

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

Mission:

This Lesson Plan has been developed by the National Museum of Military Vehicles (NMMV) to facilitate scholastic visits to our institution. This Lesson Plan provides instructors with the framework to develop a detailed lesson plan for a field trip to the NMMV, by providing references to Wyoming State educational standards. This Lesson Plan is intended to serve as a starting point, recognizing that every School District has different standards and formats for their Lesson Plans.

Description:

This lesson introduces students to the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and how women transformed the U.S. military during WWII. Through a recruiting film, a secondary-source reading, and a compare-and-contrast activity, students examine women's roles, the discrimination they faced, and the significance of their service. They conclude by crafting an evidence-based argument about why the WAC mattered in American history.

Grade Level: 6-8

Theme: Women's service in the WAC challenged traditional gender roles and reshaped the U.S. military during World War II.

Lesson Duration: 1 class period (60-75 minutes)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Explain why the Women's Army Corps was created and how it changed the U.S. military.
- Analyze the roles women performed and evaluate their impact on the war effort.
- Compare a WWII recruiting film (primary source) with a modern historical article (secondary source).
- Identify and explain the discrimination WAC members faced, including gender and racial bias.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

- Construct an evidence-based argument about the significance of women's military service in WWII.

Key Words/Vocabulary

- WAC/WAAC: Women's Army Corps; Women's Army Auxiliary Corps
- Auxiliary: A support unit that is not granted full military status
- Full Military Status: Equal standing, rights, and benefits within the armed forces
- Recruiting/Propaganda: Media designed to persuade people to join or support a cause
- Primary Source: A firsthand account from the time period (e.g., film)
- Secondary Source: A later interpretation or explanation of historical events
- Discrimination: Unfair treatment based on gender, race, or other identities
- Gender Roles: Expectations about how men and women should behave
- Integration: Bringing groups together equally within an institution
- Cryptography: Code breaking and secure communication work
- Switchboard Operator: A worker who connected phone calls manually
- Turning Point: A moment when major change begins
- Rumors/Stereotypes: Unfounded beliefs that shape public opinion
- Patriotism: Support for one's country, often emphasized in wartime media

Materials

- Projector/speakers
- Chart paper or whiteboard
- Student notebooks
- Access to the video: [“We’re in the Army Now”](#) (1943 WAAC Recruiting Film)
- Excerpts/summaries from the [National WWII Museum WAC article](#) (teacher-facing only; do not distribute copyrighted text)

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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- Teacher summary notes from the National WWII Museum article (included summary below)
 - Printed source comparison sheets (included below and attached to this PDF, use the paperclip icon to access the attachments)
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Teacher Background (Concise but Deep)

Key points from the article (teacher-facing):

- Before WWII, women served mainly as nurses; the Army resisted expanding their roles.
- Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers pushed for a women's corps to support the war.
- 1942: **WAAC** created; 1943: became **WAC**, granting women full Army status.
- Over **150,000 women** served in more than 200 job categories.
- Roles included: mechanics, drivers, cryptographers, switchboard operators, postal clerks, weather observers, and more.
- WACs faced **gender discrimination**, rumors, and unequal pay/benefits early on.
- Black women served too, including the **6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion**, the only all-Black, all-women unit sent overseas.
- Their service helped shift public opinion and paved the way for permanent integration of women in the military.

Key points from the video (primary source):

- Highly polished, upbeat recruiting tone
 - Emphasizes patriotism, order, discipline, and opportunity
 - Shows training, uniforms, teamwork, and “respectable” roles
 - Omits discrimination, controversy, or hardships
 - Designed to persuade women to enlist and reassure the public
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Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII

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Lesson Procedure

A. Warm-Up: “Who Gets to Serve?” (10 minutes)

Write on the board:

“Should women be allowed to serve in the military in the same ways men do?”

Students respond in notebooks with a short paragraph.

Invite 3-4 students to share.

Tell them:

“Today we’re going to look at a moment in history when this question was fiercely debated.”

