



TEXT SET TOPIC: Varied Experiences of World War II

Grade Level Recommendation: Middle school (grades 6–8); *adaptable for any age group studying WWII*

Key Focus Areas for Design:

Counternarratives Current Events **Identity** Language **Perspectives** Social Justice

Topic: This text set is about World War II and the impacts on varied experiences by identity groups, both civilian and soldier.



Curriculum Connection: *Teachers do not need to use this text set in its entirety; these artworks are organized in topic-based segments so that educators can easily pull references to support their lesson plans, regardless of the curricula they are using.*

Context/Rationale/Reflections: This text set will help humanize WWII. Through looking at a broad selection of visual resources representing varied views and involvement, students will gain an understanding of the complexity of war and experience. Through exposure to a wide and diverse range of stories, they will make personally powerful connections.

⚠ Important teacher notes for this text set ⚠

- This resource is an **image-based** text set created by [Doodles Academy](#), experts on using art for cross-content learning.
- Artwork and photographs are topically connected. They are meant to accompany other resources focusing on World War II.
- **Images** can be incorporated into other areas of study or can stand alone as an art connection.

How to discuss artworks with students:

Follow an *Observe–Describe–Interpret–Connect & Reflect* framework (downloadable [here](#)).

The teacher's role should be as facilitator, encouraging students to look closely at the artworks and use evidence-based observation, as well as building on the observations of their peers, to think about and come to conclusions about the content of the artworks.

The teacher should hold off on offering concrete information until students have thoroughly examined and discussed the artwork, but then offer additional background information and use a guiding question to connect to prior knowledge, including other visual resources that they have looked at to encourage further expanded and connected reflection.



A note for multilingual students:

Text Sets are meant to support knowledge building! Support opportunities for student [translanguaging](#) while using this text set by encouraging students to write, discuss, and present in their home language(s), English, or a combination while they are learning.



Experiences of Civilians: (Click on any image's hyperlink to be taken to more information.)

Why use this resource?

This collection highlights the different experiences, and thus perspectives, civilians had of the war. Some of these experiences depended largely on one's physical location (e.g., bombings) but could also encompass their perceived identity (e.g., Jew, Japanese American, healthy male). Some visual resources are included to give context and increase understanding (e.g., *Death March*, *One of the Death Pits*), while some visual resources offer insight into more individualized experiences (e.g., *artwork by Malvina Lowova*, *Charm Bracelet*).

Considerations for using this resource:

This collection could offer opportunities to connect the events of the past to contemporary happenings. For example, the shelters under "Experiences of British Civilians" could be linked to contemporary events in Ukraine.

Potential reflection questions:

- How are these experiences the same? How are they different?
- How does learning about this experience deepen your understanding of what it was like to live during WWII?
- Think about what is going on in the world today. Have we made ethical progress?

Experiences of Jewish Civilians:



[Star of David Badge](#)



[The Death Cart - Lodz Ghetto, 1980](#)
by Edith Birkin*



[Market in the Warsaw Ghetto, 1941](#)
by Albert Cusian



[Street Scene in the Warsaw Ghetto](#)
by Harry Davis



[Malvina Lowova, killed in a death camp at age 12](#)

Background Artifact—a badge that was worn by all Jewish citizens so that they could be easily identified.

As one of the first steps in the Nazi plan to murder the Jews of Europe, the German authorities ordered the concentration and segregation of Jews into ghettos. Jews from smaller communities were transported into the ghettos of nearby towns and cities. The large number of people and the limited available space and resources resulted in severe overcrowding, starvation, and disease.

**Birkin was held in a Ghetto with her family, where both her parents died. She has said that her works do not express physical cruelty or suffering so much as the sense of loneliness or isolation experienced by so many.*

Lowova, while held at a concentration camp, drew a family being deported under armed guard while farmers armed with pitchforks threatened them.



Experiences of Jewish Civilians, continued:



[Death March](#)
by Jan Hartman

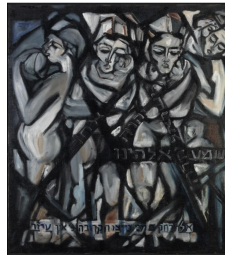
Hartman attempted to escape Czechoslovakia with his family, but all were captured. His parents died in Auschwitz, but he and his brother survived.

Shortly following his return home, Hartman created a series of paintings from memory that reflected his experience.



[Mother with Babies & Transport](#)
by Roman Halter

Halter was 12 when Nazis arrived in his hometown of Chodecz, Poland. He was moved to a ghetto and worked as a slave laborer in concentration camps. He escaped a death march and hid with a German couple until the end of the war. He returned to Chodecz to find he was one of only four survivors of the town's 800 Jews. These paintings were painted later, inspired by the artist's own recollections of a mother cradling her daughter during the journey to Auschwitz, as well as the understanding that all the mothers with babies were automatically put in the line to the gas chambers.



