

INTRODUCTION

During World War II, approximately 16 million Americans served in the military. Over half a million were offered the opportunity to anonymously write their opinions on combat and other topics in a series of surveys given by the Army Research Branch. These handwritten opinions sat largely untouched for decades until digitized and transcribed by The American Soldier in World War II project. This lesson plan utilizes a selection of these transcriptions to help students critically analyze primary sources to better understand the reality of the home front during World War II.

Students will also have the opportunity to use the **SCIM-C Method**. This method of analysis has been created to help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to interpret historical primary sources and investigate meaningful historical questions.



GRADE LEVEL

High School/College Introductory (Age 16+)

TIME REQUIREMENT

60 minutes

MATERIALS

- Copies of **The Home Front Overview Essays**
- Copies of Home Front Responses for each group of students
- Copies of **Student Worksheet** for each student

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to describe and explain the diverse views/experiences on the home front during WWII by analyzing primary source documents on soldiers' experiences. They will revise their historical interpretation after reading each source, recognizing that by synthesizing information from multiple perspectives they can develop a richer, more accurate summary of the past.

KEY TERMS

Primary sources: textual or visual materials created during the historical moment you are studying, such as letters, diary entries, photographs, posters, and newspaper articles

Secondary sources: materials created well after the events they discuss by someone who did not experience them firsthand. Books, journal articles, encyclopedia entries, and documentaries are good examples.

PROCEDURES

1. Begin by either having students read the overview essay, “The Home Front,” to themselves or reading it together as a class. Once students have finished reading the essay, have them take a moment to write down some notes summarizing the experience of American GIs with the home front based on what they read. Ask a few students to identify the following about this text:
 - a. Identify 3 important details about soldiers’ experiences with the home front detailed in the essay.
 - b. Identify 2 ways in which these experiences are still relevant to life in America today.
 - c. Identify 1 question you have or 1 source you would need to better understand these experiences.

(15 minutes)
2. Review the key terms listed above.
3. Ask students whether the essay they just read is a primary or secondary source and how they can tell. Ask them what kinds of sources might be useful for learning more about what it was like to be a soldier during World War II (e.g., letters, diary entries, oral histories, maps or photographs of a training camp, a training manual, etc.). (5 minutes)
4. Explain that students will now have the opportunity to build on their historical summaries of the home front during the war by reading actual survey responses that soldiers wrote during World War II. You may choose for students to complete the activity individually or in groups. Distribute copies of the primary source responses and the Student Worksheet to each student or group.
5. Instruct students to start by analyzing just one of the letters. Have them complete Part I of the **Student Worksheet** once they finish reading. (10 minutes)
6. Have students read some of the additional responses, revising their historical summary each time and answering the questions on the **Student Worksheet**. Students can also think about the below questions when reading specific documents. (20 minutes)
7. Return to the whole class to debrief. The object is for students to realize that while each primary source is a useful tool, the best historical interpretations will synthesize information from multiple perspectives. Here are some possible discussion questions: (10 minutes)
 - a. How did your historical summary change after you read the first response?
 - b. Did any of your responses contradict one another? How did you handle that in writing your summary?
 - c. Was there any one response that helped you the most in developing your summary? If so, why was it so helpful?
 - d. What details do you wish you knew more about before writing this summary?
 - e. What kinds of sources might help you find that information?

ASSESSMENT

You will be able to assess students' abilities to analyze individual primary sources based on the historical summaries they write, as well as the answers they provide on the **Student Worksheet**. You will be able to assess their ability to synthesize information from multiple sources and recognize the value of that process based on their historical summaries and the answers they give in discussion. You will also be able to assess their questioning of the sources provided to them.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

[Life in the Infantry \(Article\)](#)

[Battle of the Bulge \(Video\)](#)

EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT

1. Have students visit [The American Soldier in World War II](#) website and search for keywords surrounding the home front. Ask students to revise their historical summary after taking the information they find into account, and have them explain how the new source(s) helped enhance their understanding of what it was like for soldiers during World War II.

Potential Keywords: civilian, home, family, home front, factory, furlough, bonds, war worker, wife

2. Have students choose their favorite response out of the ones they read and do a “deep analysis,” extracting as much information as possible about the writer—what he liked or disliked, where he was from, his strengths and weaknesses, etc.—and build a profile of that person. The objective here is for students to practice extracting data from text, both the expressly written data and information they can infer by interpreting the details.

EDUCATION STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9 - Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 - Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 - Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9 - Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9 - Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

HISTORICAL CONTENT ERA 8, STANDARD 3B

The student understands World War II and how the Allies prevailed.

