

# WWII HOMEFRONT PROGRAM



## ST. LOUIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### OBJECTIVES

### COMMON CORE STANDARDS

### LESSON ACTIVITIES

- At the end of this program, students will have the opportunity to:
  - Create their own propaganda posters (digital and in-person templates available)
  - Write their own WWII-era letter to a loved one overseas

*Templates for modernized versions of above activities also provided (i.e. Create your own COVID-19 propaganda poster).*

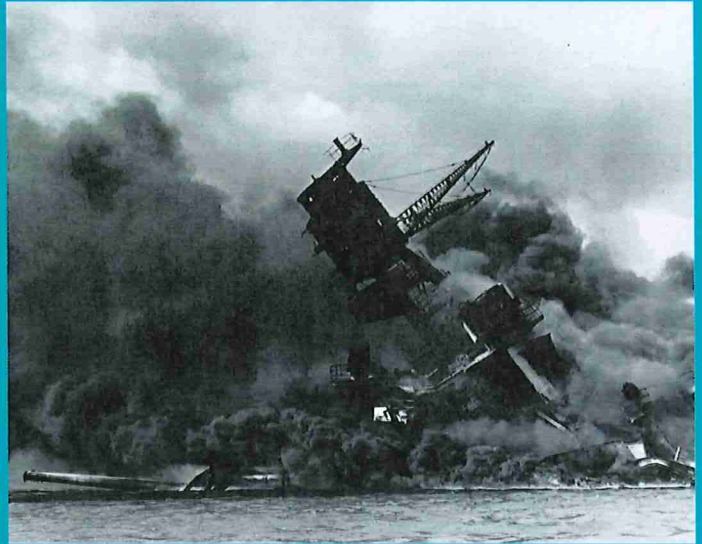
### RESOURCES

- "How Kids Helped Win WWII"
  - <https://getinthescrap.org/kids-in-wwii/> Example activities: <https://getinthescrap.org/how-to/#activities>
- "Introduction to World War II and Victory Gardens"
  - <https://extension.uga.edu/content/dam/extension/programs-and-services/school-gardens/documents/5-Historical-Victory-Garden-and-WWII.pdf>
- "A Short History of the Victory Garden"
  - <https://www.latimes.com/lifestyle/story/2020-04-16/a-history-of-victory-gardens>
- "Women and the Homefront During World War II"
  - <https://libguides.mnhs.org/Homefront>

- "St. Louis County Homefront During World War II" by Margie Nelson and Emma Van Winkle

## **BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO WWII**

Just twenty years after the U.S. and its allies defeated Germany in World War I, war again spread across the globe in the 1930s. In 1931, Japan invaded China, and in 1939, Germany invaded Poland. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and the United States joined the war. From that point on, nearly 16 million Americans (mostly men, but also women) fought in the war. Men and women from northeastern Minnesota enlisted in record numbers, serving around the world in Europe, Africa, Asia, and the South Pacific.



*The USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor*

## **LIFE ON THE HOMEFRONT DURING WWII**

But not everyone fought overseas during World War II; life on the Homefront was just as important in the war effort. During the war, women and children made up the majority of those living and working on the Homefront. Because many of America's men were deployed overseas, gender roles were dramatically altered during this time, with many women entering the workforce to take over the jobs that their husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers left behind. Joining the workforce gave American women a sense of freedom and empowerment that many had never felt before.

## **WOMEN ON THE HOMEFRONT**

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, many Americans began to seek ways to help their country in the war effort. For many Americans -- especially men -- enlisting to serve in the newly-declared war against Japan and Germany. Those who did not enlist became part of the home front efforts to maintain a steady stream of supplies to the Allied forces. In St. Louis County, maintaining the iron mines and shipbuilding quickly became priorities in the war effort. Because so many men were off fighting overseas, women were often left to pick up the jobs left behind by their fathers, brothers, and sons. For the first time in American history, women made up 1/4th of the workforce, quickly becoming

## CHILDREN ON THE HOMEFRONT

American children also played an important role in the war effort. Many children saved their allowances to buy war stamps and bonds, helped their families ration food and necessities, gathered scrap materials that could be donated to defense plants that could use the materials in the production of much-needed military equipment, and also helped their families and communities plant Victory gardens.

