



Our Girls Over There: Hello Girls Lesson Plan

Topic: The Hello Girls

Essential Question: How did gender roles influence men and women's Army participation during World War I?

Grade Level: 7-12

Time: 1 class period

Standards Alignment:

History and Social Studies Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools

- United States History: 1865 to Present
 - USII.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical thinking, geographical analysis, economic decision making, and responsible citizenship by
 - analyzing and interpreting artifacts and primary and secondary sources to understand events in United States history
 - investigating and researching to develop products orally and in writing
 - USII.5 The student will apply social science skills to understand the changing role of the United States from the late nineteenth century through World War I by
 - evaluating and explaining the reasons for the United States' involvement in World War I and its international leadership role at the conclusion of the war
 - USII.6 The student will apply social science skills to understand the social, economic, and technological changes of the early twentieth century by
 - explaining how developments in factory and labor productivity, transportation (including the use of the automobile), communication, and rural electrification changed American life and standard of living

Background Information:

The invention of the telephone transformed American life. The telephone, patented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876, allowed people to communicate with one another quickly and accurately.

The telephone uses sound waves to communicate. The first telephones were connected to one another through a series of wires. When a user picked up a telephone, their voice was converted into sound waves that were carried to a thin metal disk inside of the telephone called a diaphragm. The diaphragm converted the sound waves into electrical energy that traveled across telephone wires to the intended recipient. On the other end of the wire, the electrical energy was converted into sound waves that were heard by users on the other end.



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As the demand for telephones increased more telephone lines were added. These lines would eventually meet at a central exchange or a switchboard. The switchboard was manned by operators, who would manually connect telephone wire to route calls. Operators handled 250 to 350 calls an hour by physically plugging in the caller's line into the receiver's line and disconnecting the lines once the call was complete. By World War I, telephones were standard in American business and were growing in popularity among American citizens. While male-dominated in the beginning, women began to replace men as operators. Telephone companies switched to female operators since they were cheaper to hire and considered, "more patient, docile, and agreeable than boys." By 1917, 99% of telephone operators in the United States were women.

Not only did the telephone transform civilian communication at home and in the workplace, but it also impacted on the Army. In 1917, after the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I, the first units sent to France were telephone battalions. These "Bell Battalions," were composed of Soldiers who had previously worked for Bell Telephone Companies. The Soldiers deployed to France with the mission to set up telephone lines, switchboards, and exchanges.

However, once the lines and switchboards were operational in France, the Army realized that they lacked competent switchboard operators. Most Soldiers had never used a switchboard before deploying. While many worked for a telephone company prior to serving, the gendered aspect of telephone operating meant those men had no idea how to work a switchboard. These problems led General John J. Pershing, commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, to request the "organization and dispatch to France a force of Women telephone operators all speaking French and English equally well." That request created the Army's first all-female telephone operator unit.

Women have served the U.S. Army from the American Revolution to the present. However much of that service took place in unofficial capacities. During the Revolutionary War and Civil War, women served in traditional roles as nurses, seamstresses, and cooks for troops in camp. In the Revolution, some women served in combat either alongside their husbands or disguised as men. During the Civil War, although women were forbidden to join the military at the time, many women still served as secret Soldiers in the Civil War. It wasn't until the War with Spain in 1898, which coincided with an epidemic of typhoid fever, that the Army realized it needed highly qualified Army nurses. As a result, the Army Nurses Corps was established as a permanent part of the Regular Army in 1901.

Pershing's request to organize and dispatch to France a force of Women telephone operators in late 1917, was remarkable for the time. It marked the first time that women served on or near the front lines of battle. The Army recruited 233 telephone operators dubbed the "Hello Girls." The women were required to speak English and French. Prior to traveling to France, they received military training that taught them about the Army, its traditions, and military terms. They learned how to salute, how to address Soldiers, and learned how to use Army equipment including gas masks. They wore a uniform, were given ranks, and were subject to inspections by commanding officers.



