

Documentary Lens Lesson Plan for *Home Front*

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Curriculum Connections

This lesson is suitable for students in Grades 9 to 11. The activities address the role of Canadian women and their contribution at the home front during World War II. Another key theme is propaganda. The lesson may be useful in Civics and Politics and in classes on media and gender-construction in Social Studies. The lesson is designed for two 75-minute classes.

Lesson Objectives

This lesson explores the role of Canadian women on the home front during World War II and the way that role was portrayed in the media. Students will analyze propaganda and reflect on the way that gender roles have been constructed in Canadian society, particularly during times of war.

Outcomes/Expectations

- Show an understanding of Canada's participation in World War II. (Key Concept: Global Connections)
- Demonstrate an understanding of the contributions on the home front made by various social and political movements: women's groups, various ethnic organizations, citizens in different regions of Canada. (Multiple Perspectives and Key Concepts: Places and People, and Culture and Community)
- A) Ask questions, identify problems and use historical research methods to investigate topics and issues in history; B) communicate the results of such research in presentations, while applying insights from history to other situations. (Historical Inquiry skills)
- Distinguish historical changes in the roles, perception and rights of women in Canada. (Identity and Key Concept, Time, Continuity and Change)

Assessment Strategies

Activities 4 and 5 may be assessed either formally or informally. There are details after each of these activities.

Background

The synopsis of *Home Front* at the Documentary Lens Web site reads as follows:

During World War I Canadian women watched a half-million of their men march into the unknown. With the outbreak of World War II they once again shouldered the tasks of maintaining the home front and providing the support needed by the fighting men.

On a more analytical note, this documentary, which was produced by the National Film Board in 1940, effectively contrasts the roles of Canadian men and women during a time of war.

This film is a jewel of Canadian gender-role propaganda, ripe for historical interpretation and analysis. Through the narrator's words and the montage of images, each female contribution to the war effort is framed in terms of how it supports the fighting men. The documentary emphasizes the nursing, organizational and administrative skills of Canadian women, whose task it was to repair the damage caused by war and to help fuel a Canadian victory on the battlefield.

Home Front acknowledges the young women who trained as drivers, the contributions of aircraft designer Elizabeth MacGill, and mentions a few other less traditional activities undertaken by women. Unfortunately, while women munitions workers (in Ontario) are mentioned, we see no images of Canadian Rosie the Riveters. The film also focuses on white, primarily Anglo-Saxon women, making no mention, for instance, of the contributions of various ethnic women's organizations.

Although several of the scenes are clearly staged, they are rather charmingly executed. The soundtrack is very lively and powerful, with the introductory number paying a brassy "God Save the Queen," followed by a stirring rendition of "Auld Lang Syne." The male narrator is upbeat and dramatic.

Materials and Resources

- TV/VCR to show *Home Front*
- Poster paper
- Photocopies of Appendices A and B

Activities for *Home Front*

Introductory Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Defining Propaganda (15 minutes)

Explain that propaganda can take many forms: posters and other artwork, video and TV shows, advertisements, books, magazine articles, films, plays, speeches, music, T-shirts, textbooks, news programs, etc.

Although originally a neutral term, today "propaganda" implies strong bias and the tendency to use half-truths and outright lies to idealize or denigrate a particular viewpoint or opinion. It is most often viewed as a political tool.

In a brainstorming session, have students list the types of propaganda they see and hear around them every day.

Developing Concepts

ACTIVITY 2: The Effect of a Narrator (10 minutes)

One of the focus questions in the “What to Watch For” section of the Documentary Lens Web site points out that this film, about women, is narrated by a man. How might a female narrative voice have made a difference to the target audience for this documentary?

By discussing this intriguing question, students can develop their communication abilities as well as their creative and critical thinking skills.

Step 1: Ask a female volunteer to read the first couple minutes of the film from an excerpt of the transcript (Appendix A). Begin showing the film with the volume off, and at the end of the credits, give a signal to the student to begin reading to the class. She should finish reading by the time the documentary shows women training as drivers. Then rewind the tape to the beginning, and either show it with the sound on, or repeat the activity with a male student as the narrator.

Step 2: You can ask these follow-up questions immediately after students have heard and watched the introduction to the film as narrated by male and female voices. Or you could save the discussion until after students have seen the entire film.

- How did the narrator influence your understanding of the opening sequence of the film? Think back: what were your impressions of women’s wartime contributions when (female student’s name) read the voice-over? What adjectives would you use to describe it? Did your feelings change when you heard the male narrator/(male student’s name)?
- Why do you think a man was chosen? What does a man’s voice represent that a woman’s might not?

ACTIVITY 3: Discussing the *Home Front*

The following questions, ranked in order of difficulty, can be used for discussions as a class, in small group or in pairs. This task involves communication, critical thinking, historical thinking, decision-making and problem-solving skills.

- According to this documentary, what roles did Canadian women play on the home front during World War II?
- Summarize in one or two words how the film characterized women’s role during wartime. How were women perceived in Canadian society during the 1940s?
- Who was the target audience for this documentary? Provide evidence for your response.
- Is anyone missing from this documentary? If so, why?
- What was the purpose of this film? Was there more than one message? If so, what were they? Were all of these messages deliberate or were any unintentional on the part of the filmmakers?
- Is this documentary an example of propaganda? Give clear evidence for your response with examples from the film’s footage and narration.
- If you were to make a documentary today on the same subject, what would you do differently? What would you do the same?