## WAR STAMPS AND BONDS

During World War II, United States war bonds served two purposes: to finance the war and to take money out of circulation to prevent inflation. Bonds could be purchased beginning at \$25, or war stamps could be purchased at a much cheaper rate and saved in a book to be redeemed for a bond once it was filled. When Americans purchased war bonds and stamps, they were essentially loaning the United States money for the war effort.



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

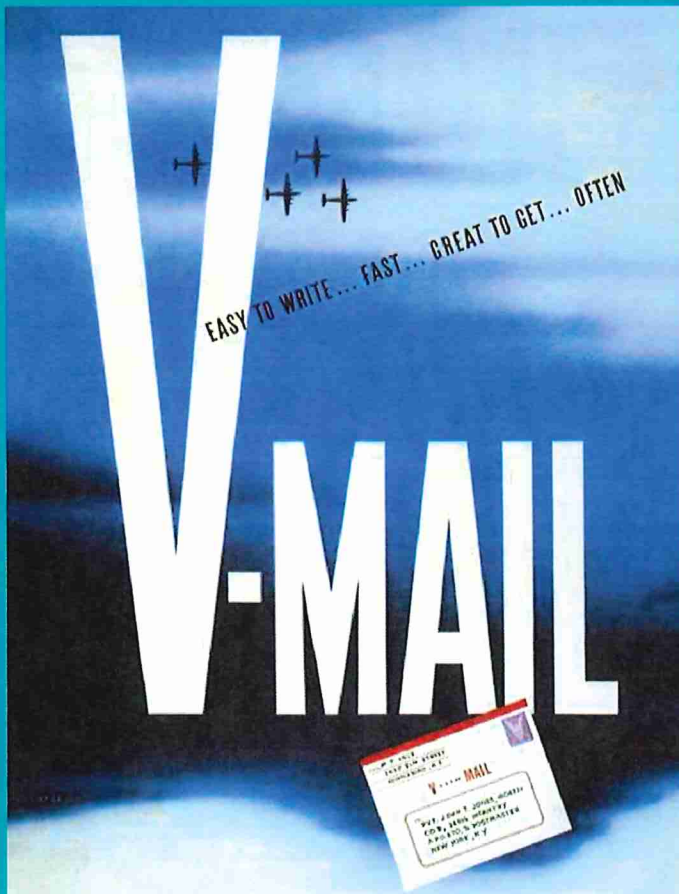
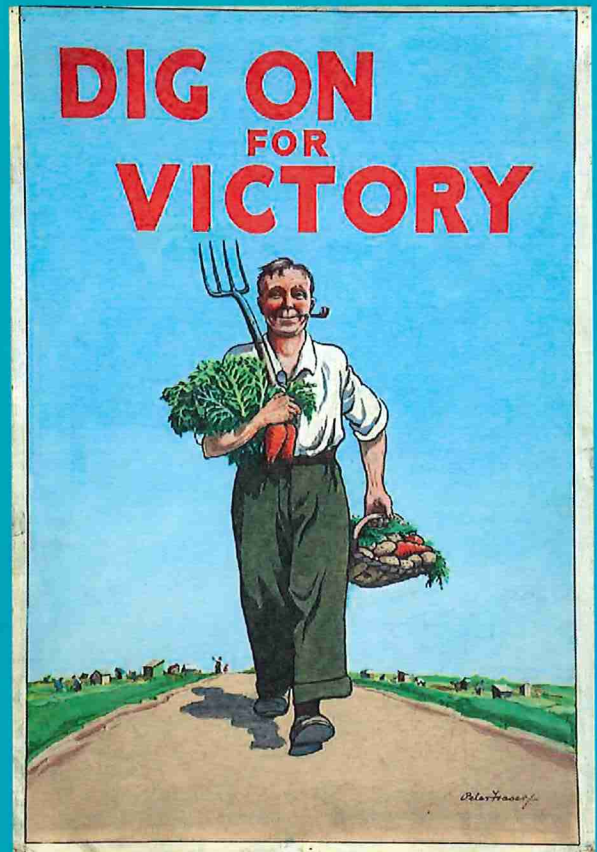