HISTORICAL CONTENT ERA 8, STANDARD 3C

The student understands the impacts of World War II at home.

HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 2

The student is able to appreciate historical perspectives by demonstrating the ability to

- (a) describe the past on its own terms, through the eyes and experiences of those who were there, as revealed through their literature, diaries, letters, debates, arts, artifacts, and the like;
- (b) consider the historical context in which the event unfolded—the values, outlook, options, and contingencies of that time and place; and
- (c) avoid “present-mindedness,” and not judging the past solely in terms of present-day norms and values.

HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 4

The student is able to support interpretations with historical evidence in order to construct closely-reasoned arguments rather than facile opinions.

Image Source: [NARA](#)

THE CITIZEN SOLDIER RESPONSES

Document A reveals feelings about civilians on military bases.

Documents B & C show how some soldiers felt about homefront efforts.

Documents D & E reveal that some soldiers felt they could work better in different circumstances.

69. How do you feel about civilian laborers employed in jobs on Army posts?

~~O.K. if doing jobs soldiers are not equipped to do~~
~~O.K. if doing jobs which soldiers could be used for~~
 XXXXXX All work on Army posts should be done by men in uniform.

70. If you have any further remarks to make on any subject, write them below as fully as you like:

Just one thing about civilians.
 They should be off the camp's
 completely. They have absolutely
 no business there. I for one, would
 not move for a civilian in a camp,
 nor would I work under one's super-
 vision. Civilians should be kept
 to hell out of the camp's com-
 pletely, except for salesgirls
 in the P.X. and Canteens.

Document A (Planning Survey III, August 1942, 02-0837):

Just one thing about civilian's. They should be off the camp's completely. They have absolutely no business there. I for one, would not move for a civilian in a camp, nor would I work under one's supervision. Civilian's should be kept to hell out of the camp's completely, except for salesgirls in the P.X. and Canteen's.

95. Do you feel that you have been given your fair share of furloughs and passes since you have been in this camp?

1 ☒ Yes, I have had my fair share of both furloughs and passes

2 ☐ I have had my fair share of furloughs, but not of passes

3 ☒ I have had my fair share of passes, but not of furloughs

4 ☐ No, I have not had my fair share of either furloughs or passes

96. Up to now, has the war made things better or worse for your family and friends back home (such things as jobs, pay, and living conditions)? (Check one)

1 ☒ Things are a lot better

2 ☐ Things are a little better, but not much

3 ☐ I don't see any difference

4 ☐ Things are a little worse

5 ☐ Things are a lot worse

6 ☐ Don't know

97. If you have any further remarks you would like to make on any subject please write them below as fully as you like.

The United States has put all its industrial might behind the war but the people have not entirely relented to helping the situation. Thousands do not even realize that a war exists. The waste in this war is terrific and could be stopped if the man controlling industry wanted to stop it.

CONTINUE WRITING ON THE NEXT PAGE →

Document B (Survey 64, July 1943, 16-1319):

The United States has put all its industrial might behind the war but the people have not entirely relented to helping the situation. Thousands do not even realize that a war exists. The waste in this war is terrific and could be stopped if the man controlling industry wanted to stop it.

