Lesson Plan: African American Involvement in World War II

**Grades:** 11-12  
**Subjects:** U.S. History, English  
**Time Required:** 4 class periods (50-60 minutes each)  
**Author:** Joan Lange, Pope John Paul II High School (Hendersonville, Tn.)

**OVERVIEW**
This project-based lesson engages students with primary sources (posters, photos, and manuscript documents) to analyze and evaluate the involvement of African Americans in World War II.

**UNDERSTANDING GOAL**
Students will look closely at primary sources and engage in in-depth inquiry to evaluate contributions of African Americans in World War II and assess how segregation and racial attitudes of the 1930s-1940s affected their involvement.

**OBJECTIVES**
Students will
- Identify a role that African Americans filled in World War II and discuss how the role offered new opportunities and/or reflected racial attitudes of 1930s and 1940s.
- Examine efforts by activists and organizations to promote change and evaluate effectiveness of Executive Orders to change policies for labor and military.
- Cite specific textual evidence (posters, photos, and/or manuscripts) to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from multiple texts.

"Above and Beyond the Call of Duty." [1942 May 27]

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONS**
- How did the involvement of African Americans in World War II reflect racial attitudes and segregation?
- How did the role of African Americans in the war impact social and economic conditions for African Americans during and after World War II? How did labor programs and Executive Orders affect opportunities for African Americans?
**Curriculum Standards**

- 11-12.RI.KID.2 Determine multiple central ideas of a text or texts and analyze their development; provide a critical summary.
- 11-12.RI.KID.3 Analyze how an author’s choices regarding the ordering of ideas and events, the introduction and development of ideas, and connections among ideas impact meaning.
- 11-12.RI.IKI.8 Evaluate how an author incorporates evidence and reasoning to support the argument and specific claims in a text.
- 11-12.RI.IKI.9 Analyze and evaluate a variety of thematically-related texts of historical and literary significance for their topics, facts, purposes, and rhetorical features.
- 11-12.W.PDW.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, utilizing ongoing feedback, including new arguments and information.

**U.S. History Standards:**

- 51 Identify the roles and sacrifices of individual American soldiers, as well as the unique contributions of special fighting forces such as the Tuskegee Airmen, the 442nd Regimental Combat team, the 101st Airborne, and the Navajo Code Talkers.
- 53 Examine the impact of World War II on economic and social conditions for African Americans, including the Fair Employment Practices Committee and the eventual integration of the armed forces by President Harry S. Truman.

**Materials and Resources Used**

**Oral Histories**
- Violet Hill Askins Gordon
- Oneida Miller Stuart
- Roscoe Tyson Spann
- Robert P. Madison

**Prints and Photographs:**
- Dorie Miller
- Tuskegee Airmen
- Rosie Pictures: Select Images Relating to American Women Workers During World War II
- Tuskegee Airman
- African American Nurses
- Buffalo Soldiers
- Members of an artillery unit...break
- Photographs and Signs Enforcing Racial Discrimination

**Manuscripts**
- Eleanor Roosevelt letter lobbying against lynching
- A. Phillip Randolph March on Washington
- President Truman Executive Order 9981
- FDR Executive Order 8802 Prohibition of Discrimination in the Defense Industry
- Mary McLeod Bethune speech “What Does American Democracy Mean to Me?” (American Public Media website)
- Bolton Act: Making the Nursing Profession More Accessible to Everyone (Frances Bolton School of Nursing)

**Resources**
- Primary Source Analysis Tool, interactive
- Analyzing Primary Sources
- Analyzing Photographs and Prints
- Analyzing Oral Histories
- Virtual Museum Template
PROCEDURE

Day One

Preparation  Materials used:

1) Teaching with Primary Sources: African American Involvement in World War II, GoogleDoc
2) Virtual Museum of African Americans in World War II, GoogleDoc
3) One print copy for each group of the Primary Source Analysis Tool and Analyzing Photographs and Prints
4) Printed copy, one per group, of project directions and group topics with printed copy of one propaganda poster for each group.

