

THE RUTH & TED BRAUN AWARDS FOR WRITING EXCELLENCE  
AT SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

## World War II: A Thematic Unit

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Brei Noble, a native of West Branch, MI, received her Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education in May 2006 with a history major and biology minor. Brei worked for over three years in the SVSU Writing Center, was a member of Alpha Phi Omega and Alpha Chi, worked on *Cardinal Sins*, wrote for the *Valley Vanguard*, and still managed to have fun playing intramural soccer. Her plans for the future are yet undecided; she hopes to continue in a career that will give back to the community and make her family proud.

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### Unit Description

This thematic unit focuses on the causes, events, ideologies, culture, outcomes, and effects of World War II. Special emphasis will be laid upon its foundations and results, to impress on students the importance of the historical continuum and historical relevance to modern times. The unit includes five subsections: Background/Causes, U.S. Home and Early WWII, Events, The Holocaust, and Outcomes/Effects. It is important to note that two separate sections will focus on the Holocaust and political ideologies, respectively. Students will also be introduced to the economic elements and impacts of World War II.

Along with many in-class group discussions and board projects, students will be quizzed throughout the unit on separate subsections (with a larger comprehensive test at the end of the unit). Moreover, students will have the opportunity to personally connect with the history of WWII through two different writing assignments. Within the first writing assignment, students will create a narrative piece from the perspective of a person who lived through the Holocaust. Within the second writing assignment, students will write a description/summary of a personal interview they conducted with a person who lived during WWII. Their focus in the papers for this assignment will be to

integrate topics of WWII learned from class with the personal account of the person interviewed.

### Rationale

In addition to lives lost, monetary costs, and technological advances that resulted from World War II, the war had an unquestionable impact on the world during and after the late 1930s and '40s. Because it has set the stage for the resulting economies, cultures, and politics in modern times, students must understand the many cause and effect relationships of WWII. (For example, in specific connection with the United States, WWII helped to mold our country to be the super power that it is today.) A clear comprehension of the political ideologies surrounding WWII, many of which still exist today, is essential to understanding why the war took place and how it affected the world. Most importantly, by understanding and analyzing these ideologies and the lessons learned from WWII, students can apply this knowledge to their future decision-making and political understanding of the modern world. In other words, the knowledge students gain from WWII may help to prevent them from making the same political and economic mistakes that nations involved in the war made. This unit especially emphasizes the idea that "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

## Unit Goals

1. Students will understand the causes, events, outcomes, and effects of World War II according to their impact on past, present, and future societies (Standards I.1, I.2, I.3, I.4).
2. Students will be able to apply this understanding of WWII to their future decision-making on politics, economy, and culture (Standards I.3, I.4, II.2, II.5, V.2).
3. Students will understand the role of the U.S. government in WWII in reference to its contributions to the war and how it affected the outcome of the war (Standards III.2, III.5, IV.3, IV.4, IV.5).
4. Students will be able to analyze/question the U.S. government's actions (and other nations' political actions) in future cases of international conflict, applying their knowledge of cause-and-effect circumstances of WWII (Standards V.2, VI.1, VI.2).
5. Students will respect leaders (especially national ones) because of the stress and difficulty in decision-making that affects large masses of people (Standards I.4, III.3, IV.3, V.1).
6. Students will respect people who have survived or encountered war (Standards I.3, VII.1).
7. Students will be able to recognize and discuss the differences and similarities between various political ideologies and use this skill to evaluate political theories and decisions in their future (Standards III.2, III.5, V.1, VI.2).
8. Students will value peace and the institutions that keep peace (Standards V.2, VI.3).
9. Students will be able to critique a peer's paper and their own writing based on quality of content and writing (Standards V.2, VI.3).
10. Students will be able to examine a primary source and use it to broaden their understanding of events, perspectives, etc. (Standards VI.1).

