



The War Effort featuring Frank Sinatra

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How did U.S. industry mobilize to support for the nation's war effort during World War II, and what role did the music and entertainment industry play in this mobilization?

OVERVIEW

"Entertainment is always a national asset. Invaluable in time of peace, it is indispensable in wartime" - President Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1943

In this lesson, students will investigate the unified efforts of the U.S. entertainment industry to support the nation's involvement in World War II. During this investigation, students will focus on the singer and actor Frank Sinatra by viewing films, listening to recordings, and analyzing archival documents.



Palumbo, Fred, photographer. Frank Sinatra signs his induction papers while Chief Clerk Mrs. Mae E. Jones helps out at local board No. 19-160 Danforth St., Jersey City / World Telegram photo by F. Palumbo. New Jersey Jersey City, 1943. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00649795/>.

Before there were “Swifties” idolizing Taylor Swift, before there were “Beatlemaniacs” fawning over the Beatles, before there were Elvis fans swooning over The King, there were “Bobby-soxers” obsessing over Francis Albert Sinatra. Frank Sinatra was the Pop idol of the World War II years.

Sinatra, along with the entertainment industry as a whole, leveraged their prestige to aid the American war effort after December 7, 1941 when Japan attacked the United States naval base at Pearl Harbor. The attack resulted in the U.S. officially entering World War II on the side of the Allies. Winning the war meant that the U.S. had to mobilize the entire nation, not just the military, and this war effort required a complete transformation of the American economy and society to supply both U.S. armed forces and its allies.

Out of this unprecedented and unifying American war effort emerged partnerships between the government and the entertainment industry. Movie studios produced patriotic films. Artists created colorful and dramatic posters that encouraged regular citizens to join the effort to preserve freedom and defeat the enemy. Women joined the workforce in numbers never before seen, and in doing so elevated their status and changed the conversation around gender roles. As men left the workforce to serve in the military, many women assumed job roles in factories that were now retooled to produce the products of war. This “all in” approach helped win the war, and this remarkable focus and unity has never been duplicated since.

Frank Sinatra was not eligible for military service due to a variety of health issues, including a

perforated eardrum and a damaged lung. Sinatra's inability to serve in the war during a time of elevated patriotism, participation, and personal sacrifice made him the focus of disdain as well as devotion. There were questions about whether his health issues were real, whether he used his celebrity to avoid serving, and although there was no evidence to support the criticism, the scrutiny persisted. One active duty serviceman and journalist who was angry because Sinatra was home making lots of money while surrounded by adoring female fans wrote, "I think Frank Sinatra was the most hated man of World War II, much more than Hitler." Sinatra's popularity endured with his fanbase, largely young people and mostly women. He maintained his status, and like many stars of the day, contributed enthusiastically to the war effort by encouraging support, and creating music that provided relief and inspiration during this stressful, confusing, and unsettling time in American history.

Music has the unique power to provide comfort, solace, and hope during times of need. The U.S. Government, in collaboration with the recording industry, produced V-Discs ("V" for victory) that were distributed to soldiers to lift their spirits and provide connections to home. They were the only recordings that members of the American Federation of Musicians were allowed to record between 1942 and 1944 due to the ongoing musician's union strike at that time. V-Discs could hold over six minutes of music and featured popular, folk, and classical selections. However, since the shellac that had been used to manufacturing records was scarce due to its necessity in a variety of war materials, polyvinyl chloride (aka "vinyl") was utilized in record production. This preceded the commercial use of this more flexible and durable material by several years. V-Discs were often included as part of a "Hit Kit" sent to those serving in the military during the war. Hit Kits included replacement needles, sheet music, lyric sheets, and hand crank phonographs. Over three million V-Discs were shipped to U.S. military personnel during the war.

In 1945, Frank Sinatra made a 10 minute movie titled, *The House I Live In*. This movie was a plea for racial and religious tolerance, and it won him an Honorary Academy Award. Like his mother, Sinatra was an early activist for civil rights during the mid-20th century. In later years he refused to stay in hotels and work in clubs that did not admit Black people. He always provided equal pay and equal treatment to Black musicians. These efforts and the power of his celebrity were a major factor in integrating Las Vegas.

