



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum



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Curriculum Guide

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Table of Contents

Curriculum Guide Objectives

What Does It Mean to Think Historically?

How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?

Overview: World War II

Freedom from Fear: FDR Commander in Chief Exhibit Guide

- 1930's: The Perilous Decade
- War in Europe: September 1, 1939
- December 7, 1941: America Enters War
- Commander in Chief
- Germany First
- The Course of the War: 1942
- Leading the Generals and Admirals
- Casablanca: Debating the Second Front
- The Course of War: 1943
- Teheran: The Big Three Meet
- D-Day. June 6, 1944
- Yalta: Winning the War ... Debating the Peace
- Courage is exhilarating: Eleanor Roosevelt and WWII
- Leading by example
- The Home Front
- April 12, 1945
- Legacies of War

Significant Issues

- Pearl Harbor
- Japanese American Internment
- The Holocaust
- FDR's Four Freedoms
- WW II Conferences

Vocabulary

Teaching Activities and Assignments

- History Activities
- Fine Arts Activities
- Civic, Citizenship, and Government Activities
- Writing and Journalism Activities
- Geography Activities
- Hands-on Learning Activities
- Document Analysis Worksheet



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

Curriculum Guide Objectives

The purpose of this curriculum guide is to provide material aimed at meeting two goals. The first is to help students gain an understanding of the tremendous burden and responsibility borne by Franklin D. Roosevelt as the Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and leader of the Allied Powers during World War II. The second is to familiarize students with the use of primary sources, and to train them in using document-based historical research techniques. Interpreting historical documents and photographs helps students gain a better understanding of history as the rich tapestry that it is, rather than a series of loosely connected facts, dates, and events. It also helps them to develop and refine their critical thinking skills.

Students will learn that a primary source is a record created by someone who participated in, or who had first-hand knowledge of an event. Examples of a primary source include letters, reports, diary entries, maps, drawings, newspaper and magazine articles, sound recordings, films and videos, artifacts, and photographs. The exhibition entitled *Freedom From Fear: FDR Commander in Chief* at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum used documents, photographs and audio visual displays as primary sources presenting documentary evidence of the struggle to defend Democracy and defeat the Axis Powers in WWII.

General Objectives: Document Based Questions

When students have successfully completed the exercises included in this packet they should be able to examine a primary source and

- identify factual information
- identify points of view
- gather, arrange and evaluate information
- compare and contrast information
- draw conclusions
- prepare, present and defend arguments

Specific Objectives: World War II

Students should also be able to

- identify specific challenges faced by FDR and the Allies during World War II
- describe the events and conditions that led up to the war
- empathize with leaders facing major military and political difficulties
- explain the attitudes and values of people fighting on the front lines and working on the home front
- compare and contrast the contradictory viewpoints within the United States concerning America's entry and involvement in the war



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

What Does It Mean to Think Historically?

Students often say they don't like history. They say they just don't 'get' why they have to memorize facts and figures about things that happened so long ago. History seems distant to them and has often been presented as nothing more than a 'laundry list' to be memorized and repeated on a test. Occasionally attempts are made to make it more appealing by offering up tidy little sayings that pass as bits of knowledge and understanding: 'In fourteen hundred and ninety two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.' While these short phrases are memorable, and do offer some information, they are hardly worthy of explaining the unimaginable changes brought about by the meeting of the cultures of the New and Old Worlds. In addition, these 'info-bits' leave the student with little desire or incentive to go on and learn more. Perhaps students are not "getting it" because of the way we are giving it.

In order to really understand history, students need to *think historically*. They have to be taught the mental skills needed to not just ingest and regurgitate 'facts', but to *examine, evaluate, and understand* history. Thinking historically requires a complex set of skills similar to those used by a detective trying to solve a mystery.

These skills include:

- **Finding Evidence:** The first step to understanding history is to know where to find the photographs, documents, and artifacts that tell the story of the time, place, people, and events under examination.
- **Classifying and Categorizing:** Organizing bits of information from both primary and secondary sources in a manner that reveals a broader story is the next step.
- **Checking and Cross Checking:** Information must be confirmed and then integrated in order to build a contextual understanding. This is called corroboration. Special attention must be paid to make sure that information is both valid and reliable.
- **Identifying Sub-Texts:** Are there political, social, economic, cultural or other sub-texts at play?
- **Constructing a Viable Interpretation of Events:** What "story" does the information seem to tell? Is this a plausible account of what may have happened?
- **Filling in the Blanks:** Sometimes historians must fill in the gaps when specific evidence does not exist. Great care must be taken to do so in a way that does not introduce excessive bias or contemporary beliefs and attitudes. Historic events must be viewed within the context and attitudes of their own time. However, no matter how pure the intentions, interpretation is always tainted by the assumptions and prejudices of the interpreter.
- **Promoting and Arguing your Point:** Once a plausible narrative has developed, it needs to be told so that it can be examined and withstand the scrutiny by outside, objective sources.



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

How are Historical Records Helpful in Teaching?