## Assessment Tool Description

The unit paper is meant to have students think critically about political ideologies and how they affect a nation's decision-making and the people of a nation. The teacher will guide students through the drafting process, because this assignment is extensive and is also meant to serve as a learning tool in writing. We will be discussing the means to research, analyze, and draft this paper throughout the unit; it stands as more of a unit project rather than just a unit paper. Students are not meant to feel rushed or overloaded from this project. They will have the bulk of the unit to complete it. Instead, the hope is for them to gain an appreciation for

the research, writing, drafting, and critical thinking processes.

Based on our class lecture and outside research, students will be asked to pick one ideology that influenced World War II outside of democracy and compare it with democracy. This is the first step/section in the paper. The second section of the paper should be devoted to analyzing how these two ideologies affected the respective nation's decision-making in World War II. In the third and final section of this paper, students will be required to analyze how each ideology ultimately affected the outcome of its nation after and in relation to World War II.

## World War II Ideology Assignment

### *Purpose*

In this project, students will use critical thinking skills to analyze the political ideologies of World War II and draw conclusions on how these ideologies affected these nations. This assignment is meant to be a multi-step process in which they will have an extended amount of time to research, write, and draft a multi-section paper. The teacher has outlined the basic questions they will need to answer in each section and provided a rubric to guide their progress. The final draft of this assignment should not read as answers to a list of questions but rather be a larger discussion.

This project has a few larger goals to keep in mind. It is meant to get students thinking critically about the cause-and-effect relationships of World War II involving two individual nations' decision-making, their respective ideology, and their outcome in the war. It is also meant to immerse students in the drafting process. This assignment will involve an extensive amount of research and writing, and as students work on this project, they should keep their writing process in mind. They should not be hesitant to rewrite and use their peers and the teacher as resources for feedback. Finally, this assignment is meant to help students analyze and formulate their own conclusions and apply this understanding to their future analysis of similar political situations. Why learn so much about history if they can never apply it to current or future situations? "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

### *Directions for Students*

Use the following information to research and draft an essay that consists of an introduction, a main body (with subsections), and a conclusion. (There is no page length requirement. Include as much writing as you need to accomplish the assignment tasks.) Use class lecture, class discussions, and your own research to

construct an essay that compares and contrasts U.S. democracy in World War II to the ideology of another key player in WWII. In addition to comparing and contrasting these ideologies, examine and analyze how each respective ideology affected its nation's decision-making and outcomes in and after the war. In this section of your essay you will need to draw a conclusion on how each nation's ideology (its goals, principles, etc.) affect the nation's decision-making and outcome. Use the following guidelines to guide your research and writing process.

*Key questions to think about during your process of completing this project (these are the larger questions that should be answered in your paper):*

How did each ideology affect its nation's decision-making?

What was the outcome of this decision-making?

Was each nation successful in its WWII goals?

Ultimately, how did each nation's goals affect its outcome in the war?

In addition to the sections labeled below, make sure to create this essay as a discussion and thus incorporate an introduction, thesis, and conclusion.

### Section 1: Ideologies Compared and Contrasted

Focus Questions: What are the principles that guide democracy and \_\_\_\_\_? What are the similarities and differences between democracy and \_\_\_\_\_?

- Pick one key player nation of WWII and conduct research on its ideology.
- Conduct research on the U.S. and its ideology of democracy in WWII.
- Compare and contrast these two ideologies:
  - What are some of their similarities?
  - What are some of their differences?
  - What conclusions can you draw from these similarities and differences?

### Section 2: Ideologies and Their Effects on Decision-Making

Focus Question: How did each ideology affect its nation's decision-making in WWII?

- Analyze how democracy affected U.S. decision-making in WWII
  - What was U.S. policy towards war during WWII?
  - What actions (offensively and defensively) did the U.S. take during WWII?
  - What goals did the U.S. hope to achieve in and during the war?
  - What reasoning supported these policies, actions, and goals?

How did these policies, actions, and goals help/protect/make the U.S. successful?

How did the U.S. government justify its reasoning?

- Analyze how its ideology affected the other key player's nation in its decision-making in WWII, answering the same questions as above.

What was this nation's policy towards war during WWII?

What actions (offensively and defensively) did the nation take during WWII?