Years after the war, Sinatra was quoted, when questioned about his popularity and influence: "It was the war years, and there was a great loneliness. I was the boy in every corner drugstore who'd gone off, drafted to the war. That was all."

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How the United States economy was adjusted to support the war effort
- Why and how the U.S. Government compelled citizens to assist with the war effort
- That popular entertainers participated in and exemplified the U.S. war effort at home and abroad
- How the U.S. Government enlisted and partnered with the entertainment industry to fund the war, boost morale, and provide comfort and support for those at home as part of the war effort

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to assess how the United States fostered an unprecedented national effort in support of the United States military in World War II by viewing archival films, listening to recordings, and interpreting primary source documents.

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Display **Image 1, Discussion Questions for War Effort Lesson** on the board. Direct students to pair up and discuss the image questions. Then, instruct those pairs to partner up with another pair to share their conversations in preparation for a whole class discussion.
2. Distribute **Handout - War Effort Vocabulary** to each student (Teacher's Guide available here). Explain to students that during World War II, the entire U.S. economy shifted in order to support the war effort. Inform students that they will be examining a variety of primary sources to determine how the economy shifted, and towards what goals.

PROCEDURE

1. Organize students into groups, and distribute **Library of Congress – Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs and Prints** sheet to each group. In addition, distribute 1 page from **Handout - War Effort Posters** to each group, so that groups have different posters to analyze. Instruct groups to freely analyze the poster they received, using the "Observe" and "Reflect" columns of the Teacher's Guide sheet to inspire discussion. Ensure each group has a dedicated person to take notes of the discussion. (In lieu of or in addition to the Teacher's Guide sheet, you may distribute the appropriate page of **Handout - War Effort Posters Questions** to student groups.)
2. Once groups have completed their analysis, invite a representative from each group to summarize their discussions. At the end of their summary, ask each group in turn:
 - What idea or product might this poster be trying to sell?
 - How did the designers of the poster make the product or idea alluring or compelling?

- Why might this idea or product be important for the U.S. war effort?
3. As a class, review the first three terms of **Handout - War Effort Vocabulary**. Direct the class to consider what each term might mean, and use **Handout - War Effort Vocabulary (Teacher's Guide)** to guide the discussion if needed.
 4. Inform students they will be examining what role the entertainment industry in particular played in the U.S. war effort. Distribute the **Library of Congress – Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Motion Pictures** sheet to student groups. Review the “Observe” and “Reflect” columns of the handout with students.
 5. Play **Clip 1, “The All-Star Bond Rally” (Excerpts)**. After watching the clip, direct student groups to make notes on what they observed. Discuss as a class some of the observations student groups made about the video. Then, ask students:
 - What might have been the purpose of this concert? What might a “Bond Rally” be? (*A way to get the public excited about buying war bonds.*)
 - What did you notice about the clip that reflected the fact that the U.S. was at war? (*Bob Hope's monologues, the costuming, the lyrics to the first performance, etc.*)
 - Did you recognize any of the names or people in the clip?
 6. Inform students that the second performer in the clip they saw was Frank Sinatra, one of the most famous singers of the era. Play **Clip 2, The House I Live In (Excerpts)**. Then, after watching the clip, ask students:
 - What is the primary theme of *The House I Live In*?
 - Describe how Frank Sinatra's character represents the concept of unity in the film.
 - What feelings or ideas do you think the film's creators wanted to communicate?
 - Discuss the significance of the title, *The House I Live In*. What does it symbolize in relation to identity and belonging? Why might this be particularly important during wartime?
 - If someone created this motion picture today, what would be different?
 - How might such a film be helpful even if it wasn't explicitly selling war bonds?
 7. Display **Image 2, V-Disc/Hit Kit Collage**, and direct students to view the **Library of Congress – Teacher's Guide: Analyzing Photographs and Prints** sheet again, focusing on the “Observe” and “Reflect” columns. Instruct students to share their answers to questions in the columns aloud. Then, ask students:
 - What are the objects being displayed? What might be their purpose?
 - What might come to mind with the term “Hit Kit”?
 - How might you describe mood and emotions portrayed on the “Hit Kit” cover?