B. Mini-Lecture: Setting the Stage (10 minutes)

Use student-friendly but historically rich language:

- “By 1942, the U.S. Army was running out of personnel.”
- “Women wanted to help, but the Army had strict rules about what women could do.”
- “Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers argued that women’s skills were essential to winning the war.”
- “The WAAC was created, but without full Army status. Women did the work, but didn’t get equal pay or benefits.”
- “In 1943, the WAAC became the WAC, giving women full military status for the first time.”
- “This was a turning point in U.S. military history.”

Ask:

“What does it mean to give someone ‘full status’? Why does that matter?”

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

C. Primary Source Analysis: 1943 Recruiting Film (15 minutes)

Play **0:00-5:00** of the video.

Students complete a guided analysis:

1. Purpose:

What is this film trying to make women feel, think, or do?

2. Techniques:

What images, music, or narration help persuade the viewer?

3. Missing Voices:

What does the film *not* show or talk about?

D. Secondary Source Analysis: Article Summary (10 minutes)

Students read a teacher-created summary (not copyrighted text).

Middle School Summary: The Women's Army Corps (WAC)

(Based on the National WWII Museum article)

When the United States entered World War II, the Army faced a huge problem: it needed far more people than it had. At that time, women could officially serve only as nurses, even though other countries were already using women in many military roles. Congresswoman Edith Nourse Rogers believed American women should also be able to serve, and she pushed for a new program that would let them join the Army in non-combat jobs.

In 1942, the government created the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC). These women wore uniforms and trained like soldiers, but they were not considered full members of the Army and did not receive the same pay or benefits as men. The Army quickly realized how valuable their work was, and in 1943 the group became the Women's Army Corps (WAC), giving women full military status for the first time.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

More than 150,000 women served in the WAC during the war. They worked in over 200 different jobs, including mechanics, drivers, switchboard operators, postal clerks, weather observers, and technicians. Their work kept the Army running and allowed more men to serve in combat roles.

Even though WAC members were essential, they faced resistance and discrimination. Some people doubted women's abilities or believed they didn't belong in the military. Black women faced both racial and gender discrimination, though many still served with distinction. One famous example is the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion, the only all-Black, all-women unit sent overseas, which cleared massive backlogs of mail for American troops.

By the end of the war, the WAC had proven that women could succeed in military roles. Their service helped change public attitudes and opened the door for women to become a permanent part of the U.S. armed forces.

Then they answer:

- What challenges did WAC members face that the film does not mention?
- How does the article describe the public's reaction to women in uniform?
- What surprised you about the roles women performed?

E. Compare & Contrast: Film vs. Article (10 minutes)

Students work in pairs to complete the chart:

Film (Primary Source)	Article (Secondary Source)
Shows idealized training	Describes discrimination & rumors
Emphasizes patriotism	Explains political debates
Portrays WAC as glamorous	Notes unequal pay & skepticism
Focuses on recruitment	Provides historical context

Pairs share one insight with the class.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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F. Argument Writing: “Why Did the WAC Matter?” (10–15 minutes)

Students write a CER paragraph (Claim-Evidence-Reasoning):

Prompt:

Was the creation of the Women’s Army Corps a major turning point for women in the U.S. military? Defend your answer using evidence from both sources.

Students must use:

- At least one piece of evidence from the film
 - At least one piece of evidence from the article
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5. Student Handouts

A. Primary Source Analysis Sheet: (use the paperclip icon to access the attachment)



WAC Primary
Source Film Short-A

Title of Source: “*We’re in the Army Now*” (1943)

1. What is the purpose of this film?
 2. What techniques does it use to persuade viewers?
 3. What emotions does it try to create?
 4. What information is missing or left out?
 5. How reliable is this source for understanding the WAC?
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Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

B. Secondary Source Analysis Sheet: (use the paperclip icon to access the attachment)



WAC Article-Based
Short Answer Quest

Title of Source: National WWII Museum Article Summary

1. Why was the WAC created?
2. What roles did women perform?
3. What challenges or discrimination did they face?
4. How did the WAC change the U.S. military?
5. What information does the article include that the film does not?

C. CER Writing Frame: (use the paperclip icon to access the attachment)



WAC Guided CER
Handout Practice.pc

Claim:

The creation of the Women's Army Corps was / was not a major turning point because...