What goals did the nation hope to achieve in and during the war?

What reasoning supported these policies, actions, and goals?

How did these policies, actions, and goals help/protect/make the nation successful?

How did the nation's government justify its reasoning?

Did these justifications match up with this nation's ideological goals and principles? Why or why not?

- What conclusions can you make about the decision-making of these nations during WWII and the effects of their respective ideologies?

### Section 3: Ideologies and Their Effects on the Nation

Focus Question: Ultimately, how did democracy affect the outcome of the U.S. and how did \_\_\_\_\_ affect the outcome of \_\_\_\_\_ in World War II?

- Analyze and conclude on how democracy affected the outcome (the success or failure) of the U.S. in WWII
  - What was the state of this nation immediately following WWII?
  - What is the state of the nation today?
  - How has its ideology played a role in these outcomes?
  - Did the U.S. accomplish its goals of democracy? Why or why not?
  - Did the goals and principles of democracy play a role in the U.S. success or failure in WWII? Why or why not?
  - Has the ideology of democracy in the U.S. changed since WWII?
  - If it has, is this a result of WWII? Why or why not?
- Analyze and conclude how \_\_\_\_\_ affected the outcome (success or failure) of \_\_\_\_\_ in WWII?
  - What was the state of this nation immediately following WWII?
  - What is the state of the nation today?
  - How has its ideology played a role in these outcomes?

Did this nation accomplish its goals of \_\_\_\_\_?  
Why or why not?  
Did the goals and principles of \_\_\_\_\_ play  
a role in the nation's success or failure in WWII?  
Why or why not?  
Has the ideology in this nation changed since  
WWII?  
If it has, is this a result of WWII? Why or why not?

### Conclusion

Focus Point: Make sure your conclusions tie together and connect with your overall thesis.

- Summarize the main points of your essay.
- Connect your conclusions to your thesis.
- Offer a supported opinion on what could have been done differently in one or both of these nations to change its success.

Did the goals of its ideology help it become successful? Why or why not?  
What could the nation have done differently?  
Would these changes be in line with its ideology?  
How might this affect the nation's agenda, outlook, and integrity?

Remember: You have almost the entire unit to complete this project, so pace yourself and don't procrastinate! You will have at least two opportunities for peer review during the course of this project and will miss out on a great opportunity for improving your project if you procrastinate and don't have anything to review. You will also have the opportunity to turn in a rough draft which will be returned with my feedback. However, feel free to come to me to discuss any ideas and challenges you come across at any step in your research and the writing process.

Group Presentation: To gain extra points in this assignment, I am giving the opportunity to present the ideas and conclusions from your research and papers to the class. You can do this individually or with a few classmates, if your project is about the same ideologies. The presentations should be only five to ten minutes long. I will require you to turn in an outline for your presentation one week prior to the presentation. Other than this requirement, the presentation is mostly open-ended. However, I will award up to ten bonus points based on the quality of content and discussion in your presentation.

## **Assignment Assessment: World War II Project**

Remember to use the project directions and purpose sheets to help you assess how well you've accomplished the assignment tasks and use them to guide your progress.

Also, this assignment does not have a required length. Include as much writing as you need to accomplish the assignment tasks, and come to me if you have any questions about your paper's length, content, references, etc.

Here are the tallied points that your project is worth:

- Peer-review participation: 10 pts  
(5 pts for each peer review)
- Rough draft with peer-review suggestions attached: 20 pts
- Final draft: 60 pts
- Group Presentation: up to 10 pts.

I have provided a rubric to help guide your progress and outline my expectations for your final draft.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

**Unifying Topic:** World War II, 1933-1945

### **Source 1**

Website: <http://www.holocaustchronicle.org/>

Produced by: The Holocaust Chronicle, Publications International Ltd., 2002

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This website is the electronic version of the print edition *The Holocaust Chronicle* published in 2000. It includes over 1,800 images and 800 pages of both primary and secondary literature on the Jewish Holocaust that occurred in World War II. It is very useful for understanding and researching specific events that occurred during the Holocaust and is also a good tool for summarizing some of the larger themes within the Holocaust.

