



WORLD WAR II LESSON PLANS

Lesson 6—Mobilization on the Home Front: Homeland Security in World War II

by *Michael Hutchison*

Overview/Description

Just as the events of September 11, 2001, changed the lives of nearly every living American, the events of December 7, 1941, did exactly the same thing to every American alive at that time. Not only did many young American men find themselves going to recruiting centers or boot camp, but their fellow citizens staying in the United States found that their daily existence became much different.

Grade Level

High School

Learning/Instructional Objectives

Students will:

- learn about typical blackout and air-raid procedures set during World War II
- consider how the war affected “average Americans”
- make conclusions about the effectiveness of the mobilization effort as a factor in winning World War II

Academic Standards for the Social Studies

- Indiana Standards: USH 5.2, USH 5.6, WH 8.4 and WH 9.2 (as of Oct 1, 2008)

- National Standards (National Council for Social Studies): II Time, Continuity, and Change; IV Individuals, Groups, and Institutions; VIII Science, Technology, and Society; IX Global Connections.

Social Studies/Historical Concepts

World War II, air raid, Civilian Defense

Time Required

One to two class periods (50 to 55 minutes each)

Materials Required

Copies of “Official Blackout and Air Raid Instructions.” IHS Digital Library, Item ID: M0272_BOX2_FOLDER6_OFFICIAL (accessed Aug. 8, 2011).

Background/Historical Context

Americans bought war bonds, conducted scrap drives, and planted victory gardens to support the war effort. They dealt with shortages of scarce goods caused by rationing. But nothing concerned Americans more than the possibility that the war might come home. Spies, saboteurs, and possible attack, were all fears that Americans shared and wanted to avoid.

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Using information collected by an Indiana soldier stationed on the West Coast of the United States during World War II, this lesson will demonstrate how ordinary Americans prepared for what they hoped was the “unthinkable”—a bombing raid or an attack by the enemy on the American mainland.

Lesson Procedure

Begin the lesson by asking the students to brainstorm about how their lives have changed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the resulting military actions. If possible, students should relate personal examples. Some students who travel frequently may note that security at airports or at border crossings are significantly more intense than before, or that many may note that friends or family members have been deployed for military service. Other students may note that they have witnessed (or been involved in) demonstrations either supporting U.S. troops or opposing the war in the Middle East. Still others may note that they had to postpone or cancel vacation plans because they were unable to secure a passport to meet new federal regulations about traveling outside the United States.

Next, ask students to speculate about the conditions and issues facing Americans during World War II. Most will probably note that there would be shortages of goods in high demand, such as gasoline, tires, some foods, and coffee. Others may note that family life was significantly disrupted because women filled jobs in the workplace because of a reduction in male workers who were now in the military.

Once the discussion is completed, distribute copies of the resource, “Official Blackout and Air Raid Instructions for the City of Sacramento,” or direct the students to find the resource online. Distribute copies of the study guide as well. Once the materials are made available, allot sufficient time for students to complete the assignment.

After students have completed the questions, either have them submit the study guides for

evaluation, or have the students share their responses in class discussion.

Assessment

The teacher should evaluate student answers based on criteria set by the school, district, or the teacher personally. Suggested assessment items include historical accuracy, spelling, grammar, and the ability to make critical thinking choices. The teacher should also note that there are multiple possible answers to many of the questions, and that any reasonable answer might be appropriate for credit.

Enrichment Activity

Ask students to consider whether the blackout and air-raid instructions would realistically protect citizens in case of an attack. The teacher may also wish to discuss how similar periods of national uncertainty (the threat of nuclear attack during the Cold War or tightening of airport security in the post-9/11 era) have spurred a higher level of security and vigilance against possible attack or invasion.

After investigating historical concerns about the post-Pearl Harbor period, ask students to write newspaper editorials encouraging their readers to follow instructions to ensure blackout conditions and protection against air raids.

Another activity could involve students doing online or traditional research using agencies such as the Department of Homeland Security to compare strategies and suggested preparations for dealing with a possible terrorist attack today and preparations for air raids or invasion during World War II.

Study Guide Questions with Suggested Answers

Note: Many of the questions are open ended and have possible multiple answers. The teacher should consider any reasonable answer as correct in those instances.

1. What type of resource would you consider the “Official Blackout and Air Raid Instructions” to be? How do you think this resource would be distributed to people?

Based on the fact that it is a multiple page resource, it is most likely some sort of pamphlet that was distributed in the Sacramento, California area. Because of the probable size and makeup of the pamphlet, it's likely it might have been distributed door-to-door by Civilian Defense authorities, or possibly distributed in public gathering places, such as churches.

2. What agencies or organizations were involved in creation of the resource as far as “sources of information”? What sorts of “responsibilities” for authorities and citizens are listed in the opening paragraphs of the resource?

The “sources of information” listed are the Sacramento Police Bureau of Operations, the Sacramento Fire Department, and the Office of Civilian Defense. The pamphlet states that the Sacramento Defense Council and military authorities are taking “every possible precaution for your protection and welfare in the event of an emergency.” The pamphlet also states that “the full cooperation of every citizen in complying intelligently and cheerfully with these and subsequent instructions is absolutely essential for the safety of the whole community.”

3. Why do you think these instructions would be more pertinent and important to Californians than to people living in Indiana? What sorts of instructions would you suggest Indiana residents have during this period?

Sacramento, California, would be closer to the coastline than any location in Indiana. In addition, since the Japanese had just attacked Pearl Harbor, people on the West Coast may have felt more vulnerable to the threat of the Japanese attack since California was much closer to Pearl Harbor than Indiana.

