

Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, WWII Heritage City

A series of lessons from the [World War II Heritage Cities Lesson Collection](#)



Figure 1: Nine British Royal Air Force pilots, at training at the Darr Aeronautics School in Kay County, Oklahoma. November 10, 1941. Featured in *The Daily Oklahoman*. Thomas, Gene. [Photograph 2012.201.OVZ001.0774] *The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical City.*

Introduction

The three lessons, and culminating fourth lesson, support the development of understanding the significance of [Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City](#). The first lesson examines aviation training, particularly of Royal Air Force Service members, at the Darr School of Aeronautics. It also connects to local radio training for the National Youth Administration and Navy. The second lesson shares on the work and service of local civilians, such as women working at the Continental Oil Company, the Red Cross, and volunteerism by the local Jewish community. The third lesson details the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war camp, which held mostly German prisoners and was run by US military personnel.

Lessons (with World War II home front topics):

The first three lessons listed can be taught individually or collectively, in any order. The final lesson supports students in summarizing the contributions of Ponca City and Kay County and supports comparison to other World War II home front cities in a culminating activity.

1. [Aviation and Military Training in Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City \(p. 6\)](#)

- Armed Forces
- Royal Air Force
- Army Air Corps training
- Navy
- Darr School of Aeronautics
- National Youth Administration (NYA)

2. [Civilian Work and Service in Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City \(p. 19\)](#)

- Women in the workforce
- Manufacturing and industry
- Continental Oil Company
- Red Cross
- Jewish community
- Material drives
- War bonds

3. [Tonkawa Prisoner-of-War Camp in Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City \(p. 30\)](#)

- Prisoner-of-War (POW) Camps
- Memoirs
- Prisoner perspectives

[4. Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities \(p. 40\)](#)

Positioning these Lessons in the Curriculum:

The standards listed beneath the lesson links are a collection of standards covered in the lesson collection. The lessons have been aligned to national standards and topics, as well as to the Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (as of 2021) and Social Studies (as of 2025). Objectives for each lesson, materials, and resources are listed within the lesson.

Time period: World War II

Topics: World War II, women's history, workforce migration, science and technology

United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History](#) from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following [Curriculum Standards themes for Social Studies](#) from the National Council for the Social Studies:

- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society
- Theme 9: Global Connections

Relevant Common Core Standards

These lessons relate to the following [Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies](#) for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.4

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH. 6-12.10

Oklahoma Academic Standards

Social Studies

The lessons align to the following academic standards defined by the Oklahoma Social Studies Academic Standards (as of 2025).

Practice Standards: Grades 9-12

P.2 The student will use interdisciplinary tools to acquire, apply, and evaluate content understanding of the four strands of social studies.

P.3 The student will engage in critical, active reading of primary and secondary sources related to social studies concepts.

P.4 The student will develop a variety of evidence based written products designed for multiple purposes.

Oklahoma History and Government

OKH.C.7.6 Summarize and analyze the impact of Oklahoma's mobilization and engagement in World War II including

A. establishment of military bases and prisoner of war installations

B. contributions of military personnel and specific units to the war effort, including the American Indian Code Talkers and the 45th Infantry Division.

Modern World History

MWH.C.6 The student will evaluate the global transformation created by the World Wars.

MWH.C.6.5 Examine the significant events of World War II from a global perspective.

United States History

USH.C.5 The student will analyze the United States' role in international affairs by examining the major causes, events and effects of the nation's involvement in World War II.

English Language Arts

The lessons align to the following academic standards, grades 6-12, defined by the Oklahoma English Language Arts Academic Standards (as of 2021).

Standard 1: Listening and Speaking

Standard 2: Reading & Writing Process

Standard 3: Critical Reading & Writing

Standard 4: Vocabulary

Standard 5: Language

Standard 6: Research

Standard 7: Multimodal Literacies

The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant with the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education, funded by the National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.

