

Name: _____ Class: _____

Rosie the Riveter

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While many people do not know who Rosie the Riveter truly was, her image continues to inspire women today. In this informational text, Barrett Smith discusses the beginning of Rosie and how she impacted women during World War II. As you read, take notes on why the image of Rosie the Riveter was created, and how it inspired women during World War II.

- [1] Rosie the Riveter is not an actual person but an idea that represents an era in history and the women who were part of that era. A riveter is someone who uses a rivet gun to attach metal parts, but not all Rosie the Riveters were actual riveters. Rosie the Riveter is an idea that represents all of the American women who worked in factories, shipyards, and other manufacturing plants during World War II to help the American war effort. She has also come to represent women's economic power and feminism, which is the movement that fights for the equal rights of women.

Women in the Workforce

Before World War II, most married women were housewives and stay-at-home moms. This meant that they were dependent on their husbands for money, food, and other resources. The few women who went to work tended to be of lower class backgrounds and held domestic-type jobs that people considered "appropriate" for women, such as cleaning and clerk work with low pay. Many women lost their jobs during the Great Depression or gave them up to create opportunities for more men to work.

When the United States entered World War II after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, most American men were conscripted¹ to fight in the military. This left no one to work in the factories and shipyards but they were still needed to produce weapons and supplies for the war effort. Companies and the American government started recruiting women to fill the jobs that in the past had been seen as only for men.



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1. required by law to serve in the armed forces

The Rosie the Riveter image and idea were used during the war by companies and the American government to encourage housewives to join the workforce. It was considered improper, at the time, for high class women to work so Rosie the Riveter was made to show a feminine woman who only works because her country needs her.

The Story Behind the Name

- [5] The term “Rosie the Riveter” was first used in a 1942 song written by Redd Evans and John Jacob Loeb. The song describes Rosie as a worker on an assembly line, working hard even while other women were out at the bar. Rosie earns an award for her hard work and dedication to the American war effort. Rosie the Riveter isn’t a real person but the writers of the Rosie the Riveter song were inspired by a real woman — Rosalind P. Walters, a rich woman who worked in a factory building a fighter plane called the F4U Corsair Fighter. This song became a hit and the term “Rosie the Riveter” became known across the United States.

The Story Behind the Image

The iconic² image that most people associate with Rosie the Riveter today is the “We Can Do It” poster created by J. Howard Miller in 1942. In this poster, a woman in a red bandanna is rolling up her sleeve with the slogan “We Can Do It!” above her. However, this poster was not actually very well known during World War II, and it was not used to recruit women to work. The “We Can Do It” poster was produced by Westinghouse Company's War Production Coordinating Committee and put up inside their factories to motivate both male and female employees to work harder. It wasn’t until after the war, in the 1980s, that the poster was rediscovered and became associated with the feminist movement.

In 1943, the famous visual artist Norman Rockwell created an image of Rosie the Riveter that was used as the cover of Saturday Evening Post. This image was widely distributed and very popular, and it was used during the war for war bond³ drives. In this image, a woman is holding a rivet gun and a lunch box that says “Rosie” on it. It is believed that Rockwell was inspired by the Rosie the Riveter song when creating this image.

The Impact

Many Americans consider the Rosie the Riveter era as a time when all Americans came together to help the war movement. However, this isn’t entirely true. While the war gave many white women the opportunity to work, it wasn’t until 1943 that black men started to be hired and not until 1945 that black women started to be trained as welders.⁴ This eventual integration,⁵ however, did have a lasting impact on the civil rights movement as well as the feminist movement. White and black people worked alongside each other doing the same jobs and had to learn to negotiate that sudden integration (in a time when they still did not share the same water fountains, toilets, or public schools).

2. **Iconic (adjective):** very popular or famous

3. loans to the government to help fund war efforts

4. a person who fuses metal together

5. the mixing together of people who used to be separated along the lines of race, gender, or any other label

The Rosie the Riveter era, though not as unified as people make it out to be, provided both white women and black people with the opportunity to prove that they could do the work that white men could do. The economic empowerment of the Rosie the Riveter era and the opening up of jobs to women and black people were temporary — when the war ended, men returned to their jobs, and many women returned to being housewives. However, the impact of the Rosie the Riveter era and idea was lasting in American culture and provided the foundation for later feminist movements.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies a main idea in the text? [RI.2]
 - A. Rosie's image and what she stood for inspired women to take on jobs formerly reserved for men.
 - B. The image of Rosie was responsible for dividing the nation more than unifying it because black men and black women still faced many restrictions.
 - C. Rosie's powerful image is the sole reason that black and white women felt that it was acceptable to enter the workforce.
 - D. The image and ideas behind Rosie were originally intended to convince women to spend money on war bonds.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "The Rosie the Riveter image and idea were used during the war by companies and the American government to encourage housewives to join the workforce." (Paragraph 4)
 - B. "This image was widely distributed and very popular and it was used during the war for war bond drives. In this image, a woman is holding a rivet gun and a lunch box that says 'Rosie' on it." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "While the war gave many white women the opportunity to work, it wasn't until 1943 that black men started to be hired and not until 1945 that black women started to be trained as welders." (Paragraph 8)
 - D. "The economic empowerment of the Rosie the Riveter era and the opening up of jobs to women and black people were temporary — when the war ended, men returned to their jobs, and many women returned to being housewives." (Paragraph 9)

3. PART A: Which of the following describes how the author introduces Rosie the Riveter in the text? [RI.5]
 - A. The author provides information on the person who inspired Rosie.
 - B. The author outlines the ideas that Rosie stands for.
 - C. The author describes what Rosie physically looks like.
 - D. The author emphasizes the lasting effects Rosie has had on women.

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "A riveter is someone who uses a rivet gun to attach metal parts, but not all Rosie the Riveters were actual riveters." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "She has also come to represent women's economic power and feminism, which is the movement that fights for the equal rights of women." (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "Companies and the American government started recruiting women to fill the jobs that in the past had been seen as only for men." (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "The Rosie the Riveter image and idea were used during the war by companies and the American government to encourage housewives to join the workforce." (Paragraph 4)

5. What connection does the author draw between World War II and the civil rights movement? [RI.3]

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. How did WWII shift the roles of men and women? How did the roles of women before WWII compare to their roles after? How would the expectations regarding women during WWII compare to expectations today? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
2. How do you think WWII contributed to the public's changing views on women's capabilities and rights? In what ways are women still required to prove themselves today? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. How was Rosie's image able to create change in both the women's rights movement and the civil rights movement? Why do you think her image continues to be popular in representing change?