Historical records are useful to teachers in a variety of ways. They help students learn to:

- interpret
- explain
- apply
- clarify
- analyze
- evaluate
- assess
- describe
- form opinions
- empathize
- identify
- compare and contrast
- develop self-knowledge
- establish perspective
- identify contradictions
- determine what is accepted as fact and what is rejected as fiction
- draw conclusions
- weigh generalizations
- recognize multiple interpretations
- examine evidence
- analyze raw data
- develop confidence in their ability to gather information
- draw upon visual, literary and musical sources
- develop a sense of excitement about learning about history

These skills can be developed or enhanced by those who participate in document-based learning programs. In addition to skill development, students find working with objects and documents to be fun and exciting. Teachers often have the same reaction.



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

Overview: FDR and World War II

World War II was the most devastating war in the history of mankind. Between 1939 and 1945, an estimated 60 million people were killed in fighting that literally spanned the globe. Democracy was threatened in every corner of the world and its survival hung in the balance.

Franklin Roosevelt understood the importance of this immense challenge and possessed an instinct for power and a willingness to exercise it. With America's entry into the war after the December 7th, surprise attack at Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt moved aggressively to centralize strategy and high command in the White House. He organized the work of war mobilization and military information gathering so that he could closely monitor and direct events himself. He set priorities and focused attention on the goal of total victory. Under his direction, the government assumed unprecedented powers over the economy. Federal defense spending skyrocketed and the public was mobilized to pay the bill. Millions of Americans began paying federal taxes for the first time. War bond sales raised billions of additional dollars. To control inflation, the government put limits on wages, prices, and rents. And to conserve scarce goods for military use, products ranging from gasoline to sugar were rationed.

Roosevelt's military advisers ranged from the anonymous to the flamboyant. The President employed his formidable political skills to manage relationships with, and among, them. Together, he and his lieutenants virtually created the modern American military. The armed services grew from an unprepared force of 334,473 active duty personnel in 1939 to 12,123,455 in 1945. The army and navy expanded and modernized and, with FDR's endorsement, American air power increased dramatically. The President also supported new agencies like the Office of Strategic Services (precursor to the CIA) and the Office of Scientific Research and Development.

Roosevelt held the key position in a wartime coalition of 26 nations he called the "United Nations." He, Josef Stalin, and Winston Churchill comprised the "Big Three" at the heart of this coalition. But, as the war progressed, FDR increasingly acted as the group's ultimate broker and decision-maker. Throughout the war, the President emphasized the importance of coalition-building. Diplomacy, as much as military strategy, became a hallmark of his wartime leadership.

To fight a global war, the United States needed to mobilize its entire population along what became known as the "Home Front." Children organized scrap drives to salvage rubber and metal for war industries, while their parents joined civil defense units, planted Victory Gardens, and purchased war bonds. Government propaganda reminded people to report suspicious activity. Americans joined the Red Cross, the USO, and other service organizations. This enormous national effort touched nearly every aspect of American life and set in motion economic and social forces that would reverberate for decades.

Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt shared in the wartime sacrifices of their fellow citizens during World War II. They purchased war bonds, placed blackout shades on their windows, and shared in wartime rationing. The couple's four sons all served in America's military. Elliott was an Army Air Corps reconnaissance pilot in the North Atlantic and Europe. Franklin Jr. and John both entered the Navy. John rose to the rank of lieutenant commander. Franklin Jr. became a full commander and was awarded a Purple Heart and Silver Star. James chose combat duty with the Marines and received the Navy Cross and the Silver Star. Daughter Anna was a trusted confidante of FDR and lived at the White House in 1944-1945 while her husband served overseas on a military-government assignment.



Curriculum Guide

Franklin D. Roosevelt and WWII

In 1942, Eleanor Roosevelt reluctantly served as unsalaried assistant director of the Office of Civilian Defense. But the nation wasn't ready for a presidential wife as a government official, and she resigned the post. Later that year, she flew to England to offer support to America's allies and returned with detailed reports for FDR. But her most ambitious foreign trip was a 25,000 mile tour of the South Pacific in 1943 as a representative of the American Red Cross. Although she had long wanted to visit the troops in the South Pacific, FDR only permitted the trip when press criticism of Mrs. Roosevelt's civil rights work increased. During her tour, the First Lady traveled in military transports, putting herself at risk to visit hospitals, military camps, and Red Cross clubs. She saw an estimated 400,000 American servicemen and women.

During the war, she continued the ceaseless activism that had long marked her as America's most public First Lady. However, her activism sometimes led to controversy. Mrs. Roosevelt was outspoken in her support for racial and gender equality. She championed the Tuskegee Airmen, women's entrance into the armed services, and the right of workers to organize.

The First Lady prodded her husband to take stronger action on issues like racial integration in the military and defense industries, day care for the children of women war workers, and planning for the postwar economy. Despite harsh criticism, she continued to advocate progressive goals, arguing that America could not fight for democracy and equality abroad without also ensuring it at home. Worn down by wartime decision-making, FDR was sometimes unreceptive. The war placed special strains on the relationship between Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. But the mutual respect between the two never ceased.

On April 12, 1945 FDR died. However, Franklin Roosevelt lived long enough to know that victory was assured. World War II profoundly changed global economics, politics, and social relationships and continues to influence the world we live in today.