the plot of the book is relatively simple.  Three sisters living in Chicago during the war are coping with the seemingly endless war and the constant fear that their loved ones overseas may never come home to them.  Their evenings are spent around the dinner table writing letters to lovesick men fighting for freedom.  While each prays that their men will return victorious, they will all lose faith in the romanticism of the war and experience loss like they had never imagined.
Rich with historically accurate context, students will be re-exposed to factual information about the war and its effects on Americans, embedded into a novel that expresses human emotion, bravery, resilience, and courage as young women struggle to make sense of life, love, and war, in a time of turmoil.

Assigned during the Reflective phase of PAR, this book will complement the actual text.  Students will be expected to read a particular number of chapters independently.  Time will be given in class for reading, but the majority is the student’s responsibility at home.  Class periods will be spent discussing the book in groups; completing study guides and answering critical thinking questions that require the student to reflect on what they have read and draw a connection between the actual textbook material, and the novel.  With easy-flowing sentence structure, and limited higher level vocabulary, I expected this book will be a pleasant read for students.
Since You Went Away

This work is a primary source collection of letters from WWII women to their brave soldiers overseas. A short introduction is given for each couple whose letter exchanges are presented in the book. At the end of the segment, the editor reveals what became of the two lovers, if the soldier returned from war or if his lover was left to manage life on her own. While some letters discuss important information or tell of broken hearts, many are simple re-caps of a woman’s day—what book she is reading or what she had for dinner. Others reveal mindless neighborhood gossip. Accompanied by photographs as well as propaganda posters, this book is an excellent primary resource. With a Fry Readability level of Grade 9, I would search the text for entries with varying topics and levels of complexity. A handout will be given to the class, during the Assistance phase of PAR, with the selections during the first class discussion of Dream When You’re Feeling Blue (After students have read the first chapter). The primary source letters of this text will reinforce the schema which the novel creates for the reader. It may, in fact, spark interest in the reluctant reader to commit to the novel.

Since You Went Away 1944, Film

Remastered and in color, this film is an appropriate addition to the text set because it is a visual reinforcement of the novel and primary source letters introduced. The film is a portrayal of the lives of three young women who are waiting desperately for their lovers to return.

The film is dated; the lack of special effects may bore the student. Therefore, the film should not be shown in its entirety. This film will create a good frame of reference and jumping off point for the novel, Dream While You’re Feeling Blue, and the concept of the lovesick woman on the homefront. It would be best implemented during the Preparation phase of PAR. Students can further embed the “WWII homefront” schema into their psyche by watching this film.

New Roles For Women

The next three selections reveal the WWII experiences of three very different types of women. Students would be responsible for choosing one of the works and reading particular excerpts which I have chosen. Students will collaborate with those who read the same book to share their thoughts on the material read. As a class, we will compare and contrast the characteristics and experiences of the women we have read.
Women Who Served

*Sisterhood of Spies*

Based primarily on interviews and the author’s personal experiences as an OSS officer, the book exemplifies an exciting period in our history when women served as a true Sisterhood of Spies. The first half of the book is an account of the different branches of the OSS that were responsible for activities such as coding, research, and propaganda. The chapters in the second half of the book focus more closely on the activities and experiences of individual women. She recounts numerous stories including those of women who went behind enemy lines and were captured by the Germans. The book shares some of the adventure and excitement that these women must have experienced, even as the chapters discuss the hardship and danger that they faced.

With a Fry Readability level of a college senior, this particular book is an important addition to the text set because military history of WWII rarely tells the story of the female operative; students will most likely be under the impression that women were generally nurses away from the line of fire. Students need to understand that, though they could not serve side by side, women still took on some of the same roles as men in enemy territory.

Excerpts from this text will require good background vocabulary. An advance organizer should be given to students in order to prepare them for the reading.

Women Who Played

*Dottie Wiltse Collins: Strikeout Queen of the AAGPBL*

With many of our baseball greats off to war, the American homefront longed for its favorite pastime. Philip Wrigley, capitalizing on the changing roles of women, created the All American Girls Professional Baseball League in hopes of generating a following similar to that of men’s minor and major leagues.

Dottie Wiltse, a softball player from California, played for the AAGPBL from 1944-1950, and is known as one of the most dominant pitchers the league had ever seen. Based on research and personal interviews, this work covers Dottie’s pitching career and experience on the road playing professional baseball.

I included this reading because I feel the significance of the League is too often overlooked. The League provided a sense of normalcy in a turbulent world, a release from the tensions of war, and yet another groundbreaking new role for women in America. Furthermore, the experience of women baseball players is rarely explored in the classroom. These women felt, in many ways, that each crack of the bat led the United States closer to victory. Women on the AAGPBL truly broke the social mold for women of the 1940s and showed that women really can “play ball.”