Step 1  Introduce the topic with Teaching with Primary Sources: African American Involvement in World War II. Students as a whole class will analyze “Pvt. Joe Louis” poster, slide 3 of PowerPoint, using interactive Primary Source Analysis Tool and suggested questions from Analyzing Photographs and Prints. Teacher will use PowerPoint to model out loud how to investigate further based on student observations of the poster. Using the Library of Congress search terms “Joe Louis boxer.” Photo result 12 is Historic knockout of Max Schmeling by Joe Louis. Teacher can then use search terms “Max Schmeling” to locate photo result 8, Max Schmeling… Nazi salute…March 10.

Step 2  Whole group discussion on how both Joe Louis and Max Schmeling were used as propaganda in World War II and present central research questions:

- How did the involvement of African Americans in World War II reflect racial attitudes and segregation?
- How did the role of African Americans in the war impact social and economic conditions for African Americans during and after World War II?
- How did labor programs and Executive Orders affect opportunities for African Americans?

Step 3  Introduce research project of Virtual Museum with Virtual Museum: African Americans in World War II, GoogleDoc. Students select an African American topic to highlight in their museum. In the next class time, each group member will locate a primary source (poster, photo, manuscript) to analyze and further research. (See pp. 7-11 for project instructions handout.)

Step 4  Students will select a topic and in groups of four to five, each group will begin analyzing one propaganda poster (p. 7) related to their topic using a print copy of the poster, Primary Source Analysis Tool, and Analyzing Photographs and Prints.
PROCEDURE (cont.)

Step 5 Before class ends, each group will turn in one completed Primary Source Analysis Tool as well as one Group Checklist sheet (pp. 10-11) that details category of primary source that each group member will analyze for their virtual museum exhibit room.

Day Two

Preparation Computer Lab
Materials used:
1) One print copy per student of Primary Source Analysis Tool
2) Print copies of Primary Source Analysis questions, as needed for students to share
3) Virtual Museum Blank Template. If students have access to Gmail and GoogleDocs, teacher will copy, rename, and share this template with each group leader. If students need to use PowerPoint instead, teacher will download Virtual Museum Blank Template as a PowerPoint and save one ppt. copy to each group flash drive; students can share blank template using the flash drive (see p. 9 for Virtual Museum directions).
4) Return Group Checklist to each group to be further detailed by the end of class with specific primary source that each student chooses.

Step 6 Briefly review categories of primary sources that each group will assemble for their Virtual Museum exhibit room. Students will use computers and hyperlinks to Library of Congress (provided in Materials section, p. 2) to locate one primary source, create citation, and begin completing a Primary Source Analysis Tool form.

Step 7 With 30 minutes remaining in class, have student groups confer to share the primary sources they have found and discuss if further sources will be needed for a cohesive exhibit themed to their topic, using the Group Checklist form (pp. 10-11).

Step 8 While students are conferring, teacher should 1) save a copy of the Virtual Museum Blank Template; 2) rename it (Group 1, 2, 3, 4, 5—one copy for each group); 3) SHARE each renamed Group copy with permission to edit; and 4) e-mail the template to each student group leader.

Group leader will upload primary sources to Virtual Museum slide 2 and save the Virtual Museum presentation in GoogleDocs.

(If student groups do not have GoogleDocs, teacher should download Virtual Museum as a PowerPoint on each group leader flash drive. Group leader will upload primary sources to Virtual Museum slide 2 and each student group leader can save the PowerPoint to a flash drive.)
PROCEDURE (CONT.)

Step 9 Before class ends, each group will turn in one Group Checklist form and each student will turn in a Primary Source Analysis Tool for their own primary source.