- What might it feel like to receive a V-Disc from home if you were serving in a war overseas?
8. Direct students to review the fourth term on **Handout - War Effort Vocabulary** and guide a discussion as to its potential

definition. Instruct students to provide their own definition on the handout based on the discussion. Use **Handout - War Effort Vocabulary (Teacher's Guide)** to guide the discussion if needed.

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Ask students:
 - Why did the United States need to shift its economy during World War II?
 - What were some of the elements to the U.S. war effort? How was money raised? How did the economy continue despite men leaving their jobs to go overseas and serve in the war?
2. Individually or in groups, ask students to create their own poster, television script, or song with the intent to get Americans to buy war bonds, war stamps, or otherwise help in the War effort.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Have students create modern day "Hit Kits" to honor and entertain fellow citizens who serve today. Some possible items included in a modern "Hit Kit" may be:
 - A music playlist
 - Song lyrics that reflect gratitude
 - Poems that display thankfulness
 - Pictures or drawings that validate their service
2. Examine the online exhibition Entertaining the Troops - Hope for America: Performers, Politics and Pop Culture from the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/hope-for-america/entertaining-the-troops.html>. Direct students to two sections for investigation. While exploring the exhibition, consider:
 - If you or a loved one was serving during the war, how might these visits boost your morale?
 - What emotions might you experience if you received a letter or note from a family member?
 - What reactions might you have if celebrities visited the base you were stationed at?



3. Listen to this oral history about the War Effort from Meda Montana Brendall through the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/afc2001001.04951/>
4. Examine the online exhibition World War II and the Post War Years - NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom from the Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/world-war-ii-and-the-post-war-years.html>
5. Learn more about V-Discs by reading this article from the National Endowment for the Humanities: <https://www.neh.gov/divisions/research/featured-project/war-vinyl-and-print-music-the-troops-during-world-war-ii>
6. Read the article, “The Double V Victory” from The National WWII Museum: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/double-v-victory>
7. Read the article, “Jim Crow, Meet Lieutenant Robinson” from the National Archives: <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2008/spring/robinson.html>
8. Listen to the NPR piece, “This WWII battle wasn’t against Nazis. It was between Black and white GIs in England”: <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/21/1183045605/black-army-soldiers-england-wwii-battle>
9. Discover the musician Alberta Hunter by reading this article from the National World War II Museum: <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/alberta-hunter-singing-blues-entertaining-troops>



STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

History

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.

D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.

CALIFORNIA HISTORY—SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

10.8 Students analyze the causes and consequences of World War II.

6. Describe major developments in aviation, weaponry, communication, and medicine and the war's impact on the location of American industry and use of resources.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

US2.45 Analyze the social, political and economic impact of World War II on American society, including the contributions of and discrimination faced by different Americans, including women, Black Americans, Indigenous Nations, Asian Americans and Latinx Americans.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Topic 3: Defending Democracy: Responses to fascism and communism HSS.USII.T3.07

Explain the long-term consequences of important domestic events during the war.

CONNECTICUT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

US-5. World War II

US.His.1.d. Evaluate how the demand for labor on homefront in World War II shaped gender roles (e.g., mobilization, victory gardens, rationing, War Production Board).

NEW JERSEY STUDENT LEARNING STANDARDS - SOCIAL STUDIES

Era 11. The Great Depression and World War II: World War II (1929–1945)

6.1.12.EconET.11.a: Evaluate the shift in economic resources from the production of

domestic to military goods during World War II in terms of opportunity costs and trade-offs and analyze the impact of the post-war shift back to domestic production.

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 11-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.



RESOURCES

VIDEO RESOURCES

- Library of Congress - "The All-Star Bond Rally" (Excerpts)
- Library of Congress - Clip 2, The House I Live In (Excerpts)

HANDOUTS

- Handout - War Effort Vocabulary
- Handout - War Effort Vocabulary (Teacher's Guide)
- Handout - War Effort Posters
- Handout - War Effort Posters Questions