Specific Topic/Themes: The Jewish Holocaust of World War II

Related Project: (See Supplement 1)

### **Source 2**

Video: *Shoah: A Film*

Produced by: Claude Lanzmann, 1999.

Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This film explores the Nazi extermination of the Jews through a series of interviews and first hand accounts with survivors, spectators, and those who

carried out the Holocaust in World War II. It also includes extensive footage of the death camps during the Holocaust and what these places look like today. The film includes interviews with Jewish survivors of the death camps and the Warsaw ghetto uprising, with Nazis who worked at the death camps and in the Jewish ghettos, and with farmers and villagers who lived near the camps.

Specific Topic/Themes: Surviving/Living Through the Jewish Holocaust

Related Project: Based on the film and students' knowledge from other sources, students will be asked to write a narrative of a day in the life of a person who lived through the Holocaust, capturing not only the daily life of this person but also the mind frame and perspectives. Students can choose between writing from the perspective of a Jew, a Nazi, or a nearby outsider/observer.

### Source 3

Book: *Anne Frank: The Diary Of A Young Girl*

Author: Anne Frank, published by Bantam Books, 1993

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This is the first-hand account of a young Jewish girl who lived during the Holocaust. The diary includes details of her everyday life as well as personal reflections as she lived hidden with her family in a secret annex of a building in Amsterdam during the War.

Specific Topic/Themes: Life of a Jew in the Holocaust

Related Project: As an extension activity from the narrative assignment, students will be offered extra points for reading Anne Frank's diary and writing a theme-based book review in connection with the themes of the Holocaust learned in class.

### Source 4

Book: *Peace and War: United States Foreign Policy, 1931-1941*

Author: United States Government, Department of State, 1943, 1983

Accessed from:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/paw/index.html>

Produced by: Ibiblio.org, 2005

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This book is an extensive collection of primary documents that presents a record of policies and acts by the U.S. government during its time of neutrality in World War II.

Specific Topic/Theme: U.S. Policy and Agenda in World War II

Related Project: This collection will be used throughout the World War II Unit to provide students with primary documents that support and supplement class and text discussion of U.S. policy and agenda during World War

II. Specific documents will be chosen to be analyzed and discussed in order to further interpret and discover how the policies and agenda of the U.S. changed during the course of World War II. This will ultimately help students understand this topic and will better prepare them for the essay question on the final test, which asks them to explain and analyze U.S. policy and agenda during World War II and its changes over the course of the War.

### Source 5

Primary Document: The Annual Message to Congress, delivered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on January 6, 1942

Accessed from:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/420106a.html>

Produced by: Ibiblio.org, 2005

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This primary document contains Roosevelt's reflections, plans, and persuasive arguments on the U.S. involvement in World War II, with specific reference to thwarting Japan's and Germany's plans for takeover in Asia and Europe.

Specific Topic/Theme: U.S. Policy and Agenda in World War II

Related Project: (See Supplement 2)

### Source 6

Website:

<http://www.teacheroz.com/WWIIHomefront.htm>

Women and the Homefront During the War

Produced by: Tracey Osborne, Teacher Oz's Kingdom of History—World War II Database

Reading Audience: The teacher

Summary: This website performs as a database for other websites connected to women's involvement and historical perspectives in World War II. There are many sites listed on this main site that link to both primary and secondary documents that can lead to supplemental information for students or that review World War II history with concentration on women's perspectives.

Specific Topic/Theme: Women of World War II

Related Project: n/a; this site will mainly provide an overview of women's history in World War II.

### Source 7

Book: *1001 Things Everyone Should Know about World War II*

Author: Frank E. Vandiver

Reading Audience: The teacher and 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This book chronologically summarizes the events, people, politics, places, cultures, and ideologies

of World War II. It also includes over 180 black and white photographs from World War II.