Based on its Fry Readability of Grade 10, this book should be relatively comprehensible for the average 11th grader. The book has a lot of “baseball talk” in it, a discourse which some students may not be familiar with. This may, in turn, make it hard for students to draw a personal connection with what they are reading, which could decrease the motivation to read.
**Women Of Internment Camps**

*Women of the Homefront*

On an 8th Grade Readability level, this collection of personal accounts is a wonderful representation of the ordinary lives of women on the homefront during World War II. A particular chapter of the book, titled, “When I lost my Liberty,” tells the story of Kiyoka Kurumada, a Chinese American girl relocated to an internment camp in California. In this six page story, Kurumada describes her experience at the camp. Because she arrived there as a young girl, students may be better able to draw a connection between Kurumada and themselves, empathizing with an individual from the past. It would be beneficial to compare the experience of those in internment camps in the United States with those in the Concentration Camps on Europe.

**Rosie And The Minority Worker**

During World War II women were expected to put down the oven mitt, put on a hard hat and take on the jobs which men had left behind for war. The government’s use of propaganda projected the image of Rosie the Riveter; a hard bodied female with polished nails, a painted face, and a lot of muscle. This fictitious woman on the homefront lifted heavy machinery by day and served meatloaf by night. Rosie gave women the impression that they could be strong and support their country, yet feminine at the same time.

The government’s Rosie campaign, however, did not include African Americans. Because racial discrimination was still rampant in the United States, propaganda ads failed to showcase the African American work force. Put simply, Rosie was white. I intend to use the next two text items together. The first, a multimedia presentation, showcases life on the homefront for Rosie the Riveter, while the second uncovers the world of the minority worker during the war.

**Rosie the Riveter; The American Homefront 1941-1945**

What better way to explore the social, political, and military aspects of the war than to present a slide show of propaganda posters, images, film, and audio of the homefront! This text addition is incredibly versatile. I would guide the discussion of the slides according to the student’s level of comprehension. Questions pertaining to the slides will vary in complexity. I would present this slideshow as an introduction to the unit in order to spark the student’s interest in the subject and provide a jumping off point for the material. An anticipatory guide will be given after the slideshow which presents a number of statements related to the material in which the students are asked to declare if they agree or disagree with the statement. Students will work in groups to debate it. As a Preparatory activity in the PAR framework, this exercise will get students talking about the material to come.
**Bitter Fruit; African American Women in World War II**

This anthology of African American literature sheds light on the accomplishments of African American women in the work force during war and their strides toward racial equality. This collection of poems and short stories is accompanied by short descriptions of the war, as well as the happenings on the homefront in order to give the reader a good frame of reference when tackling the poems. Selecting a few for the students to read will provide good instructional variety.

After watching the multimedia presentation and reading these poems, students will be able to draw a good contrast between the experiences of whites and blacks in the working world. On a 12th grade reading level, this text should be within reach of a good number of students as long as the appropriate background information and class time is given to discuss the meaning of the poems on how the students felt when reading them.

**Primary Source Collections**

**Our Mother’s War**

This work portrays women as equal partners in fighting and winning a war that forever transformed the way women participated in American society. It is an excellent representation of what American women from all walks of life were doing and thinking, on the homefront and abroad. *Our Mother’s War* investigates how the women of her mother's generation responded to this time when their country asked them to step into roles they had never been invited, or allowed, to fill before. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the journalist brings to life intimate tales of women working as spies, war correspondents, disc jockeys, pilots, and prostitutes, as well as women building ships, planes and bombs, sending their husbands, brothers and sons off to war, and joining the military themselves for the first time in American history.

Although this text has a Readability level of Grade 11, a particular segment of the text, which explores the “Wrong Kind of Woman” discusses controversial material that does not necessarily pertain to the SOLs. Therefore, the book should be carefully scanned before considering which material to use.
Connecting The Past With The Present

“Civilian Women Played Major Role In World War II Victory”

This article, presented on the Department of Defense website, was written in response to the unveiling of the Women in Military Service to America exhibit at the National Women’s History Museum. Women who worked on the homefront during the war and came for the event were interviewed, sharing a few words on their experiences serving their country. The inclusion of this article is a good closing activity for the unit on World War II women. It shows students that the work women did during this time has left a lasting impression on Americans and their dedication should be recognized and celebrated.

The article can be introduced during the Preparation stage of PAR to give students a general idea of the time period, the changing roles of women, and their commitment to the cause, or it could be read as a Reflection activity, summing up the unit. Regardless of when it is implemented, the article shows students that the war efforts of women were crucial to United States victory, and that all Americans should be aware of their contribution.
Reference


Rosie the Riveter: The American Homefront 1941-1945
Multimedia Presentation given by the Valentine Richmond History Center
4$ per student