[Charm Bracelet](#)
by Greta Perlman

This charm bracelet was assembled by Greta Perlman, a prisoner in the Theresienstadt concentration camp. Internees were sometimes able to make artworks clandestinely in the camp workshops, but a large group of charms like this is very rare. They were either given to Perlman as personal mementos or collected by her in exchange for food, when she worked in the camp kitchen. She may have gathered the pieces into a bracelet later, in the United States.



[Belsen 1945](#)
by Edgar Ainsworth

"I went to Belsen shortly after it was liberated. I saw the horrors of mass death. I was nauseated, as every other sane human would be. But it wasn't the piles of rotting dead that fascinated and horrified me, it was the condition of the still living" -Edgar Ainsworth, Art Editor for Picture Post magazine



Experiences of Jewish Civilians, continued:



[One of the Death Pits](#) or [Belsen camp: the compound for women](#)
by Leslie Cole

[Human Laundry, Belsen: April 1945](#)
by Doris Zinkeisen

Note: These images are disturbing and will not be appropriate for all teaching situations. If using, sensitively prepare students before showing them.

Cole was an official artist of the War Artists Advisory Committee (WAAC), He traveled widely, recording the aftermath of the war in Malta, Greece, Germany, and the Far East. Cole's work consistently addressed the suffering of human beings; in these oil paintings, he bears witness to the conditions in Bergen-Belsen at liberation.

During the Second World War, Zinkeisen joined the St John Ambulance Brigade and, in 1944, was commissioned by the Red Cross to paint the work of doctors and nurses in north-west Europe. The "human laundry" was a stable block converted into a decontamination center where former prisoners were washed and deloused before being transferred to hospital. It was staffed by German nurses and doctors pressed into service from a nearby military hospital.



Experiences of British Civilians:



[Incendiaries in a Suburb, 1941](#)
by Henry Carr



[Photo of an injured child](#)
by Cecil Beaton



[Underground Station Shelters](#)

The Germans conducted mass air attacks ("The Blitz"), many targeting towns and cities, and thus civilians.

Beaton was a portrait photographer before the war, and during the war turned to documentation. His training explains the formal aesthetic and qualities of this untraditional portrait.

Initially, the government did not want people using the London Underground for shelter. But, it was impossible to stop people from paying for a ticket and then simply bedding down on a platform.

These shelters were well lit, warm, and in some (those that were deeper), shelterers couldn't hear the noise of the bombs.



Experiences of American Civilians:



[Ruby Loftus Screwing a Breech-ring](#)
by Laura Knight

During the war, many women had to take on roles that had traditionally gone to men. This painting depicts real-life Ruby Loftus working at an industrial lathe cutting the screw of a breech-ring for a Bofors anti-aircraft gun.

Loftus was a 21-year-old woman who had quickly become an expert in the production of breech-rings—in seven months, rather than the several years it normally took. The painting was commissioned to promote women's work in factories.

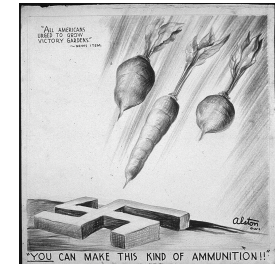


[New Orleans, Louisiana. Line at a rationing board](#)

World War II put a heavy burden on U.S. supplies of basic materials like food, shoes, metal, paper, and rubber. The Army and Navy were growing, as was the nation's effort to aid its allies overseas. Civilians still needed these materials for consumer goods as well.

The federal government took steps to conserve crucial supplies, including establishing a rationing system that impacted virtually every family in the United States.

Rationing involved setting limits on purchasing certain high-demand items. The government issued a number of "points" to each person, even babies, which had to be turned in along with money to purchase goods made with restricted items. In 1943, for example, a pound of bacon cost about 30 cents, but a shopper would also have to turn in seven ration points to buy the meat. These points came in the form of stamps that were distributed to citizens in books throughout the war.



[Charles Alston](#)

The Office of War Information hired a Black artist named Charles Alston to create a series of motivational drawings especially for African American newspapers. These two images are to encourage the growing of victory gardens—vegetable gardens planted during the world wars in order to ensure an adequate food supply for civilians and troops.