## RATIONING & GATHERING SCRAPS

Common household materials such as rubber, tin cans, and cooking grease were extremely useful in the war effort. Tin from cans, for example, could be melted down to create necessary materials needed in war such as bullets for machine guns. Leftover cooking grease from fatty foods like bacon was also useful, as it could be rendered (melted down) to create glycerin, which could be used to create explosives.

## VICTORY GARDENS

Victory gardens were a particularly popular way for children and families to contribute to the war effort from the Homefront during World War II. The food grown in these gardens accounted for approximately 40% of the country's food supply during World War II. Victory Gardens have made a resurgence in the year 2020 amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic as families and communities have tried to conserve food and tried their hand at growing and harvesting their own.



## V-MAIL (VICTORY MAIL)

During World War II, letter writing was an easy way to keep in contact with loved ones fighting overseas. Receiving letters helped boost morale for soldiers as they braved the uncertainty of the war. Because sending letters overseas could be costly, V-Mail or Victory Mail was developed to provide Americans an easy and cost-efficient way to keep in contact with loved ones. To keep the cost of postage down, V-Mail was written on film strips that were smaller, easier, and faster to mail.

## ST. LOUIS COUNTY DURING WWII

Luckily, no enemy attacks took place in St. Louis County during World War II despite Duluth being a harbor city and therefore an ideal target. St. Louis County was, however, a significant contributor to the war effort in terms of providing much needed supplies through shipbuilding and mining.

During WWII, Minnesota workers mined 70 percent of the iron ore produced in the United States. Workers transformed the ore into much-needed military supplies for the Allied forces, including airplanes, ships, trucks, tanks, artillery weapons and shells, helmets, and nails.

For their exceptional contributions to the war effort, Duluth's Clyde Iron Works and other northeastern Minnesota industries won WWII Army-Navy "E" awards for excellence in their work.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**Question 1:** If you were a child living on the Homefront during WWII, what do you think you would have been doing?

- Planting a Victory garden? Saving your allowance to purchase war stamps? Collecting scraps? Sending V-Mail to loved ones overseas?

**Question 2:** Are there any similarities between life on the Homefront during WWII and life in the year 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what are they?

# WWII HOMEFRONT PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY #1:

### CREATE YOUR OWN PROPAGANDA POSTER

*This activity is intended for elementary and middle school-aged students and may be completed digitally or offline.*

**Propaganda** was a form of media (posters, short films, radio advertisements, etc.) commonly used during World War II to influence individuals and communities to think and act a certain way. In Nazi Germany, propaganda was often used to spread fear and misinformation to promote Hitler's biased and harmful ideologies. In the United States, however, propaganda was often used in a positive manner to encourage individuals and communities to contribute to the war effort in any way that they could, whether it be by planting a Victory garden, buying war stamps/bonds, or gathering scrap materials to donate.

Today, propaganda-style advertisements are still used to encourage people to do certain things or think a certain way. Some examples include political advertisements to promote a candidate or protest signs. Propaganda has also been influential in modern times during the COVID-19 pandemic. Advertisements and posters encouraging people to wear masks and social distance have influenced individuals and communities to do their part in helping to stop the spread of the virus and protect others.

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For this activity, have your students imagine that they are living on the homefront during World War II. They have friends and family members fighting overseas, and now they need to do their part in aiding in the war effort from home. They've planted a Victory garden with their family and written countless letters to loved ones serving overseas. Now, it's time to encourage their friends and community to do the same by making their own propaganda posters!