Evidence 1 (film):

In the recruiting film, we see...

Evidence 2 (article):

According to the article...

Reasoning:

This evidence shows that...

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



Author: The National Museum of Military Vehicles

CER Argument Writing Rubric: Teacher + Student Version (Grades 6–8)

Prompt: *Was the creation of the Women’s Army Corps a major turning point for women in the U.S. military?*

1. CLAIM (C)

Teacher Rubric	Student-Friendly Version
4 – Exceeds: Claim is precise, insightful, and directly answers the prompt; shows nuanced thinking.	4: My claim is clear, specific, and shows deep thinking.
3 – Meets: Clear claim that answers the prompt and takes a defensible position.	3: My claim clearly answers the question.
2 – Approaching: Claim is vague, confusing, or only partly answers the prompt.	2: My claim is unclear or only partly answers the question.
1 – Beginning: No claim or claim does not relate to the prompt.	1: I didn’t make a claim or it doesn’t match the question.

2. EVIDENCE (E)

Teacher Rubric	Student-Friendly Version
4 – Exceeds: Multiple, specific, accurate pieces of evidence from both sources; smoothly integrated.	4: I used strong, specific evidence from both the film and the article.
3 – Meets: At least one accurate piece of evidence from each source.	3: I used at least one piece of evidence from each source.
2 – Approaching: Evidence is limited, inaccurate, or only from one source; may be listed.	2: I didn’t use enough evidence or only used one source.
1 – Beginning: Evidence missing or unrelated.	1: I didn’t include real evidence.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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3. REASONING (R)

Teacher Rubric	Student-Friendly Version
4 – Exceeds: Reasoning clearly explains how evidence supports the claim; shows deeper historical thinking.	4: I clearly explained how my evidence proves my claim and showed deeper thinking.
3 – Meets: Reasoning explains the connection between evidence and claim.	3: I explained how my evidence connects to my claim.
2 – Approaching: Reasoning is weak, unclear, or mostly summary.	2: My explanation is unclear or mostly summary.
1 – Beginning: No reasoning or reasoning does not relate to evidence or claim.	1: I didn’t explain my evidence.

4. HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDING

Teacher Rubric	Student-Friendly Version
4 – Exceeds: Strong understanding of WAC, WWII context, discrimination, and social change; accurate vocabulary.	4: I showed strong understanding of the WAC and used correct history words.
3 – Meets: Accurate understanding of key ideas from both sources.	3: I showed I understood the main ideas.
2 – Approaching: Partial or surface-level understanding; some inaccuracies.	2: I showed some understanding but made mistakes.
1 – Beginning: Major misunderstandings or inaccuracies.	1: I misunderstood important information.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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5. WRITING QUALITY & CONVENTIONS

Teacher Rubric	Student-Friendly Version
4 – Exceeds: Clear, organized, polished writing; strong transitions; few or no errors.	4: My writing is clear, organized, and edited.
3 – Meets: Understandable and organized; errors do not interfere with meaning.	3: My writing makes sense even with a few mistakes.
2 – Approaching: Uneven or unclear writing; frequent errors distract.	2: My writing is confusing or has many errors.
1 – Beginning: Hard to follow; errors interfere with understanding.	1: My writing is very hard to understand.

Total Score: ____ / 20

Student Checklist

- I made a clear claim
- I used evidence from both the film and the article
- I explained how my evidence proves my claim
- I showed accurate understanding of the WAC and WWII
- My writing is clear, organized, and edited

Optional Extensions

A. Debate Activity

Resolution:

“The WAC was essential to the Allied victory in WWII.”

Students argue affirmative or negatively using evidence.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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B. Spotlight on the 6888th Battalion

Short research task on the only all-Black, all-women unit sent overseas.

C. Media Literacy Mini-Lesson

Analyze how propaganda shapes public opinion during wartime.

D. STEM Connection

Explore wartime communication technology: switchboards, radios, cryptography.