Day 3

Preparation Computer lab

Materials used:

1) Virtual Museum: African Americans in World War II, Google Doc
2) One print copy of Project Instructions per student, if needed (pp. 7-13)

Step 10 Each student will develop their own slide, incorporating further information about their primary source. Show example of slides from Virtual Museum: African Americans in World War II, GoogleDoc, to remind students that in addition to the primary source, their museum slide will include the following elements:

1) Sourcing—identifying the author/creator of the primary source (if known) and evaluation of purpose of message and audience
OR Contextualization—providing historic context of the source by linking major events, themes, and people in the era in which the document was created.

2) A second source should be incorporated to provide background to your topic (the second source can be primary or secondary).

3) Questions to engage audience in further discussion.

4) Citation added to group bibliography slide (MLA citation, 1 bibliography per group).

5) For each group, create one “Traps for Misreading” slide that reveals 1 or 2 surprising discoveries in your research that might cause a misreading or misunderstanding of the primary source. (See p. 12, project instructions handout.)

Step 11 Reminder: Important observations from the Primary Source Analysis Tool should be included in the slide text, but the text should be brief.

Step 12 Reminder: For historical background information, students will use links to Library of Congress resources (Materials, p. 2) as well as databases and websites recommended by the school library.

Step 13 Last 15 minutes of class reserved for group leader to assemble all group slides into one presentation, either using GoogleDocs presentation, or individual PowerPoint slides saved to flash drive and assembled in one PowerPoint (or group members e-mailing individual PowerPoint slide to the group leader). See pp. 8-9 for directions.

Step 14 Before students leave class, each group leader will share GoogleDoc with teacher or have PowerPoint saved to flash drive and flash drive given to teacher.
**Procedural (cont.)**

Day 4

Step 15  Share Virtual Museum presentations in class or view PowerPoints as a flipped classroom assignment.

Have students ponder: How did presentations change their understanding of the involvement of African Americans in World War II?

Share with students the recent appointment of Naval Admiral Michelle Howard and discuss if barriers to African American women have been changed. (This video link has short speech by the Navy Secretary as a well as a speech Michelle Howard—begin video 16 min. into the ceremony.)

Step 16  Have students evaluate project in class or as a homework assignment. (See p. 14 for Project Evaluation.)

**Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group Checklist</td>
<td>5 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Source Analysis (1 analysis from each group)</td>
<td>15 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Source Analysis (1 analysis each group member)</td>
<td>15 pts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum PowerPoint Slide</td>
<td>65 pts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See grading rubrics on pp. 13 for assessment of each student’s Virtual Museum slide.

**Extension**

Student GoogleDocs or PowerPoints can be linked to school website to be shared with school community. A student or teacher panel can vote on their favorite museum room.

Virtual Museum can also be a flipped classroom activity. Students can use Venn Diagram graphic organizer to compare/contrast perspectives of two different African Americans from different branches of service or home front jobs.

Operating a hand drill at Vultee-Nashville, woman is working on a "Vengeance" dive bomber, Tennessee [1943 Feb.]
African American Involvement in World War II

Directions:
The purpose of this project is to gain a better understanding of how World War II provided new social and economic opportunities for African Americans, as well as to explore how their war service was limited by segregation and affected by racial attitudes of the 1930s and 1940s.

- You will work in groups of four-to-five students to assemble primary sources and to create a Virtual Museum exhibit that will communicate your inquiry and analysis.
- Each student will develop their own “artifact slide” and it will be linked to the group’s themed museum room.
- A group of five students will have four primary sources in their museum room—one primary source per student, and the fifth student will develop the Traps for Misreading slide.
- It is important that the group work together to make a cohesive display that communicates insights on their topic.