Specific Topic/Theme: Chronological Facts of World War II

Related Project: Throughout the unit, students can use this book to supplement their class textbook in order to further explore the facts of World War II. The teacher will also use it as an additional reference tool to check the extensiveness of the unit plan and to look up specific facts he/she may not know offhand. The teacher will also use this book as a reference for the individual facts posted each day on the bulletin board. Students may earn bonus participation points or test points if they recall these facts in class discussions or use them in their essays.

### **Source 8**

Book: *Design for Victory: World War II Posters on the American Home Front*

Authors: William L. Bird and Harry R. Rubenstein

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This book is a compilation of U.S. war posters of World War II. Presented in these posters are propaganda themes appealing to Americans to support the war by working in the war industries, enlisting, or simply building animosity towards the Axis powers.

Specific Topic/Theme: U.S. Propaganda in World War II

Related Project: This book will be used throughout the unit to demonstrate specific cultural mind frames and themes that existed during World War II in the U.S. More importantly, the teacher will use this book in two separate small group activities. In the first activity, each small group will be assigned to analyze one poster and explain its propaganda messages, potential effects, and what it tells us about the political and cultural climate of the U.S. during the time of its creation in relation to World War II circumstances. In the second activity, the teacher will ask students to create their own propaganda posters for our current war in Iraq based on their knowledge of propaganda and examples from this book.

### **Source 9**

Video: *Battle Line: Pearl Harbor, Crusade in the Pacific*

Produced by: Platinum Disc Corporation, 2001

Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This film includes a collection of war footage and recreations of the attack on Pearl Harbor. It includes interviews with military personnel from both sides: the U.S. and Japan. It also summarizes a brief historical account of the war in the Pacific from 1941 to 1945 with actual war time footage and factual narration.

Specific Topic/Theme: U.S. War in the Pacific in World War II

Related Project: Prior to watching this documentary, we will have a short class discussion about what the students know about U.S. relations and involvement in the Pacific in World War II. (Before this, the teacher will ask students to write down a few bulleted points for discussion on what they already know.) We will then watch the documentary, and the teacher will ask students to write down points of interest, questions, or important facts that they didn't already know that were presented in the film. After the film, students will be assigned to explore one of these topics by doing some research, writing a short essay, and then presenting it to their group members in a small group. Each group member will be sure to have a different topic so that a variety of topics can be examined and explored. The teacher will provide a list of resources or point students in directions where they may find further information on their topic outside of the text.

### **Source 10**

Book: *Rain of Ruin*

Authors: Donald M. Goldstein, J. Michael Wenger, and Katherine V. Dillon

Reading Audience: 10<sup>th</sup> Grade U.S. History Class

Summary: This book is a photograph and essay collection of the aftermath of the atomic bombings of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. It includes first-hand accounts of survivors and victims, along with a history of the two cities before and after the bombings.

Specific Topic/Themes: The Atomic Bombings of Japan in World War II

Related Project: We will look through this book as a class to open our discussion on the World War II atomic bombings. Based on the results and costs of the bombings, the teacher will ask students to debate whether or not the U.S. should have dropped the atomic bomb. We will also look through other sources for information on the destruction of the bombs, Japan's persistence in the war, and reasons why the U.S. felt it was necessary to drop the bombs.

### **Supplement 1**

(Secondary Sources) <http://www.holocaustchronicle.org/>  
See articles "1939: The War Against the Jews" and "1942: 'The Final Solution'"

### **Into the Topic:**

Key vocabulary terms that relate to the reading will be listed next to a few columns students will be asked to fill in according to what they know about the vocabulary word. (Possible key terms include: deportation, ghetto, Gestapo, concentration camp, euthanasia, The Final

Solution, Auschwitz, blitzkrieg, Joseph Stalin, and Adolf Hitler.) The columns will read: previous knowledge, questions, connections, and reactions. In the previous knowledge column, they will write what they think they already know about the vocabulary term and what other events, people, etc. they relate to this term. In the questions column they will write what questions (if any) come to mind when they see this term or what they want to know about it. In the connections column, they will write how they relate to this term (if possible), whether they have had any experience with the term before in real life, in the classroom, or how they feel about it. The reactions column will be left blank. This column will be filled in after they read the text.