4. The resource mentions in two different locations about the blackout signal as of December 20. Based on your knowledge of U.S. history, what inferences can you make about the significance of this date?

Most students will infer that the pamphlet was printed in late 1941 because of the December 20 date. They probably will recognize that December 20 would be less than three weeks from the December 7 attack, and may conclude that the pamphlet is in reaction to what they believed at the time was a possibility of imminent attack on the city by Japanese carrier-based airplanes.

5. What does the resource state the blackout signal is? What is the all clear signal? What does the resource direct a person to do if the blackout signal occurs while the person is in their home?

The blackout signal is three short whistle blasts, repeated at various intervals. The all-clear signal is one long whistle blast. These were temporary signals, and the pamphlet states the signals would be changed once new air raid sirens were installed. If the blackout signal occurs while someone is at home, they are to move to “whatever room or area in the house you have previously prepared and remain there.” No light of any degree should show on the outside of the home. The pamphlet also instructs the person not to move around in unlighted portions of the home any more than absolutely necessary.

6. What instructions does the resource give as far as what to do if the blackout signal takes place when a person is in their car? What are the penalties for violation of the blackout rules? Do these penalties seem fair? Explain your answer.

If the blackout warning occurs when a person is in an automobile, the driver is to immediately pull to the curb or side of the road, stop the vehicle, and turn out all lights, including dash-lights, tail lights, stop lights, or other illumination.

Occupants of the car are then to leave the car and walk to a place of safety, and remain there until the all clear has sounded. If they can't find a place of safety, the pamphlet states they should lie flat on the ground under the car.

Some students may think the penalties are minor, until they realize the value of a 1941 dollar was far greater than money in the early part of the twenty-first century. With minimum wage at only 25 cents per hour during the depression, \$500 would be the equivalent of several weeks' pay for many people. Many students may look at six months imprisonment as a substantial punishment as well. There is no evidence in the resource that anyone was prosecuted for violating the law, and it is presumed that this is a state law and not a federal law.

7. What does the resource suggest for preparing a home for a possible air raid?

If the home has a basement, the basement should be prepared with necessities that might be required for occupancy for several hours or more, including food, water, temporary toilet facilities, and one or more flashlights. If the house did not have a basement, then a room on the first floor of the house with the least exterior exposure should be selected, preferably one with the least number of windows, lessening the danger from flying glass and bomb fragments. The occupants should lie down under a table or bed for protection. Bathtubs and other receptacles should be filled with water for an emergency supply if water mains are damaged.

8. Look at section seven, "Methods Of Controlling Incendiary Bombs." Why do you think the writers of the resource put so much emphasis on these types of bombs, which would cause buildings to catch on fire rather than be damaged or destroyed by explosion? The resource gives the homeowner explicit instructions on how to remove and extinguish the bomb. Why do you suppose the fire department expected homeowners to be involved in the putting out of such fires?

While the pamphlet doesn't specifically mention the effect of incendiary weapons, students might presume that incendiary fires might burn out of control before the fire department could put out the fire. Typically, in an incendiary raid, many bombs are dropped over a wide area, and fires could be widespread and uncontrollable in a short amount of time. The teacher may wish to discuss the effects of incendiary bombing on Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo, where damage by firebombs was extreme. While it is not specifically stated in the pamphlet, the underlying message is that in case of incendiary bombing, "first responders" may be overwhelmed and unable to put out every fire in the city.

9. Look at section nine, "General Instructions." In the space below, write the instructions that might be specifically designed to increase morale. What similarities can be found

between those instructions and instructions many Americans might see today in the face of terrorist attacks?

Most students will likely point to the following instructions: "Lead as normal a social and business life as possible. Do not shut yourself and your family to a hermit-like existence;" "Such actions are bad for morale and health. Be an American, keep your chin up and keep smiling;" "Be calm at all times;" "Don't be a party to spreading false reports. Enemy nations seek to demoralize use of military and civilian authorities." Students may note several similarities between the morale-boosters of 1941 and those 60 years later. For example, after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, government officials encouraged Americans to go on with their business and with their lives. Many Americans flew the flag for some time. In addition, while new security measures at airports and other forms of transportation seemed to inconvenience many, most took it in stride. Students may suggest that in 1941 most Americans may have been inconvenienced by rules regarding blackouts and possible air raids,

they most likely felt that the restrictions were needed and did not resist them.

10. While the danger of air raids might have been thought more severe on the U.S. coastlines, many Indiana residents may have also expressed concern about the possibility of attack, or more likely, sabotage. Using what you know about the area where you live, what steps would you have recommended to Civilian Defense authorities to secure your community during the early days of World War II? Be ready to defend your answers and ideas in class discussion.

Students may have varied answers to this question. For example, if a student lives in a highly industrialized area, they may note that protection of industries vital to the war effort was paramount. Students who live near transportation hubs (rail lines, highways, airports) might believe that it would be important to protect routes so that men and material can be moved easily in order to get it to the front lines. Students who live in rural areas might feel that agricultural interests should be protected to ensure a safe food supply for military and civilian populations.

4. The resource mentions in two different locations about the blackout signal as of December 20. Based on your knowledge of U.S. history, what inferences can you make about the significance of this date?

5. What does the resource state the blackout signal is? What is the “all clear” signal? What does the resource direct a person to do if the blackout signal occurs while the person is in their home?

6. What instructions does the resource give if the blackout signal takes place when a person is in their car? What are the penalties for violation of the blackout rules? Do these penalties seem fair? Explain your answer.

7. What does the resource suggest for preparing a home for a possible air raid?

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