Lesson 1: Aviation and Military Training in Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains readings and photos to contribute to learners' understandings about the role of aviation and military training in Kay County. This included Royal Air Force pilots training alongside American pilots at the Darr School of Aeronautics, and Navy recruits training alongside National Youth Administration (NYA) workers at a radio training program. Extension activities include researching service connections to the local Chilocco Indian School and learning about Jewish refugees who worked at a local NYA center.

Objectives:

1. Describe the military and aviation training in Kay County and how it impacted the Royal Air Force and the Allies.
2. Explain the training and the partnership between the National Youth Administration and the Navy in Tonkawa.
3. Compare local, historical perspectives on service to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 2-5 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3 (and optional extension)
3. *Recommended:* Map of Oklahoma, with Kay County and Ponca City marked

Photos



Figure 2: Photo of nine British service members in Royal Air Force uniforms and suits, labeled "A Bit of England in Oklahoma." (The Daily Oklahoman, November 16, 1941)



Figure 3: Glider pilot students, August 19, 1942. Kaho, C. J. [Photograph 2012.201.B0236.0277]; The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Figure 4: Rugby practice at the Royal Air Force training center in Ponca City. October 4, 1942. Photograph 2012.201.B1113.0087], *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Figure 5: Tonkawa Armory in 1942, the location of the NYA Tonkawa radio training program. With Navy recruits joining the radio training, the NYA expanded to also include nearby buildings. [Photograph 2012.201.B1292.0011]; *The Gateway to Oklahoma History*, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Getting Started: Essential Question

How did military and aviation training in Ponca City and Kay County contribute to the success of the United States and its Allies in the war?



By the numbers:

- The first auxiliary field for the Darr School of Aeronautics was 160 acres, four miles west of Ponca City. A second 160-acre tract was also leased.
- The original proposal for the Darr School training to the British government was that Americans would train British pilots at the school for \$25 per flying hour.
- Over 1,100 British pilots were trained at the Darr School, along with 125 American pilots. Civilian pilots were used to train them, as there weren't enough instructor pilots for the U.S. Army Air Corps. In November 1941, there were 125 civilian employees, including instructors and maintenance workers.
- Pilots started with 40 minutes of flying a day, gradually increasing over time. By November 1941, there were about 70 U.S. Army planes used for training.
- RAF pilots were expected to learn necessary skills in 20 weeks—the same amount of training that American pilots had 30 or more weeks for at the time. The training was successful; however, seven RAF pilots were killed during training. There is a [memorial](#) for them in Ponca City today.
- The school existed for 33 months.



Quotations to consider:

“ . . . At that time the U.S. military had already started a preflight training program for college graduates, and I had joined that where you took basically the ground school for a private pilot license and you got, if you passed the ground school then you were, you could be eligible to start flight training. . . It was about a three-month ground school which we did at night because we were all working people. The person with the lowest grades would get to take flight training out at the local airport. And this is called the CPT program, civilian pilot training program . . . As the war clouds over in Europe got darker and darker, when we all graduated, they give all of us flight training. So the government contracted with the local fixed-base operator out at the Ponca City Airport, a fella by name of Tommy Smar (ph) who had been in aviation for all of his life, I guess, ran this program, and we all took flight training

in the Piper Cub, 40-horsepower engine Piper Cub. And so I was in the process of this flight training when this opportunity to sign up for the Navy came about in Oklahoma City.”

- Joe E. Brant, in interview on October 20, 2003. The full [interview](#) and transcript can be accessed from the Veterans History Project at the Library of Congress. Brant worked at the Continental Oil Company while doing his civilian pilot training in Ponca City, and prior to joining the Navy in the fall of 1940. He married his wife, Ester, in 1942 in Ponca City, who also worked at the Continental Oil Company. To learn more about women working at the company during wartime, see [Reading 1 in Lesson 2](#).