This will allow the teacher to understand what they know, what they want to know, and what past connections, ideas, or encounters they have had with the material. It will also keep them focused while reading the text because as they go through it, these key vocabulary terms will likely pop out at them more because they would have already started thinking about them before the reading. This will allow them to be more actively involved (in their own minds) while reading the text and thus to fill in the blanks in their minds about the terms and possibly answer the questions they previously wrote down.

**Through:**

After reading the text, the teacher will ask the students to first fill out the reactions column on their worksheet. This will then lead into a class discussion in which we discuss how our preconceived ideas about the terms compared to what we learned about them. The teacher will also ask students to share their reactions about the reading and what further ideas they have about the events, people, places, etc., including questions and concerns. As a class, we will try to answer these questions and concerns.

**Beyond:**

There is an enormous amount of information on Hitler's "Final Solution" and on the people, places, and events of the Holocaust. Option 1: The teacher will ask the students to think of a further question or topic that they are interested in finding out more information on, have them write a question down, and then answer the question after doing a little further research on the subject. The teacher will give them a few days to do this so that they have the opportunity to search the library, web, or other possible resources. Option 2: The teacher will ask the students to write a short reaction paper to the "Final Solution" in relation to themselves and a time that they felt attacked or experienced prejudice due to their

own identities and characteristics. They will compare this to the experience of a Jew during World War II.

**Supplement 2**

(Primary Source) The Annual Message to Congress, Delivered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on January 6, 1942, accessed from <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1942/420106a.html>

Reading primary documents can be difficult and tedious. However, exposure to primary documents is extremely important for students in a history class, because primary documents are often filled with a rich assortment of information and firsthand knowledge that secondary sources can not replace. Governmental documents are especially tedious and often difficult to read, but, again, are filled with irreplaceable, often revealing information. This text, the written account of a speech delivered by President FDR to Congress just after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, is filled with contextual information about the changing attitudes of the U.S. towards WWII. Prior to this section of the unit, students had read through primary documents that illuminated the U.S.'s neutrality policy and attitude towards the War. Upon close examination of FDR's speech, students can discover the U.S. transition from a policy of neutrality to a policy of aggressive tactics to thwart and destroy Japan and Germany's attempts at conquest.

**Into the Topic:**

To help students focus and not become overwhelmed by the many topics that FDR speaks of in his speech, the teacher will give students a list of key terms or phrases to watch for while reading his speech. The teacher will also leave enough space near these terms for the students to write down whatever comments, questions, or ideas they may have about these terms, either from their previous knowledge or what they learn in reading the speech.

**Through:**

After reading the text, the teacher will give the students a few moments to review what they wrote down about these key terms from the text, then have the students divide into six small groups, having each group examine two key terms and come up with what the text reveals about these key terms in relation to WWII. They will also be asked to present to the class what FDR's speech reveals about the American people and U.S. government's attitudes towards war at the beginning of 1942. Their individual presentations will also include a question-and-answer time where the teacher will prompt students to ask any questions they may have about these terms to the respective groups. Then, as a class, we will

discuss how the government and American people's attitudes had changed from the beginning of 1941 to the beginning of 1942 (basing our discussion around the terms and topics of FDR's speech) and make predictions or observations about what the effects of this attitude/ideological change would be.

**Beyond:**

Much of FDR's speech about mobilization and stopping Germany and Japan from world takeover is fueled by the changing climate of U.S. involvement and American support of WWII based on the Pearl Harbor attacks. The teacher will ask the students to write a short essay on their predictions of what may have happened if Japan had not attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, specifically related to the terms we discussed in class, and support these predictions from what they've learned so far about WWII history. The teacher will prompt them with a few questions based on the terms; for example: Would the U.S. have decided to take aggressive action against Japan in the South Pacific (i.e., the Philippines)? Would the American people have been persuaded without the circumstances of Pearl Harbor to cooperate in an "All-Out War"? Would the Declaration of Solidarity have taken place in January of 1942?