Wyoming Standards

Grades 6-8 Standards Alignment

English Language Arts (ELA) Standards

Reading Informational Text

- RI.6-8.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
Students use evidence from the film and article in CER writing.
- RI.6-8.6 Determine an author's (or creator's) point of view and analyze how it is conveyed.
Students analyze the recruiting film's persuasive techniques and omissions.
- RI.6-8.7 Integrate information from visual media with written text.
Students compare the film (visual) with the article (text).

Writing

- W.6-8.1 Write arguments using clear claims and relevant evidence.
CER paragraph on whether the WAC was a turning point.
- W.6-8.4 Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task and audience.
Structured CER writing frame.
- W.6-8.9 Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis.
Evidence from both sources required.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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Speaking & Listening

- SL.6-8.1 Engage in collaborative discussions.
Warm-up discussion, pair work, share-outs.
 - SL.6-8.2 Interpret information presented in diverse media.
Film analysis + article summary.
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Social Studies

Civics & Government

- SS6-8.CG.1 Analyze rights, responsibilities, and civic participation.
Women's service, discrimination, and changing military policy.

Culture & Cultural Diversity

- SS6-8.CD.1 Examine how culture and identity shape experiences.
Gender roles, racial discrimination, 6888th Battalion.

Time, Continuity & Change (History)

- SS6-8.TC.1 Analyze cause, effect, and historical significance.
Why the WAC was created and why it mattered.
- SS6-8.TC.2 Evaluate multiple perspectives using primary and secondary sources.
Film vs. article comparison.

Technology, Literacy & Global Connections

- SS6-8.TL.1 Evaluate how media and technology influence society.
Propaganda analysis, wartime communication roles.
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Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

- CT.6-8.1 Evaluate information, arguments, and claims.
Students identify bias, omissions, and purpose in the film.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women's Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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- CT.6-8.3 Analyze complex issues from multiple perspectives.
Gender, race, military policy, public opinion.
-

Communication

- COM.6-8.1 Communicate ideas clearly for various purposes.
CER writing, discussion, pair-share.
 - COM.6-8.2 Adapt communication to audience and task.
Argument writing vs. source analysis.
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Collaboration

- COL.6-8.1 Work effectively with others to accomplish tasks.
Partner comparison chart, optional debate.
-

Media & Technology Literacy

- MTL.6-8.1 Analyze media messages and their purposes.
Recruiting film as propaganda.
 - MTL.6-8.2 Evaluate credibility and accuracy of sources.
Primary vs. secondary source reliability.
-

Cultural & Global Awareness

- CGA.6-8.1 Examine how cultural perspectives influence events and decisions.
Women's roles, racial barriers, shifting wartime expectations.
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Personal & Social Responsibility

- PSR.6-8.1 Demonstrate ethical reasoning and civic awareness.
Warm-up question on who "gets to serve" and why it matters.

Lesson Title: Women in Uniform: The Women’s Army Corps (WAC) in WWII



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Resources

Primary Source

“*We’re in the Army Now*” (1943 WAAC Recruiting Film) – U.S. Army Signal Corps Used for student analysis of wartime messaging, persuasion techniques, and omissions.

YouTube: “1943 WAAC Recruiting Film: *We’re in the Army Now*.” WWIIPublicDomain. Accessed April 9, 2026.

Secondary Source (Teacher-Facing Only)

National WWII Museum, *Women in the Army* article (summary notes provided in lesson) Used to provide accurate historical context, key facts, and background for teacher instruction.

Haley Guepet, JD, PhD. “The Women’s Army Corps (WAC).” The National WWII Museum. Published December 23, 2024. Accessed April 9, 2026.

Teacher-Created Materials

Article Summary: *The Women’s Army Corps (WAC)* — Middle school–level reading based on National WWII Museum research

Teacher background notes on WAC history, roles, discrimination, and the 6888th Battalion

Printed source comparison chart (Film vs. Article)

Primary Source Analysis Sheet, Secondary Source Analysis Sheet, CER Writing Frame

CER Argument Writing Rubric (Teacher + Student Version)

Optional Extension Resources

Historical materials on the 6888th Central Postal Directory Battalion

Examples of WWII propaganda posters or short clips for media literacy

Images or diagrams of WWII communication technology (switchboards, radios, cryptography tools)