“The drama of the European war has been brought to Ponca City’s front door during the past several weeks with the hurried commencement of activities at the new Darr School of Aeronautics. It has been the dire necessity of a life or death struggle for existence which has brought the British government to organize pilot training schools in the United States during the past few months. Harold S. Darr, who has been operating flying schools for the U.S. army air corps for several years, had proven his ability to organize the necessary training and housing facilities speedily and was therefore given the contract.”

- “City Takes Place in Pilot Training Efforts of Nation,” *The Ponca City News*, September 14, 1941



Read to Connect

Reading 1: Newspaper Article

Teacher Note: Excerpts from the text have been selected to provide background on the efforts that led to the training site being located in Kay County. Connect pieces from this reading to By the Numbers and Quotations to Consider to build background on launching the Royal Air Force training school and details about its operations.

Location of School Was Eagerly Sought

City, C.C. Leaders Worked Hard to Get Darr Project Here

The Ponca City News, September 14, 1941

It was little more than a month ago when Ponca Citizens heard some news they had long awaited – Ponca City was to be the site of a major national defense project.

This became the most exciting civic news of the year, and the credit goes to a determined group of civic leaders which pushed one obstacle after another aside to obtain its goal. The

story of the leaders' campaign to obtain a military air school here makes another brilliant chapter for local history.

More than a year ago citizens of this community began to realize generally that the local airport, built up doggedly during years of depression to rank the third best in the state, could be turned into a civic asset far in excess of its initial cost. The government was making plans for the training of 25,000 military fliers a year. Surely the local field, with its fine runways and excellent location and elaborate ground facilities, could be turned into a pilot training center of major importance.

Local School Encouraged

Working in this direction, the Chamber of Commerce aviation committee sponsored three non-college ground school courses offered by the civil aeronautics administration, and encouraged the growth of the Ponca City School of Aeronautics. Civilian air training, however, would not employ the field to maximum advantage, so plans were made to interest U.S. army air corps officials in the location here of an army training school. . .

Army Okays Field

After considerable negotiation, during which the committee gathered large quantities of information regarding possible sites for landing fields in this vicinity, and other facts concerning the town, several U.S. army air corps officers visited the city. Impressed with the obvious backing aviation has had here for many years, as symbolized in the fine municipal airport, they took back good reports to (Major General G.C.) Brant. . .

Contract is Signed

On August 5 the eventful day had arrived, the contract was signed with Harold S. Darr of Chicago, Ill., operator of three other military aviation schools in the south. Not until the deal was sealed with indelible ink was the public told the good news. All the work done by the members of the committee and their friends had borne fruit.

And the gate which was opened to bring the school here was unlocked when the CAA lifted its regulation regarding the use of the municipal airport for military training. Brant may have had a hand in this.

Civic leaders realize that in him they have a true friend of Ponca City. He has been invited to attend the Cherokee Strip Celebration and inspect the new development at the airport, which although under construction for use by the British, is of considerable interest to the U.S. army air corps, nevertheless."

Questions for Reading 1, By the Numbers, and Quotations to Consider

1. Who were key people and organizations involved in bringing the military air school to Ponca City?
2. What role did the local airport's history and development play in convincing the military to choose Ponca City for the training school?
3. Why would the community have wanted the military air school in the county? Consider its potential impact on the economy and development.
4. How did the Civilian Pilot Training (CPT) program at Ponca City Airport prepare people for military flight training as the war in Europe grew more serious? (Quotations to Consider – Joe E. Brant)
5. How did the development of the CPT program connect to the community's push to be selected for use for military training? (Reading 1)
6. What challenges might have led the British to seek pilot training in the United States? (Quotations to Consider)

Reading 2: Newspaper Article

A Bit of England in Oklahoma

The Daily Oklahoman (Oklahoma City, Oklahoma), November 16, 1941

By Morris P. Moore

Ponca City, Nov. 15 – The innate British reserve that arrived in Ponca City in August with the first contingent of the Royal Air Force students has been swept away by Ponca City's hospitality.

