

# Winnie the Welder

GRADES 3-8



## Overview

This activity is geared toward participants in grades 3-8. The estimated amount of time to deliver this lesson is 45 minutes.

Participants will learn about women's contribution to the war effort in shipyards, especially as welders. As many men were sent to serve in the U.S. military during World War II, women were hired for a variety of roles at home, including building Navy ships.

Participants will look at some major news headlines concerning women's roles in shipyards and draw conclusions about when and why they were permitted into the workforce.



## Objective

Participants will be able to describe the importance of women in the shipbuilding industry and develop an understanding of the ways that newspaper headlines present important events.



## Materials

- Headlines from the *Norfolk New Journal and Guide*
  - Facilitators may choose to use the provided headlines worksheet or printable large versions of headlines
- Oral history clips from Lillian Carson, Mabel McCray and Rose Abbonizio



## Inquiry

Ask participants to consider the news headlines from the *New Journal and Guide* and either use the worksheet to number them in chronological order or cut out the images and place them in order on a large, flat surface. Discuss the following questions:

- Why did you put the headlines in this order?
- What might these articles be about?

After providing the correct order, discuss the following questions (*grades 6-8*):

- Why might women have been needed to work in shipyards during WWII?
- What other kinds of jobs might women have been hired for during wartime?

The correct order and dates for the articles is as follows:

- “Shipyard Boom Means Jobs for Many” (July 1, 1933)
- “Shipyard Planning for the Employment of Women” (October 17, 1942)
- “Role of Woman in Nation’s War is Opportunity Story” (March 20, 1943)
- “Women Hold One in Every 3 War Jobs in the Nation” (April 29, 1944)
- “Over Two Million Negro Women Cited for Jobs in War Industry” (July 21, 1945)
- “Giant Shipyard Closed, 9500 Jobless” (May 4, 1946)



## Investigation

Listen to clips from the [oral histories](#) of Lillian Carson, Rose Abbonizio and Mabel McCray. All three women worked in the Philadelphia Navy Yard and were involved in the building of Battleship New Jersey. Lillian Carson was a welder in the yard from 1941 to 1946, Rose Abbonizio worked in optics repair from 1943 to 1945, and Mabel McCray was also a welder from 1942 to 1945. Discuss the following questions:

*Suggested questions for 3-5:*

- How did Lillian, Rose and Mabel contribute to the war effort?
- What kinds of training did the women receive before going to the navy yard?
- How did the women in these oral histories feel about their experiences as shipyard workers?

*Suggested questions for 6-8:*

- What are the similarities between the experiences of Lillian, Rose and Mabel?
  - How did working in a shipyard impact their quality of life?
  - What was it like for these women to work so closely with men?
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## Activity

### Alliteration Name Game (suggested for grades K-2)

During World War II, women working in factories and shipyards were given nicknames such as “Rosie the Riveter,” “Winnie the Welder,” and “Susie the Steelworker.”

Move around the room and have each participant give themselves a nickname, stating their name and an occupation or activity, mirroring the structure of “Winnie the Welder.” Each participant will add a movement to the nickname, acting out the activity.

### Write a Headline (suggested for grades 3-8)

Share oral history transcripts and news headlines with participants. These headlines describe several events during World War II, when women were hired by the thousands to work in shipyards. Participants will create their own news headlines inspired by the experiences of Lillian, Rose and Mabel. Encourage participants to include language like that of headlines they’ve read in newspapers before. Ask them to share their headlines and explain their thought processes.

Discuss the following questions:

- Who is the subject of your article?
- What event(s) does your article discuss?

If your group completed the **Inquiry** activity,

- Where in the timeline would your headline fall?



## Lesson Connection

Have participants listen to the oral histories of other women participating in the war effort during World War II, such as: Veronica Cotariu, Thayer Boswell and Doris Pearce. Please see our lesson: **Women's Uniforms of World War II.**



## Background

Many women were hired for traditionally male-dominated roles during World War II, when millions of men joined the service. The War Manpower Commission was established early on in the war to balance the personnel needs of the armed forces and industry jobs. Part of their job was to recruit women into the workforce.

They often used propaganda posters of women hard at work to encourage other women to move into the manufacturing and construction industries. Participants may be familiar with the image of Rosie the Riveter, who represented many of the six million women working in factories and shipyards during the war. However, women worked a multitude of roles beyond riveter, especially in shipyards, where “Winnie the Welder” was much more common.

Rosie the Riveter’s name possibly originated from a woman working as a riveter building fighter planes in Connecticut. It became popular when Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb released a song in early 1943 called “Rosie the Riveter.”

Later that year, an image of a fictitious Rosie painted by Norman Rockwell was on the cover of the Saturday Evening Post. Soon, “Rosie” inspired a multitude of other personifications around the country. “Susie the Steelworker,” “Elsie, the Electrician,” “Typewriting Tess,” “Aircraft Annie,” “Ronnie, the Bren Gun Girl,” and “Winnie the Welder” may not have stuck as well as “Rosie,” but they represented the variety of jobs performed by women during the war.

“Winnie” may have first appeared in a comedy routine performed by musician Jack Marshall in New York City. It soon came to refer to women workers primarily in shipyards located in Philadelphia, Charleston, Newport News, Pittsburgh and other cities around the United States.



## Additional Resources/References

For more information on Winnie the Welder:

<https://www.heinzhistorycenter.org/blog/women-forging-the-way/meet-winnie-the-welder>



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*Full Muster: Inclusive Histories on Historic Naval Ships* has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities: Democracy demands wisdom.

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**Documents and Images**

***Role Of Woman In Nation's  
War Is Opportunity Story***

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Use of articles permitted complimentary of *New Journal and Guide*

***Women Hold One In Every  
3 War Jobs In The Nation***

Use of articles permitted complimentary of *New Journal and Guide*

***Shipyard Planning For  
The Employment Of Women***

Use of articles permitted complimentary of *New Journal and Guide*

# SHIPYARD BOOM MEANS JOBS FOR MANY

Use of articles permitted complimentary of *New Journal and Guide*

## ***Giant Shipyard Closed, 9,500 Jobless***

Credit: *The Chicago Defender*

## **Over Two Million Negro Women Cited For Jobs In War Industry**

Credit: *Atlanta Daily World*

## INQUIRY: HEADLINES

Directions:

Read the headlines below and number them from 1-6 in chronological order.

	“Role of Woman in Nation’s War is Opportunity Story”
	“Over Two Million Negro Women Cited for Jobs in War Industry”
	“Giant Shipyard Closed, 9500 Jobless”
	“Shipyard Planning for the Employment of Women”
	“Women Hold One in Every 3 War Jobs in the Nation”
	“Shipyard Boom Means Jobs for Many”



## ACTIVITY: WRITE YOUR OWN HEADLINE

Directions: Consider the experiences of the three women welders you heard from. Write a news headline for an article on their experiences. Use the headlines from *Inquiry* as inspiration.