Experiences of Japanese American Civilians:



[Hayward, California, May 8, 1942 & I am an American](#) by Dorothea Lange

Images made of the internment camps by Japanese/American citizens (1,2)

[Toyo Miyatake, Manzanar](#)

In 1942 Executive Order 9066 ordered the removal of 110,000 civilians of Japanese descent, including 71,000 American citizens, from the western United States, placing them in internment camps. These Japanese Americans were active members of American culture, as depicted in the Lange photos. The family (Mochida) operated a nursery and five greenhouses on a two-acre site, and the "I Am An American" sign was hung by the owner of the grocery store, a Japanese American, shortly before he was sent to an internment camp.

Internees lived in uninsulated barracks furnished only with cots and coal-burning stoves. Residents used common bathroom and laundry facilities, but hot water was usually limited. The camps were surrounded by barbed-wire fences patrolled by armed guards who had instructions to shoot anyone who tried to leave.



Experiences of Japanese Civilians of Hiroshima:



[Shadows of victims of the bomb](#)



[Woman and Child Statue, 1974](#)
by Yasuko Yamagata



[I Ran Toward My House Through a Sea of Flames, 1974](#)
by Yoshiko Michitsuji



[Miyako Ishiuchi](#)



[One month after the American atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima](#)
by Wayne Miller

Two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945, on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They killed and maimed hundreds of thousands of people. By the end of 1945, the bombing had killed an estimated 140,000 people in Hiroshima, and a further 74,000 in Nagasaki. In the years that followed, many of the survivors would face leukemia, cancer, or other terrible side effects from the radiation. ([citation](#))

When the bomb exploded, a flash of boiling light scorched all that it touched; anything within 1,600 feet of its blast zone was incinerated in an instant, and anything within a mile radius of its impact site was reduced to rubble.

The heat from the explosion was so intense that it bleached everything in its blast zone, leaving nuclear shadows where citizens once were.

Artworks by survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima.

A contemporary artist, Ishiuchi photographs objects affected by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, now preserved by and housed in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum.

[Note: Any of the images from this series would be appropriate](#)



Experiences of Soldiers:

Why use this resource?

This collection offers a counternarrative to the perception that “soldiers” were always strong, white, and male. It instead offers perspective on how many different types of people participated directly as soldiers in WWII.

Considerations for using this resource

Have students reflect on their perception of “soldiers” before starting and then again after they have looked at a variety of images.

Potential reflection questions:

- Why do selected people appear in books/resources as historically important while others are ignored?

Experiences of Female Soldiers:



“Doing their share, too” by Charles Alston

See note on Charles Alston under “Experiences of American Civilians.”



[WAVES propaganda poster](#)

WAVES was an organization of women whose job was to replace Navy men at shore stations.



Video: [African American Women's Auxiliary Corps Volunteers 1944](#)



[An anti-aircraft defence soldier on the Moscow rooftops in 1941](#)

According to the book, “The Unwomanly Face of War” by Svetlana Alexievich, a million women fought on the frontlines in the Red Army.

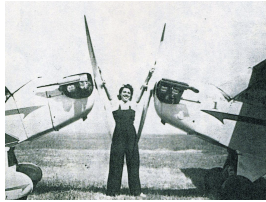


[Injured Paratrooper](#)
by Robert Sargent Austin

Nurses and ambulance drivers were one way that women helped out on the front lines of combat.



Experiences of Female Soldiers, continued:



[Willa Brown](#)

In 1942, the United States was faced with a severe shortage of pilots and decided to train women to fly military aircraft so male pilots could be released for combat duty overseas. This program was called WASP for short.

Brown sought to join WASP but was rejected because of her race. Instead, Brown and her husband Cornelius Coffey organized the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Squadron. CAP flew anti-submarine machines, border patrols, and courier services, protecting the home front and freeing pilots for the war front.



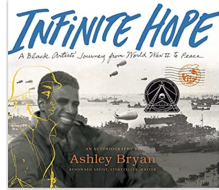
[Women Codebreakers](#)

Upwards of 10,000 American women codebreakers worked behind the scenes of WWII; they continually broke the ever-changing and increasingly complex systems used by the Axis Powers to shroud their messages in secrecy. (see also: Comanche Code Talkers)

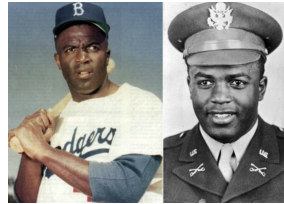


Experiences of Male African American Soldiers:

(Note to teachers: female African Americans are included in (and could be pulled from) the “Experiences of Female Soldiers” segments.)



Book: [*Infinite Hope: A Black Artist's Journey from World War II to Peace*](#)



[*Jackie Robinson*](#)



[*Gun Tub 10, 1944*](#)



[*Tuskegee Airmen Congressional Gold Medal*](#)

Some 1.2 million Black men served in the U.S. military during the war, but they were often treated as second-class citizens.