Even if the boys aren't at home, they are happy, and the breathlessness with which Ponca City first greeted them has passed. It has become the usual, not the unusual, to hear the drone of many planes in the air day and night, and to hear gray-clad youths, in British accents, call for chocolate malts in the drug stores.

Ponca City has taken the boys into its homes for dinners and dances and parties, but always on the weekend. For their business in America is a pressing and a grim one, and their schedule of training is rigorous. From early morning until late at night they either are in the air or in the classrooms, and are free to accept Ponca City's many invitations only on weekends. Further, rain has seriously delayed the training schedule, and every hour of good weather means flying, previous engagements or not. All invitations are accepted on that basis – if the weather is still bad we'll be there. It rained 38 out of the first 60 days the boys were here.

There are approximately 150 youths, from 18 to 30 (average age 21), actual members of the Royal Air Force. Their commanding officer is Squadron Leader H.F. Suren, the only R.A.F. officer here. Actual flying instruction is done under contract with the Darr School of Aeronautics, which operates three other R.A.F. schools, in Georgia and Florida. There is a similar school at Miami (OK), operated by Spartan of Tulsa, and one near Fort Worth. The training is the regular course of the R.A.F., the same the boys would get in England or in any other part of the empire, compressed into 20 weeks.

Arriving here with only rudimentary military training, the students have learned to fly, are beginning to look on their planes not as vehicles but as weapons, and with some further instruction in Canada and England, principally in gunnery and British plane types, they are ready to take their places in nightly raids over Germany. Thus, by late winter, some of the boys now in Ponca will be fighting swastika marked planes over the channel, or bombing occupied countries.

On the post, built in 60 days out on the Kay County plain, the boys wear the blue uniform of the R.A.F. In addition, each man was issued a gray, double-breasted suit in England. These civilian clothes are worn for all occasions off the post. Although the suit is like that of any American or English high school boy, it has become familiar in Ponca by its very numbers. On the main drag (high road to the boys) of Ponca, Grand Avenue, it is not unusual for the English boys to be seen talking or strolling with Ponca girls, or riding in the girls' cars with them, and perhaps Ponca boys, too. At first this informality of meeting rather stumped the boys, but they soon learned that these were the same boys they saw at dances, dinners, or at church, that the informality was merely friendliness, and the American way.

The Darr school has built four barracks for 50 boys each, a large mess hall, an office building, a classroom building, and two large hangars are going up. The site is the northern edge of Ponca City's already well developed airport, enlarged to accommodate the school.

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Fully aware of their mission here, the boys still are boys, and are wide-eyed tourists as they come upon new things in American life. They don't talk about it much, but each was supplied before coming over with a little blue book called 'Notes for Your Guidance,' which outlines for them the right paths to follow in their dealings with Americans. The entire book is built around this idea: when an American asks you how you like America, he means that, not what do you dislike. And the boys don't tell Ponca City if there's anything they don't like.

..

Suren (R.A.F. Commanding Officer) has been greatly impressed by the manner in which Poncans have opened their homes, and their hearts, to his boys. 'The fineness and the

kindness of the people has been amazing,' he said. As an example, on occasions when a boy is washed out, headed back for Canada for training in another branch of the R.A.F., Poncans have been at the station to bid him goodbye.

And it is safe to say, when the 20-week turnover hits its stride, many British boys will carry with them over Germany and the occupied countries visions remote from the scene below. They'll see, not pock-marked objectives, but the rolling green of Kay County wheat, Lake Ponca sparkling below, the Pioneer Woman's bronze in a bronze autumn landscape an Indian in braids, the Conoco tank farm, and perhaps the dancing eyes of a Ponca high school girl. For Ponca has learned to love the British boys, and the boys love Ponca City.