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The Hello Girls were critical to American Expeditionary Force because all maneuvers were coordinated through telephone operators. During some of the Army's largest campaigns, the Hello Girls worked around the clock in 12 hour shifts to keep the lines moving. The Army quickly realized their potential and expanded their duties to include more than connecting calls. Operators also received and translated sensitive messages about troop logistics. A contingent of the Hello Girls even remained in Europe, assigned to the Third Army of Occupation, to provide assistance with the Treaty of Paris implementation.

Following the war, their service was not recognized by the Army or the War Department. The telephone operators learned that the War Department considered them to be "civilian contractors," rather than Soldiers. Although the women had taken oaths, received uniforms and insignia, were paid wages equivalent to Soldiers, underwent training, and received citations and awards normally bestowed to Soldiers—they were not considered Soldiers. This meant they were denied benefits normally bestowed upon returning veterans.

Almost 60 years after their service, the Hello Girls received the recognition they earned. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter granted the Hello Girls veterans status and benefits. The surviving women finally received their official Army discharges in 1979. By that time, only 18 of the original 233 Hello Girls were still living.

Program Goals:

- Honor the women who served in the U.S. Army as telephone operators during World War I.
- Understand how the Army viewed the Hello Girls following World War I.

Learning Objectives:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

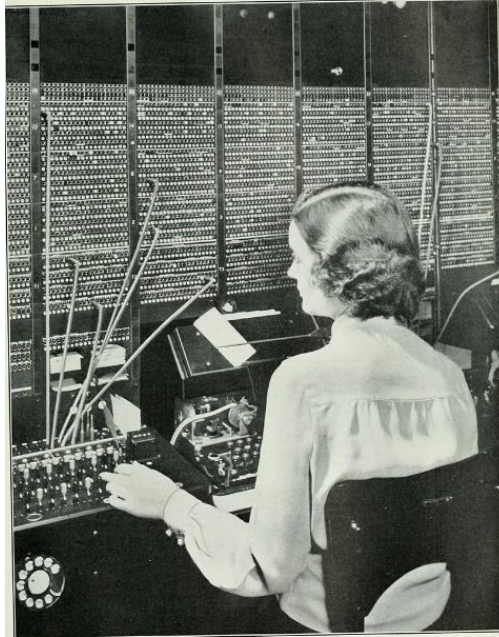
- Understand the role and contributions of the Hello Girls during World War I.
- Explain the differences in how men and women were viewed by the U.S. Army and American society during the First World War.
- Recognize the different roles available for men and women during World War I.

Vocabulary List:

- Doughboys: A nickname for U.S. Army Soldiers during World War I. It is not fully known where this nickname came from but some attribute the nickname to a Soldier's dusty uniform that gave them the appearance of being covered in flour.
- Hello Girls: A nickname given to women who worked as telephone operators because the women greeted callers with "hello." The term was applied to the women who served in the Female Telephone Operator Unit in World War I.
- Telephone switchboard: A central location where telephone lines came together. All telephone lines were connected to an exchange that would require a switchboard operator to route the call to the appropriate location.
- Telephone operator: Someone who manually connected telephone calls at a central switchboard.

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- U.S. Army Signal Corps: A branch of the U.S. Army that creates and manages communications and information systems.



Source: “Bell Telephone Magazine.” Photograph. New York: American Telephone and Telegraph Company. Information Department. Prelinger Library.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/internetarchivebookimages/14569507248/>

Procedures:

1. Introduction
 - Review background information on Hello Girls focusing on the guiding question – How did society view men and women differently during World War I?
2. Assignment
 - Divide students into three groups and distribute the primary source sets to each group.
 - Ask students to review primary sources and respond to the questions for each primary source set.
 - Bring the groups back together to facilitate a discussion about the primary source sets. Ask students the following questions:
 - What roles were available to women to support the war effort? What roles were available to men?
 - What differences do you notice in tone when comparing sources discussing women and men? Are there differences in the language or imagery used?
3. Concluding activity
 - Ask students to imagine themselves as an Army recruiter during WWI. Create a short advertisement to enlist women into the female telephone operator unit. Students can choose to write or sketch a recruiting advertisement that would be displayed in a newspaper to encourage women to apply for the position.