**Digital version** of activity and activity directions can be accessed here:

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11EgU64aURXKGwV4CBzItHa\\_zYIAX0G3?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/11EgU64aURXKGwV4CBzItHa_zYIAX0G3?usp=sharing)

**Offline version** of activity requires the following materials:

- Paper, coloring utensils (markers, colored pencils, crayons, pencils)
- Printed and/or digital examples of real propaganda posters for students to refer to
  - See examples provided in lesson plan or gather your own from the internet

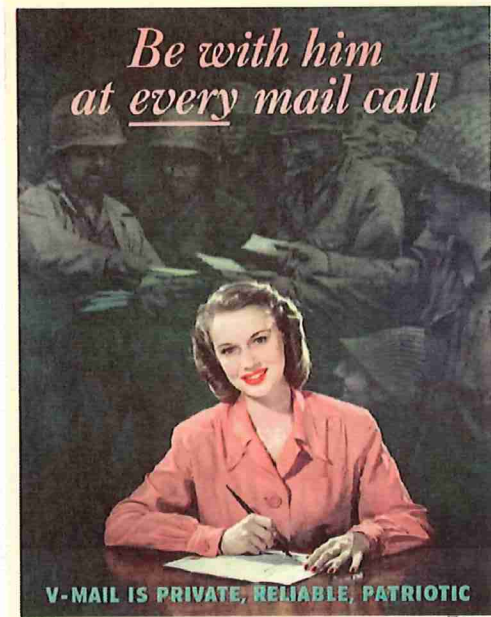
## ACTIVITY #2:

# LETTER WRITING

*This activity is intended for students in grades 1-8*

During World War II, letter writing was an easy way to keep in contact with loved ones fighting overseas. Receiving letters helped boost morale for soldiers as they braved the uncertainty of the war.

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### *Materials needed:*

- Paper/stationary
- Writing utensils (pencils/pens)
- Envelopes
- Stamps (optional)

For this activity, have students write a short letter to a loved one fighting overseas. Build on the previous poster activity by encourage students to write about the ways they have contributed to the war effort on the Homefront (which they have now done by making posters and encouraging their community to help out in any way that they can).

If approaching this activity through a modern context, have students write letters to loved ones that they may not have seen for a while due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Again, encourage the students to tell their loved ones about the ways that they have contributed to slowing the spread of COVID-19 (by making posters and encouraging their peers to wear masks, socially distancing, safely keeping in contact with loved ones through letter writing, phone calls, video calls, etc). Provide students with envelopes and postage to send their letters once they are finished.

## PHOTO CREDITS

### Page 2

- "USS Arizona (BB-39) burning after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor"
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_USS\\_Arizona\\_\(BB-39\)\\_burning\\_after\\_the\\_Japanese\\_attack\\_on\\_Pearl\\_Harbor\\_-\\_NARA\\_195617\\_-\\_Edit.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_USS_Arizona_(BB-39)_burning_after_the_Japanese_attack_on_Pearl_Harbor_-_NARA_195617_-_Edit.jpg)

### Page 3

- "Protect His Future" propaganda poster
  - <https://movieposters.ha.com/itm/movie-posters/war/world-war-ii-propaganda-poster-us-government-printing-office-1944-bonds-poster-28-x-40-protect-his-future-war/a/161727-51470.s>
- "Save Scrap for Victory!" propaganda poster
  - <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=158392&picture=scrap-vintage-salvage-poster>

### Page 4

- "Dig on for Victory" propaganda poster
  - [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:INF3-96\\_Food\\_Production\\_Dig\\_for\\_Victory\\_Artist\\_Peter\\_Fraser.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:INF3-96_Food_Production_Dig_for_Victory_Artist_Peter_Fraser.jpg)
- "V-Mail" propaganda poster
  - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-mail#/media/File:V\\_Mail\\_Poster\\_WW2.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V-mail#/media/File:V_Mail_Poster_WW2.jpg)

### Page 7

- "Be with him at every mail call" propaganda poster
  - <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc473/>