Themes (topics) for Group Museum Rooms:
- Group 1: Rosie the Riveter (Women in War Industries)
- Group 2: African American Women and Nursing
- Group 3: African Americans in the Navy
- Group 4: African Americans in the Air Force (Tuskegee Airmen)
- Group 5: African Americans in the Army (Buffalo Soldiers)

Posters for Brainstorming with Five Groups:
- Group 1: Women and Nursing—Be a Cadet Nurse: The Girl with a Future (This image is from World War II Poster collection of Northwestern Univ. Library)
- Group 2: Women War Industry—The More Women at Work, the Sooner We Win
- Group 3: Navy—Above and Beyond the Call of Duty: Dorie Miller (to view larger image of this poster, click here to view the jpg linked from African American Odyssey)
- Group 4: Air Force—Cadets for naval aviation take that something extra—Have you got it? (to view larger image, type poster title in a Google image search)
- Group 5: Army—Courage Infantry—United States Army—In the face of obstacles (to view larger image, type poster title in a Google image search)
**Directions for Virtual Museum Template: Classes using GoogleDocs**

Teacher will:

1) save a copy of the Virtual Museum Blank Template;
2) rename it (Group 1, 2, 3, 4, 5—one copy for each group);
3) SHARE each renamed Group copy with permission to edit; and
4) e-mail the template to each student group leader.

Group leader will SHARE Virtual Museum GoogleDoc with each member of the group with permission to edit.

Each student will develop one Artifact Slide on their shared GoogleDoc. Example:  
Student 1 uses Artifact 1 slide  
Student 2 uses Artifact 2 slide  
Student 3 uses Artifact 3 slide  
Student 4 uses Artifact 4 slide

*Each student will save their citation(s) to group bibliography slide of GoogleDoc.

**Directions for Finalizing GoogleDoc**

One group leader will double check that

1) group members have developed and saved on Artifact slide each on the Virtual Museum GoogleDocs.  
2) each group member saved their citation(s) to the bibliography slide.  
3) all group members will discuss and add one or two insights based on research to the Traps to Misreading slide.  Save work.

**Directions for Virtual Museum Template: Classes using PowerPoint**

Teacher will download Virtual Museum as a PowerPoint on each group leader flash drive.

Group leader will download PowerPoint to each student computer in the group.

Each student will develop one Artifact Slide on their own copy of the ppt. Example:

Student 1 uses Artifact 1 slide  
Student 2 uses Artifact 2 slide  
Student 3 uses Artifact 3 slide  
Student 4 uses Artifact 4 slide

*Each student must save their Artifact slide on the group flash drive before the end of class. Each student will save their citation(s) to group bibliography slide.

**Directions for Assembling PowerPoint:**

1) Save each student ppt. to flash drive and label each student ppt. by their Artifact number:  
Example:  
Student 1 Artifact 1  
Student 2 Artifact 2  
Student 3 Artifact 3  
Student 4 Artifact 4

2) Open one student ppt. at a time and copy their Artifact Room slide and paste it onto the corresponding Artifact room slide on the group leader’s ppt. Save work on flash drive.

3) Copy each students’ bibliography citation to one bibliography slide on the group leader’s museum ppt. Save work on flash drive.

4) Discuss with group members to add one or two insights based on research for the Traps to Misreading slide. Save work.
**FINALIZING THE MUSEUM GALLERY, SLIDE 2**  
**GOOGLEDOC INSTRUCTIONS:**

Complete Museum Gallery slide 2 by adding photo image to each of the blank wall frames in the museum gallery.

To add images to Museum Gallery Frames:
- Save each of the four primary sources to your flash drive or computer desktop.
- Click on back wall frames and click on Insert Image (locate image file and add).

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**FINALIZING THE MUSEUM GALLERY, SLIDE 2**  
**POWERPOINT INSTRUCTIONS:**

Complete Museum Gallery slide 2 by adding photo image to each of the blank wall frames in the museum gallery.

To add images to Museum Gallery Frames:
- 1) Save each of the four primary sources to your flash drive or computer desktop.
- 2) Add images to back and side wall frames,
  - 1) Click on frame
  - 2) Click on FILL bucket icon in toolbar
  - 3) Select FILL EFFECTS
  - 4) Select PICTURE
  - 5) Click on CHOOSE PICTURE and add photo from your desktop or flash drive location. (*Do not checkmark “Rotate with shape”)

Save completed PowerPoint with last name of designer and Group number.
Example: Smith  Group 1

Give teacher flash drive or e-mail ppt. to teacher.
GROUP CHECKLIST FOR VIRTUAL MUSEUM

Name of Group members:

Museum title (theme):

Each group exhibit should include the following primary sources located using Library of Congress:

**Day one:**

_______ One propaganda (or war recruitment) poster. Group analysis of this poster will begin the brainstorming for research directions for your group. Teacher will provide a copy of a poster image to each group. (see poster image links on page 7 for each group poster.)

