Background:

By the time the United States entered World War II in 1941, American defense industries were already churning out large numbers of planes and ships, trucks and tanks, guns and shells, supplies and equipment. Tons of war materials were being shipped to Britain and other nations battling the Axis. As America joined the fight, and battlefronts multiplied around the globe, demands on war production skyrocketed. Civilian industries re-tooled, manufacturing tanks instead of cars, parachutes instead of stockings, machine guns instead of Kleenex. And as men went off to war, six million women took their places on factory floors and assembly lines.

American industry and American workers produced most of the war matériel the United States and some forty other nations used to fight the war:

324,000 aircraft, 88,000 tanks, 8,800 warships, 5,600 merchant ships, 224,000 pieces of artillery, 2,382,000 trucks, 79,000 landing craft, 2,600,000 machine guns, 15,000,000 guns.
“I worked the graveyard shift 12:00–8:00 a.m, in the shipyard. I had leather gloves, leather pants, big hood, goggles, and a leather jacket. They said you weld like you crochet.”

—Katie Grant
Materials:
- Online Video—World War II Overview: North Atlantic and North Africa
  http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson10.asx
- Woman war worker coveralls
- Maidenform ad: “Brasieres ... A Vital Necessity to Women at Work”
- Welding mask used by ship welder Augusta Clawson
- African American woman welding
- Women riveting

Lesson:

This lesson should give students a different perspective on the effects of World War II. It provides an excellent topic for a class-wide, semi-guided research project that teaches students how to do in-depth historical research. This will prepare them for the types of projects they will have to conduct in college.

First, set the stage by showing the students the World War II overview of the North Atlantic and North African theaters on the video. Then have them write down the steps they would take to research a topic on the impact on U.S. society of the Rosie the Riveter campaign. (Steps should include: establishing a thesis, developing a process to prove the thesis, reviewing secondary sources, analyzing primary sources, and testing the accuracy of the thesis.)

Make sure students use a variety of sources, both primary and secondary. Have them analyze images and artifacts in the manual from the National Museum of American History collections, as well as review library primary accounts about female workers. Students should supplement this analysis with statistical data from the U.S. census; ask them to find out the numbers of female workers and compare this to totals before the war. Also, have the students compare their findings to the theses of other historians. Encourage them to be critical of what others have concluded in the past.

Follow-up Activity:

Students may know of women in their local community who recall life in America during World War II. Some of these women may be willing to say how they feel about the changes in society that occurred during their youth. This would introduce students to the skill of interviewing in addition to providing an eyewitness perspective to their current research project.

Students could research the impact of the need for workers on African Americans or American immigrants, particularly the Hispanic population. How did the new opportunities to work affect their lives?
Brassieres...  
A VITAL NECESSITY TO WOMEN AT WORK

Work in the war industries — for the most part — is much heavier than that to which a woman has hitherto been accustomed. Working with her hands and arms — pulling, lifting, stretching — means a continual strain on the important muscles of the breasts. Though the ill-effects may not be immediately apparent, they will take their toll over a period of time — unless the worker wears a brassiere scientifically constructed to give her bosom proper support and protection. That is one of the reasons why — in this wartime era — Maiden Form is glad to be able to reassure the women of America that today, as always, they can obtain correct support with Maiden Form’s scientifically designed brassieres.

"There is a Maiden Form  
For Every Type of Figure!"

Maiden Form  
BRASSIERES 
GIRDLES, GARTER BELTS
DO YOUR SHARE—BUY U. S. WAR BONDS AND STAMPS

MAIDEN FORM BRASSIERE COMPANY, INC.  
200 Madison Avenue, New York  
920 Merchandise Mart, Chicago  
719 S. Los Angeles St., Los Angeles
General

Section I: War of Independence

Section II: Wars of Expansion

Section III: Civil War

Section IV: World War II

Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath
*Americans at War*, produced by The History Channel

An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

**War of Independence**

*First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:*
- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

**Mexican War**

*First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:*
- José María Tornel y Mendívil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

**Civil War**

*First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:*
- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottwood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

**World War I**

*World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel*

**World War II**

*World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel*

*World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format, produced by The History Channel*
- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater

*The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel*

*First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:*
- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

**Vietnam**

*Excerpt from *Huey Helicopter—Air Armada*, The History Channel documentary, 2002*

*First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:*
- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004,
  *(produced by Pyramid Studios)*