

On All Fronts
World War II and the NFB
Lesson plan for *Rosies of the North*

By Pat Pederson, secondary school teacher
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Overall Objective

This unit focuses on how much the role of women in the workplace changed in the 20th century. The critical time period here is WWII.

Grade level

Advanced 9–12 and beyond. This unit can be adapted to younger grades and different courses of study in various Canadian provinces and territories.

Content Areas

Social Studies
History
English/Language Arts
Multimedia/Video Editing
Canadian Studies
Women's Studies

Content items used (film and excerpts)

Rosies of the North, 1999 (46 m 30 s)
Excerpt 1 (10 m 4 s – 14 m 49 s)
Excerpt 2 (21 m 36 s – 24 m 43 s)
Excerpt 3 (29 m 57 s – 33 m 1 s)

NB: Content items can be viewed online free of charge at <www.nfb.ca/ww2>.

Materials Required

Access to a computer lab, Internet connection, Web camera, proxima projector, digital camera/recording device. If a media/digital course – editing software/equipment would be required.

Summary

They raised children, baked cakes... and built world-class fighter planes. Sixty years ago, thousands of women from Thunder Bay and the Prairies donned trousers, packed lunch pails and took up rivet guns to participate in the greatest industrial war effort in Canadian history. Like many other factories across the country from 1939 to 1945, the shop floor at Fort William's Canadian Car and Foundry was transformed from an all-male workforce to one with 40 per cent female workers.

Remarkable footage of women during WWII and recent interviews with some of these same women show how the role and the work of women changed dramatically over the period of the Second World War. The learning activities explore this critical period in Canadian history through the eyes of those who were there.

Introduction Activity: Is it only about being a soldier?

(10-15 minutes per handout version, 30 minutes for extension activity)

Objective – To emphasize that there are many roles people play in wartime, in addition to serving on the front.

Use Handout 1 for younger students. (Older students should be able to brainstorm a list in class.) The handout provides a suggested list of 'jobs' that need to be done during wartime. The task is to place these jobs in either the Women or Men boxes based on what students think would have been the division of labour before WWII. You can extend this activity by changing the time period on the handout to during and then after WWII.

Extension activity: Ask students individually or in groups to report back to the whole class to answer these questions:

1. What new jobs did women begin to do?
2. How did having women do these jobs support the men who were fighting?
3. How was Canada's ability to remain strong in the war a result of the willingness of women to work in non-traditional roles?
4. How do you think the lives of the women who were interviewed changed because of their work experience?
5. What is implied about what is going to happen to the working women after the men return from the war?

ACTIVITY 1: Who were they, then and now? 3–5 classes (50 minutes each)

Objective: To encourage students to make a personal connection to the women who lived and worked on the home front during WWII and to understand what happened to those women after the war ended.

Step 1: Have students find women in the community who may have participated in some way in WWII.

Step 2: Students choose one of the following activities:

- a) Interview the woman in person. Handout 2 suggests interview questions. This could also be a video editing project.
- b) Do a research project on a particular woman and/or the job that she took on during WWII. Find out what happened to her after the war ended.

Step 3: For an English or writing class, students could write a 1-page, first-person narrative based on the conversation they had with the woman interviewed. See Handout 3 for an example.

ACTIVITY 2: Comparisons, then and now! 2–5 classes (50 minutes each)

Step 1: View the three video clips – excerpt 1, 2 and 3.

Step 2: Students choose one of the three themes and do a comparison between then and now:

- a) Women working in non-traditional industries
- b) Women and men’s moral codes
- c) Working conditions

Students use the video clips as their primary information source for the early 1940s. However, for a) and c) students could do research about the workforce of the aerospace industry today and create a comparison chart, PowerPoint or paper. If students have chosen b), they could write a paper comparing acceptable behaviour for men and women in the 1940s with today.

Extension activity: For b) above, students could create posters that might have been put up around the factory indicating what would be considered appropriate behaviour for women at that time. (Similar to an anti-smoking, Say No, or anti-drug campaigns of today.)

Closure Activity/Check for Understanding (20-30 minutes)

Note the questions in the extension and the introduction activities. Additional questions, particularly for older students, could be:

1. What are the economic implications for a country that goes to war?
2. Do you think a country can benefit economically from being at war? Explain.
3. Do you think that women’s role in the workplace had a positive impact on technological development during the war? Explain your answer.
4. When you have spent time with someone who has survived a war, does this change how *you* think of war? What do you think now when you see an elderly person walking down the street?

Evaluation rubric

Rubrics can be created by the teacher using the following tool.

<www.2learn.ca/construct/rubric/flcrubric.html>

References and Resources

http://www.mccord-museum.qc.ca/scripts/explore.php?Lang=1&tableid=11&tablename=theme&elementid=10_true&pageid=ew_1.1

On the McCord Museum Web site there are still images of shipbuilding in Vancouver. This could be used to supplement the comparison activity in Activity 2a and 2c.

http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/Rosie.html
<http://www.rosietheriveter.org/painting.htm>

The Norman Rockwell picture of Rosie the Riveter (U.S.)

http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-71-855-5466/conflict_war/women_ww2/
Canada's own Rosie. CBC Archive article about the *Rosies of the North*.

<http://archives.cbc.ca/500f.asp?id=1-71-855-5108>
Radio program about women after the war. In addition, there are a number of sound clips linked here that are excellent for use in Activity 2.