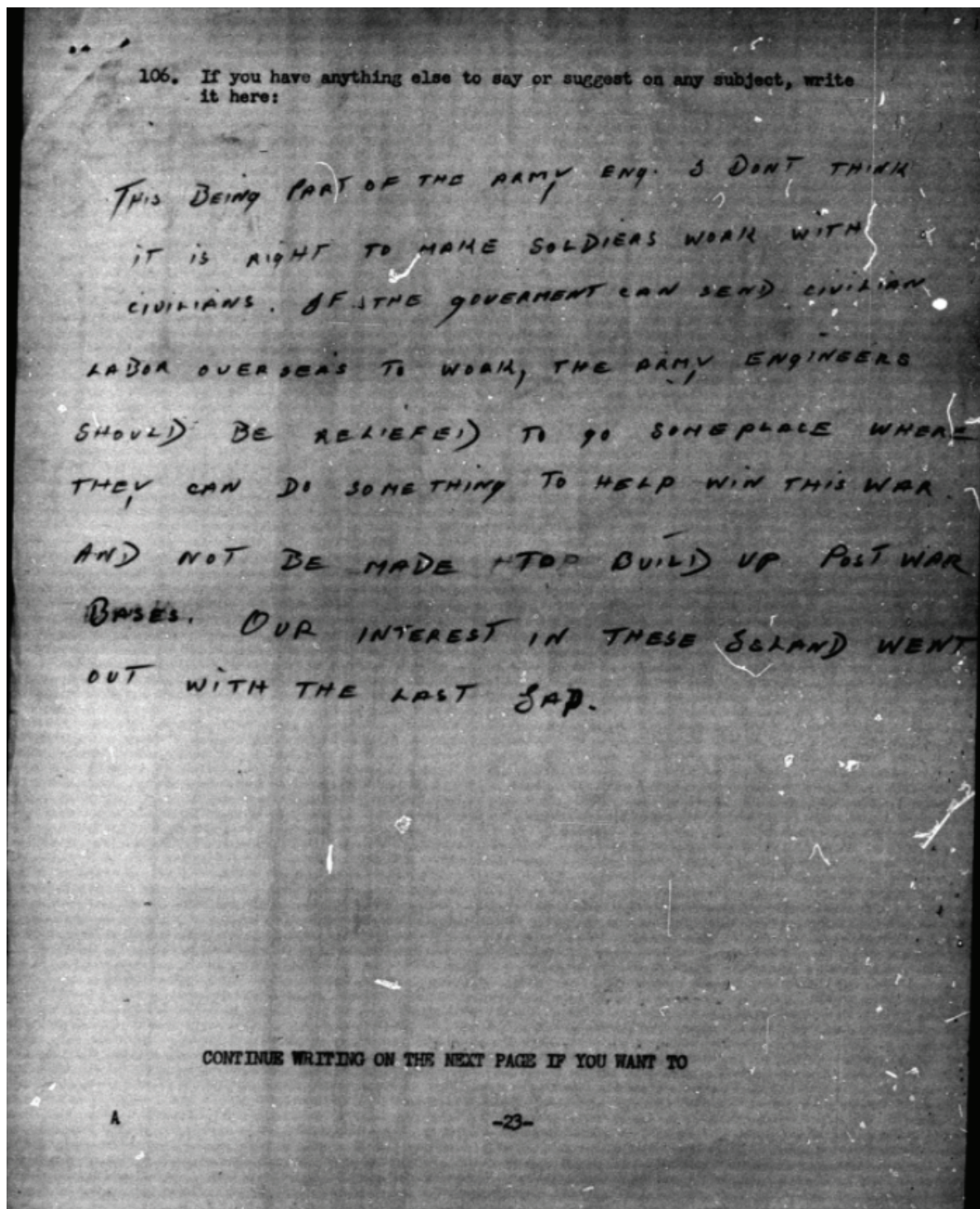
103. If you have anything else to say or suggest about the hospital, the Army or your future plans, write it here.

I would like to be discharged from the army as soon as possible and give some of those strikers in the United States a chance to see what the soldiers have to put up with and get a wage of \$50⁰⁰ a month and see what they think. Then maby they I would change their mind about when to strike.

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Document C (Survey 77, October 1943, 18-1103):

I would like to be discharged from the army as soon as possible and give some of those strikers in the United States a chance to see what the soldiers have to put up with and get a wage of \$50 a month and see what they think. Then maby they would change their mind about when to strike.



Document D (Survey 133, April - May 1944, 23-0690):

This being part of the army Eng. [Engineering] I don't think it is right to make soldiers work with civilians. If the government can send civilian labor overseas to work, the army engineers should be relieved [relieved] to go someplace where they can do something to help win this war and not be made to build up post war bases. Our interest in these island [islands] went out with the last Jap.

RESTRICTED

(52-53)

(f) Are you ever worried and upset? (Check one)

6 ☐ I am hardly ever worried and upset
7 ☐ I am sometimes worried and upset
8 ☒ I am often worried and upset

(g) In general, what sort of a time do you have in the Army? (Check one)

6 ☐ I have a pretty good time
7 ☒ It's about fifty-fifty
8 ☐ I have a pretty rotten time

69. There are probably other things you would like to ask or comment on. Use this space for any additional comments, complaints, or suggestions you may care to make.

I AM SHURE THAT I COULD DO MORE TWORD THIS WAR EFFORT OUT OF THE ARMY THAN IN BECAUSE BOTH MY WIFE AND I WOULD BE WORKING. AT THE PRESENT SHE HAS QUIT HER JOB TO BE NEAR ME. AND I AM DOING A JOB THAT TO MY OPINION IS VERY MUTCH OVER DID IN THE Z.I.

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RESTRICTED

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Document E (Survey 205, May 1945, 41-0761):

I am shore [sure] that I could do more tword [toward] this war effort out of the army than in because both my wife and I would be working. At the present she has quit her job to be near me and I am doing a job that to my opinion is very mutch [much] over did in the Z.I.