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Primary Source Set 1: Newspapers

Questions:

- What specific words do the authors use to describe men and women serving in the Army?
- How are they different?
- Are they similar?
- Are there any words or phrases that stand out?
- What are the different tones that the authors use?

The Stars and Stripes (Paris, France), March 29, 1918

“Hello Girls Here In Real Army Duds...

THEY HAVE SERGEANTS, TOO

Such in brief might well be the handbill announcement heralding the arrival in France of the vanguard of the Hello Girls detachment, which has come here to handle switchboards, adjust switches, calm and sooth irate C.O.s – at long last – who are trying to cut in and tell the Quartermaster just what they think of him, and to disconnect promptly any brusque and over-military persons who will persist in saying Cochou or “---!” when they hear an undue buzzing on the line. In short, the phone girls – thirty-three, count ‘em, thirty-three are here to take the phone using portion of the A.E. F. by the ears, and put its proper place.

They arrived just the other day, and like everything else that’s new and interesting in the Army – yes, there’re in it too – they were lined up before a Signal Corps camera and shot. Group about the base of a statue in a little Paris square, the presented a pleasing sight. (American girls always do).

The ladies of the line wear a real Army costume...and they’ve got it on the rest of us in that they know how to sew on those buttons when they come off...”

Source: *“The Stars and Stripes*, “The Hello Girls Here In Real Army Duds.” March 29, 1918. From Library of Congress.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/20001931/1918-03-29/ed-1/?r=-0.113,0.48,1.31,0.783,0>



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Audubon County Journal (Exira, Iowa), October 24, 1918

“Yanks Quickly Adapt Selves

American Youths soon Fall Into Free and Easy Life of the Soldier.

Within the American Army – It hasn’t taken long for American youths to become acclimated to the free-and-easy lives of soldiers. They are as frank and as open and as shameless as their French brothers in arms, and a good deal more so than their British comrades.

A convoy of American troops halts for a few hours rest in some French town, not too far from the front but that they distant rumble of the incessant cannonade can be heard, with occasionally the alternating buzz-buzz of the Boche airplane and the dull boom of the archies hurled skyward at it...”

Source: *Audubon County journal.* (Exira, Iowa), 24 Oct. 1918. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers.* Lib. of Congress.

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn87057934/1918-10-24/ed-1/seq-2/>

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Primary Source Set 2: Pictures

Questions:

- What differences do you see in these images?
- What stands out about the uniforms in each image?
- How do you think people back home viewed these images?
- How do these images reinforce gender expectations of the time?



Source: Source: “U.S. troops pose for a photo during World War I” (photograph). U.S. Army. <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Nov/09/2002890564/-1/-1/0/180305-O-D0439-001C.JPG>

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Source: “Capturing of St. Mihiel Salient” (photograph). National Archives and Records Administration, Department of Defense, Defense Audiovisual Agency, “Series: Photographs of American Military Activities, ca. 1918 - ca. 1981.” National Archives Identifier: 55203658.

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Primary Source Set 3: Advertisements

Questions:

- What differences do you see in these advertisements? What are similarities?
- Based on these advertisements, what roles were available for men and women?
- How do you think these ads relate to how the Hello Girls and Doughboys were viewed?



Source: Cammilli, Edoardo, Sculptor. The call to duty Join the Army for home and country. United States, 1917. [New York: Published by Recruiting Committee of the Mayor's Committee on National Defence, ? N.Y.: American Lithographic Co] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/00651808/>.

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Source: Porteous, R. H., Artist. Women! Help America's sons win the war--Buy U.S. Government Bonds, 2nd Liberty Loan of/ R.H. Porteous. United States, 1917. [Chicago: Edwards and Deutsch Litho. Co] Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/93510435/>.