A picture book memoir (by artist Ashley Bryan) about serving in the segregated army during World War II.

Most known for integrating Major League Baseball, Jackie Robinson was also in the army.

He joined the “Double V” campaign, through which African American soldiers tried to use their war service to fight against U.S. domestic racism. ([more info](#)).

These black sailors were given their own battle station called Gun Tub 10. During combat in the Philippines, a Japanese kamikaze airplane barreled toward Gun Tub 10. The gunners fired at the incoming aircraft, shooting away its left wing. The damaged plane crashed into their position, killing 10 men and badly burning others. The survivors of the kamikaze attack on Gun Tub 10 were initially promised the Navy Cross but were only awarded the bronze star. Forty-nine years after the attack, five of the surviving crew were finally awarded the Navy Cross. The picture above is of the members of Gun Tub 10 who were promised the Navy Cross.

The Congressional Gold Medal is the highest civilian recognition awarded by the U.S. Congress. This medal was presented to the Tuskegee Airmen, African American pilots flying for the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II. Awarded on March 29, 2007, the medal recognized their “unique military record that inspired revolutionary reform in the Armed Forces.”



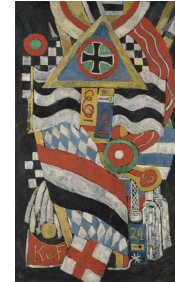
Experiences of Gay/Lesbian Soldiers:



[Image courtesy of Friends of the National WWII Memorial](#)



[Phyllis Arby and Mildred, Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.](#) Image courtesy of Deep Focus Productions.



[Portrait of a German Officer](#)
by Marsden Hartley

Homosexuality was classified as a mental illness by the medical community. Mental illness was one condition that disqualified young people from service. The United States military asked every potential service member questions on their sexuality. People who were gay and lesbian were forced to answer questions vaguely, or lie about their sexuality, in order to be allowed to serve; otherwise, they would run the risk of being sent home and branded as “sex perverts.”

“This is the Army” was a GI show put on during World War II. Soldiers represented female characters in military plays and some homosexual soldiers found refuge from rigid gender roles. Image courtesy of Friends of the National WWII Memorial.

Phyllis Abry, was featured in propaganda articles because she represented the ideals of a WAAC. Unknown to the Army, they also selected Abry's lover as the other ideal WAAC to be featured together in the propaganda.

“Hartley's deepest personal loss occurred during the initial outbreak, when von Freyburg [Hartley's lover] was killed in battle just three months after the conflict began. The artist [...] focused his work on memorializing this loss—albeit in a very encoded way.” ([more here](#))



Experiences of Soldiers in Combat:



[In an Air Raid Shelter, Dunkirk – Bombs are dropping, 1940](#)
by Edward Bawden

Air raid shelters were structures for the protection of combatants against enemy attacks from the air.



[US troops' first assault on Omaha Beach during the D-Day landings](#)
by Robert Capa

D-Day was the largest invasion ever assembled, before or since. 156,000 Allied troops landed by sea and air on five beachheads in Normandy, France.

D-Day was the start of Allied operations, which would ultimately liberate Western Europe, defeat Nazi Germany, and end the Second World War.

For the individual human beings who stormed the beaches, however, it was a day of chaos, terror, and death. It's believed that 4,413 Allied troops were killed on D-Day.



[Corporal Yukio Araki,](#)
26 May 1945

Kamikaze (in World War II): a Japanese aircraft loaded with explosives and making a deliberate suicidal crash on an enemy target.

Corporal Yukio Araki, holding a puppy, with four other pilots of the 72nd Shinbu Squadron at Bansei, Kagoshima. Araki died the following day, at the age of 17, in a suicide attack on ships near Okinawa.



[View of the damage to the deck of the USS Bunker Hill following an attack by two Japanese kamikaze pilots, June 1945.](#)



About the designer:



Doodles Academy offers exceptional instructional materials for grades 1-6. Their content is deeply rooted in the visual arts with an emphasis on cross-content learning.

Responsive: Doodles Academy projects are choice-based and student-centered; they offer outlets for young learners to develop and express their individuality while expanding their knowledge of the world and the diverse group of people they share it with.

Integrated: Within Doodles Academy projects, resources are offered to connect art to literacy, history, and social studies content, and connect to contemporary as well as classic artworks.

Accessible: Doodles Academy content often includes video tutorials, and always includes extensive but flexible lesson plans to support educators of all backgrounds. Projects are available virtually, for free or at low cost, from doodles-academy.org

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