



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM

The Changing Face of Women
Primary Documents:
Propaganda and Popular Opinion from WWII

A Lesson Plan from
the Education Department of the
The National World War II Museum

The National World War II Museum
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www.nationalww2museum.org

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The Changing Face of Women

Propaganda and Popular Opinion from WWII

American women played a vital role in the Allies victory in WWII. More than 400,000 served in the military and millions worked in defense industries on the home front. WWII gave women new opportunities for work and independence. Some people viewed these changes as positive, some as negative. Many people were ambivalent about the social changes that effected women during the war. This ambivalence can be explored in contemporary images of women from that era.

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn about the social expectations brought about by women entering the workforce during WWII by analyzing portrayals of women in wartime propaganda.

BENCHMARKS: **Grades 5-8:** H-1A-M2; H-1A-M3; H-1A-M4; H-1A-M5; H-1A-M15; H-1B-M17; H-1B-M18
Grades 9-12: C-1A-H3; C-1B-H3; C-1B-H4; H-1A-H2; H-1A-H3; H-1A-H4; H-1B-H17

INSTRUCTIONS:

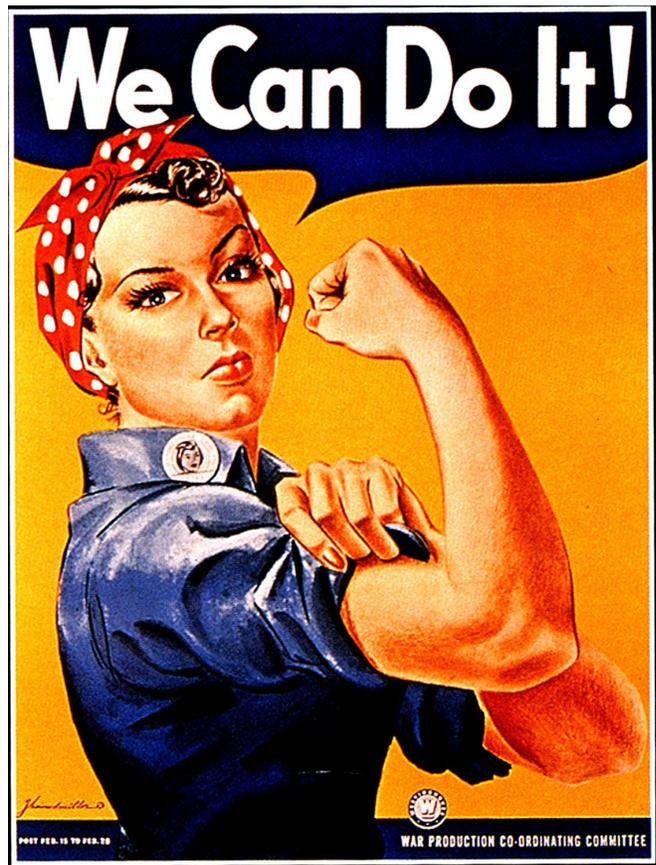
1. Present a brief lesson on the women’s experience of WWII. Focus on the experience of large numbers of women going to work to increase war production. Ask students what social conflicts this may have caused.
2. Pass out copies of the two images of Rosie the Riveter. Explain what a riveter is: a person who bonds two pieces of metal together with a nail-like bolt. Ships, planes, and other wartime vehicles were constructed with rivets. Students may either answer the questions individually or as pairs on a separate sheet of paper, or you may hold a group discussion using the questions. Remind students to pay close attention to details when analyzing propaganda posters.
3. If students answer questions on paper, end lesson by holding a brief discussion about the activity. Discuss which depiction students liked best, and why?

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the any written questions and the class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Have students look through current magazines for pictures of women and answer the following questions: What is the purpose of the picture? What characteristics does each women possess? Do you like the picture—why or why not?

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Compare these two images from 1943 of a woman war worker. The one on the left was painted by Norman Rockwell and appeared on the cover of the popular weekly magazine *Saturday Evening Post*. Graphic artist J. Howard Miller for the Westinghouse Corporation produced the one on the right.



Rockwell's woman has a big, muscular body and a dirty face. She holds her rivet gun and her lunch box with the name *Rosie* in her lap. Her feet are resting on a copy of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. The woman in Miller's image has fingernail polish, lipstick, rouge, plucked eyebrows and mascara. She is wearing a bandana and a work shirt and her company's identification button.

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Student Worksheet

Directions: answer the following questions about the two depictions of Rosie the Riveter:

1. What do these two women have in common (include physical characteristics and personality)?
2. How do they differ?
3. Which image do you think became more popular with the public during the war? Why?
4. Which image do you like better? Why?