Title of poster:_________________________________________________________________

_______ Primary Source Analysis sheet completed by group by end of first class meeting

**Day two:**

Locate one primary source per group member using Library of Congress or provided website links (see Materials, p. 2).

Each group must have at least two text documents (see Materials, Manuscripts, p. 2).

These text documents could be letters or articles written by activists for change (Eleanor Roosevelt letter, lobbying against lynching; NAACP, A. Phillip Randolph March on Washington, or Mary McLeod Bethune); Executive Orders (such as FDR’s Executive Order 8802 or President Truman’s Executive Order 9981); or oral history interviews of African Americans involved in the war (see Materials, Oral History links, p. 2).

Complete this form with student names and titles of documents.

Student name:_________________________________________________________________

_______ Text document one.

Title of text document:_________________________________________________________________

_______ Primary Source Analysis sheet completed by end of second class meeting.

_______ Citation completed on a word document, saved to flash drive.

____________________________________________________________________________

Student name:_________________________________________________________________

_______ Text document two.

Title of text document:_________________________________________________________________

_______ Primary Source Analysis sheet completed by end of second class meeting.

_______ Citation completed on a word document, saved to flash drive.
Student name:________________________________________________________________

______  One additional primary source photo image.

Title of photo image:__________________________________________________________

______  Primary Source Analysis sheet completed by end of second class meeting.

______  Citation completed on a word document, saved to flash drive.

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Student name:__________________________________________________________________

Poster image title:_______________________________________________________________

(Primary source analysis sheet was completed by group, so use this sheet to highlight points on your slide, but find an additional primary or secondary source that provides historic context to the poster image)

______  Secondary or primary source image.

Title:________________________________________________________________________

______  Primary Source Analysis sheet completed by end of second class meeting.

______  Citation completed on a word document, saved to flash drive.

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______  Each group member downloaded ppt template and added photo or text image to their own museum slide.

______  Each group member’s ppt. saved to flash drive by end of class.

______  Each group member turns in a Primary Source Analysis sheet by end of class.

Please note that you have one more class period to locate an additional primary or secondary source to complete your slide on day three. All sources used must be cited MLA style. All group citations will be assembled on a final ppt slide, so last twenty minutes of class time will be used to assemble slides.
**Museum Slide Planning Template**

1. **Sourcing or Historic Context**—Analysis for your primary source image/document. Choose one type for your planning. (Adapted from [Stanford Historical Thinking Chart](https://history.stanford.edu/teaching-resources/historical-thinking-chart/))

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sourcing</strong></th>
<th><strong>Historic Context</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Who is the author/creator of the primary source? When was it written and why?</td>
<td>Documents are products of particular points in time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What is the author’s position (message of the primary source)?</td>
<td>How does historic context/background information (events, people, issues) influence the content of the document?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Who is the audience?</td>
<td>Suggested Prompts:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Suggested Prompts:</td>
<td>Based on the background information,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The author probably believes___________</td>
<td>I understand this document differently because_______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The audience is ____________________________</td>
<td>The author might have been influenced by_______________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do/don’t trust this document because____</td>
<td><strong>Example from Joe Louis Poster:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Example from Joe Louis Poster:** Message of poster is united front and Audience is African Americans (or perhaps even all Americans).

**Example from Joe Louis Poster:** Historic context of the Joe Louis/Max Schmeling fight is important for theme of freedom vs. Nazism. However, segregation and racial conflict in America would help you to understand this poster differently (ironic that African American roles were limited, and there wasn’t equality).