<http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/war-industry/index-e.html>
Series of pictures of women working during the war.

<http://www.sciencetech.technomuses.ca/english/collection/innovation03.cfm>
Queen of the Hurricanes

APPENDIX

- In the introductory activity, you could discuss stereotypes and how we label people and work based on gender. This would be a good time to talk about the term “women’s work.” Depending on the age of student, this could become an in-depth discussion about Canadian social norms and where they come from.
- Contact the local Legion for a guest speaker or ask your class if there are women who would be willing to come in and talk about their experience during WWII. We often have veterans come in during Remembrance Day. This is an opportunity to look at other aspects of a country during wartime.
- During Activity 2, when students are comparing then and now, talk about the film clip that shows a child left outside on a rope. Do students think that Canada was a safer society in the sense that no one would kidnap the child? What would happen to a parent today who did something similar?
- Take the opportunity when showing the film to pause and discuss some of the images. It is interesting to contrast the women of the two time periods.
- The women in the factory, all single, would work all day and dance late into the night. Ask students to think of their grandmothers. Can they imagine their grandmothers dancing all night after having worked all day?
- Talk about the music of the time, and contrast it with current dance music. What would life have been like where you needed a matron to watch over you?

Rosies of the North Handout 1

1. Brainstorm jobs that need to be performed when a country is at war.
2. Add your items to the suggested list below.
3. Place jobs in the boxes below according to what you think was 'acceptable' prior to 1939 in Canada.
4. Using new sheets repeat this activity for the period during WWII and then post-WWII.

Jobs		
Men	Both	Women

Potential Jobs: Soldiers, Nurses, Factory workers, Farmers, Government officials, Stay-at-home parent, Providers (wage earner for family), Factory owners, Engineers, Secretaries, Farmers, Welders, Construction workers, Loggers, Teachers,

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Rosies of the North Handout 2

Suggested Interview Questions

HELPFUL TIPS: Explain clearly why you are conducting the interview and how you plan to use the answers. After you ask a question, wait and allow the person to answer fully. Make eye contact. Be polite.

1. Do you remember the day that Canada entered WWII?
2. How old were you?
3. Did a male family member serve in the war? If so, who? How did you feel about them leaving? Did you understand what they were going to do?
4. How did you get information about what was happening during the war? How did you know where soldiers were fighting and in what countries?
5. When did Canada being at war affect your life at home? For example, rationing, shortages, requests for women to join the workforce.
6. Did you end up working outside of your home during the war?
7. Were you married? Did you get married during the war? To a soldier or to someone who could not/did not serve?
8. What do you remember about the music at the beginning of the war? During the war? After the war?
9. Did you attend dances? How did your parents feel about the changing society?
10. What were you doing on the day that you heard the war was over?
11. What happened once the soldiers started to return home?

Rosies of the North Handout 3

Taken from the Veteran Affairs Canada Web site – “My Grandmother’s Wartime Diary”

<http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/general/sub.cfm?source=history/secondwar/diary/grandmother/mckenzie>

Gladys (Hawkins) McKenzie

The following is submitted by Ruth McKenzie of the Prairie Region. It is a wartime story, as told to her by her mother, Gladys (Hawkins) McKenzie.



In October of 1942, after harvest on the farm, I enrolled in the War Emergency Training Program (WETP) in Moose Jaw. I was 22 years old and had grown up on a farm 70 kilometres southeast of Moose Jaw. Through WETP, I received training in machine shop work, learning the operation of machines like lathes, planes and drills. I also had instruction in drafting, reading blue prints and hand tooling metal goods. I was recruited by the John Ingles War Factory in Toronto, along with some forty other girls from the Moose Jaw classes.

We travelled to Toronto by train in the luxury of a private day coach, enjoying our trip of two days and two nights. At Toronto we were met at the station, assigned billets in private homes and told which section to report to at the factory. All of us were sent to different billets, assigned to different sections in the plant and worked different shifts, so we didn't see much of each other once we got to Toronto.

On the first morning, I had to get to the street car stop in the darkness of an early December morning which was really dark because Toronto was on double daylight saving time. I had no idea how long the ride would be across the city. The conductor called out the street names, which all sounded the same in his English accent. The ride was over an hour and I was scared of missing my stop so I kept asking the driver if this was my stop. I'll bet he was glad when my stop finally came.

At the John Ingles Plant, I was assigned to the barrel setting division for Bren gun manufacture where I worked for one year and then was reassigned to one of the barrel divisions. In this work, we used powered grindstones to shape and smooth the gun barrel to exact specifications. My daily quota was 500 barrels. If one of the other machine operators was absent, we had to cover off the extra machine and keep up the unit's daily quota.

The job paid \$42 per week and I paid \$20 per month for my room. We got a full hot meal at the factory for 35 cents and I managed small meals back at my room. Leaving home and working in a factory was quite an experience for me. I learned to adapt but never wanted to stay in Toronto. I made some good friends in the factory and we had some good times together, but after three years, I was ready to come back to Saskatchewan and help my older brother on his farm.

I know we were making equipment to help win the war, but it was upsetting to walk by the shipping room and see all the guns and crates piled up. I thought about all those men shooting at each other and thought of my boyfriend overseas. Fortunately, he came home without injury and we were married in 1947, but that's another story.

Gladys (Hawkins) McKenzie