Applying Concepts

ACTIVITY 4: Editing *Home Front* for a Specific Target Audience, Group Activity

Give each student a copy of the Editing *Home Front* Worksheet (Appendix B). You will need to add the name of your course to the worksheet, and you may want to adapt the list of “Various ethnic groups” and “Various regions” so that they apply to your students and their community.

You may finish this activity in a single class, in about 20 to 25 minutes, or you may have students present their editing proposals to each other during the next class. This would be particularly beneficial in the case of those student groups who are focusing on some of the ethnocultural groups that were ignored in the film, as students would then be teaching one another about the contributions of a range of groups not otherwise discussed in the lesson.

Assessment Strategy for Activity 4

Assessing group activity skills: Either formal or informal assessment with a possible marking scheme as follows:

- Communication: participation in group brainstorming (recorder is graded upon his/her notes; other group members, on their actual discussion, as observed by teacher) /2
- Knowledge and Understanding: use of key terms and concepts related to the home front and propaganda; demonstrating familiarity with historical place (the home front in Canada) and period (World War II) /2
- Thinking and Inquiry: propose changes to film appropriate for demographic group and historical time period; propose maintaining aspects of the film appropriate for demographic group and historical time period /2
- Application: provides a rationale statement that is clear, thorough, logical and addresses all the major solutions posited in the group’s proposal /1

ACTIVITY 5: Creating Propaganda for the Canadian Bureau for Wartime Propaganda

Ask students to imagine that it is 1943. They are graphic artists, speech writers, poets or musicians hired by the Canadian Bureau for Wartime Propaganda to encourage women to contribute wholeheartedly to the home front war effort. This task can be done in groups or individually. Choose one of the following:

- A propaganda poster that must include an image (drawn, collage, photo, etc.), a powerful slogan and a caption (a sentence that offers supplementary information—the “fine print”)
- A rallying speech two to three minutes long to record on cassette, CD or video, or to type (two pages, double spaced)
- A patriotic song or poem of four verses/stanzas in length (bonus marks for musical score/beat track or outstanding lyricism)

Assessment Strategy for Activity 5

Evaluate communication skills as well as their critical and creative thinking. Give bonus marks for outstanding creativity and persuasive power. Choose either formal or informal assessment with a possible marking scheme:

- Communication: clear, dynamic communication of ideas and information; logically organized, smooth flow and style /2
- Knowledge and Understanding: use of key terms and concepts related to home front and propaganda; demonstrates familiarity with historical place (home front in Canada) and period (World War II) /2

- Thinking and Inquiry: effectively encourages women to pursue specific home front activities; uses conventions appropriate to the medium used (for example, poster, speech, song,) /2
- Application: applies knowledge of home front, gender roles during the 1940s, and wartime propaganda to create insightful home front appeal /2

Appendix A

Transcript of Opening Narration of *Home Front* (1940, NFB)

As each day brings the war closer to her shores, Canada mobilizes her men and her wealth to meet the challenge. And behind the fighting lines another all-important front is taking up position – the home front – manned by the nation's three million women. Today, for the second time in a generation, these women of Canada know the heartbreak of war. For the second time, they have become the living link between home and inferno.

Today the menfolk face ordeals such as men have never had to meet before. And as they did at Vimy Ridge a quarter century ago, they face them without flinching.

But far from the battle front, the women of Canada turn calmly to their eternal task in war – the relief of human suffering.

And as the total war developed today has produced new weapons of ever greater destruction, so science strives to perfect new methods of restoring its victims to life and vigour. It was Canadian doctors who discovered that blood, so often needed to give strength to wounded men, could be preserved until required by a process of condensation. Today, in Toronto, Canadian women play a leading part in this latest marvel of medicine, collecting and storing the blood that may save many a soldier's life. And today, through hospitals throughout the land, comes a new generation, learning its country's great tradition of nursing skills, preparing for whatever sacrifices it might be called on to make.

Appendix B

Editing *Home Front* Worksheet

Name: _____ Date: _____

Congratulations!

You are all famous Hollywood North film editors working in Vancouver and Toronto. You are renowned for your talents in editing a film so that it appeals precisely to the audience your director and producers are targeting.

One day, as you rifle through the usual collection of celebrity wedding invitations, adoring fan mail and glossy magazines in your oversized mailbox, you find a package from the National Film Board of Canada. In it is a copy of their documentary *Home Front*, which you so enjoyed in your _____ (Insert course name here) class back at _____ High School.

The NFB has attached a personal request for you to edit the classic film in order to appeal to a very specific demographic during the war. (Remember, it's the 1940s!)

Instructions:

Work with your group to develop a plan. First, nominate a recorder to take notes as you brainstorm and to write out your final plan. Use point form to list the things you would change, add and keep the same about the film. Include specific examples. What will you emphasize? What will you ignore?

With the other members of your group, compose a rationale or brief paragraph explaining why you would make these changes or keep certain elements intact. You may need to do research about your target group during this historic period. This knowledge will help you get your message across. Good Luck!!

Sample Target Audiences (1940s)

Teenage girls Teenage boys Children Housewives/Mothers Career women Businessmen	Senior citizens Various ethnic groups, for example, Aboriginal, Italian, Russian, French Canadian Various regions, for example, Western Canada, Atlantic region, Northern Canadians, urban, rural
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