2) **Second Source:** Add additional background/understanding to your museum display (the second source can be primary or secondary).

3) **Questions** to engage audience in further discussion.

4) **Citations** added to group bibliography slide. Each student should have at least two citations, one for the primary source and one for the second source of information. (MLA citation, 1 group bibliography slide).

5) **“Traps for Misreading”**

One group slide reveals one or two surprising discoveries in your research that might cause a misreading or misunderstanding of the primary source.

**For instance, Pvt. Joe Louis poster, Joe Louis was in the navy, not the army/infantry.**

**Example from Schmeling and Nazi salute photo: Schmeling was not a member of the Nazi party and he helped to save Jews**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Virtual Museum Rubric</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sourcing or Historic Context</td>
<td>Thorough knowledge of who created the source as well as message and audience for primary source (sourcing) or thorough knowledge of meaning of source in historic context</td>
<td>Good knowledge of who created the source as well as message and audience for primary source (sourcing) or good knowledge of meaning of source in historic context. No more than one element incomplete.</td>
<td>Good knowledge of who created the source as well as message and audience for primary source (sourcing) or good knowledge of meaning of source in historic context. No more than two elements incomplete.</td>
<td>Little or erroneous knowledge of who created the source as well as message and audience for primary source (sourcing) or little or erroneous knowledge of meaning of source in historic context. More than two major points missing or incorrect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Source</td>
<td>Second source provides background information for primary source; thorough synthesis of the two sources.</td>
<td>Second source provides background information for primary source; good synthesis of the two sources.</td>
<td>Second source provides some background information for primary source; two sources are not clearly connected.</td>
<td>No second source to provide background information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions to Engage Audience in Further Discussion</td>
<td>Questions show thorough understanding of additional issues raised by sources.</td>
<td>Questions show good understanding of additional issues raised by sources.</td>
<td>Questions show unclear relationship to sources.</td>
<td>No questions relating to sources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citations</td>
<td>MLA citations for all sources; no formatting mistakes.</td>
<td>MLA citations for all sources; 1-2 formatting mistakes.</td>
<td>MLA citations for all sources; 2-4 formatting mistakes.</td>
<td>MLA citations incomplete and more than four errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traps for Misreading</td>
<td>Points raised show insightful connection of research to primary source.</td>
<td>Points raised show good connection of research to primary source.</td>
<td>Points raised show unclear connection of research to primary source.</td>
<td>No additional points provided on Traps for Misreading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and spelling/grammar</td>
<td>Clear display of primary and second source and thorough use of hyperlinked information. No spelling or grammar errors.</td>
<td>Clear display of primary and second source and good use of hyperlinked information. One spelling or grammar errors.</td>
<td>Clear display of primary and second source and good use of hyperlinked information. Two to three spelling or grammar errors.</td>
<td>Design is confusing and lacks links to additional information. More than 3 spelling or grammar errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF THE VIRTUAL MUSEUM

1. What did you like about the Virtual Museum?

2. What did you dislike about the Virtual Museum?

Read each statement and circle the number that best characterizes your own response:

1. The analysis of Joe Louis Poster helped to promote further questioning and investigation.  
   1 2 3 4 5

2. Posters provided to each group for analysis helped our group brainstorm new directions for research.  
   1 2 3 4 5

   1 2 3 4 5

4. Directions for the project were clear.  
   1 2 3 4 5

5. Virtual Museum template was easy to download.  
   1 2 3 4 5

6. Directions for modifying the Virtual Museum template were clear.  
   1 2 3 4 5

7. Our group collaborated well in planning sources to match theme of the museum room.  
   1 2 3 4 5

8. The evaluation criteria (how I would be graded) for the Virtual Museum were clear.  
   1 2 3 4 5

9. My overall experience with the Virtual Museum was satisfactory.  
   1 2 3 4 5

10. I would like to use the Virtual Museum for future projects.  
    1 2 3 4 5