Questions for Reading 2

1. How long was the training for the RAF students in Ponca City and what was its purpose?
2. Why were some of the initial training sessions delayed? What other challenges may have been faced?
3. What was the purpose of the "Notes for Your Guidance" book given to the RAF students?
4. How does the author portray the relationship between the RAF service members and the residents of Kay County?
5. How might the memories and experiences described in the article have influenced long-term perspectives of the RAF students and the local American residents? *(Think about how Allied countries worked together and as a result, also shared cultures. This article was also written just over a month before the [Pearl Harbor attack](#).)*
6. Imagine you are a historian researching Allied forces military training in the U.S. during the war. How could this article help you get started? What other types of sources would you look for to learn more?

Reading 3: Newspaper Article

Background: The National Youth Administration (N.Y.A.) was a New Deal agency sponsored by Franklin D. Roosevelt. It provided work and education for youths aged between 16 and 25. It started in 1935 and was discontinued in 1943.

Tonkawa Rushing Preparations to Greet Naval Radio Recruits

Additional Incoming NYA Men Also Due, and City Utilizes Full Facilities

The Ponca City News, January 21, 1942.

Tonkawa – The busiest place in Kay County this week, anyone here will tell you, is Tonkawa.

The place is a veritable beehive of activity. The town is humming in more ways than one.

The reason for a large portion of the activity is that the navy is coming to town and outside of a little in the Salt Fork there isn't much water hereabouts.

But the sailors are coming to study all phases of radio work and the water makes little difference – so long as there is enough to drink and take an occasional bath in, anyway.

Shortly after America entered World War II Lieut. Com. Frances W. Taylor of the naval training base at [Pensacola, Fla.](#), visited the national youth administration's radio project in Tonkawa looking for recruits for the navy's radio department.

Signs 52 for Navy

Taylor not only signed up 52 of the NYA enrollees for naval service as radio technicians and operators but he also liked the looks of the NYA radio project.

After his visit here he told naval officials in Washington what the NYA had in the way of living quarters and training facilities. The navy immediately dispatched Com. H.W. Olds of the San Diego naval training station to Oklahoma. Commander Olds visited Tonkawa as well as several other NYA projects in the state in company with Bruce G. Cater, state NYA administrator.

Carter made Commander Olds a proposition whereby the NYA would share its quarters and shops facilities throughout Oklahoma with the navy, which would use the facilities as a stop-gap for training centers for recruits in this territory. Monday the navy accepted Carter's offer and by next Monday will send 100 recruits to Tonkawa, 100 to Enid and 100 to Tulsa.

In each of these cities the navy boys will be housed in NYA dormitories and eat at NYA mess halls. They also will work in NYA shops, supervised by NYA instructors. The navy will send one or more first class petty officers who will be in charge of the Sailors. These officers will have charge of the discipline of the naval recruits.

Rush Preparations for Arrival

Every one from Director Johnston Murray on through the list of NYA supervisors and the 177 NYA enrollees at the project was going at top pace here Tuesday getting everything in shape for the arrival of the navy boys and their officers Monday.

Workmen were scurrying here and there putting on the finishing touches. The navy boys will be housed in the armory as the NYA project downtown is already full and running over with NYA enrollees – 177 of them to be exact, and more are arriving daily.

The armory building is being redecorated throughout and toilet and bath facilities were being installed. Additional beds and mattresses were being rushed here by the NYA. The beds have been made in the NYA shops in Enid and the mattresses were made in the NYA making plant in Henryetta. . .

Radio Project Begun

Work already has started here on the rebuilding of old radio sets donated by citizens throughout the state. These sets when put into perfect condition by the NYA enrollees here will be given to the army camps in Oklahoma for use in recreation halls and barracks.

The American Legion and United Service Organizations (USO) are aiding the NYA in this statewide drive to collect all old discarded sets which the public will donate for use of boys in the service. Will Rogers air base in Oklahoma already has asked for 150 of the sets and the Air Corps Flying School at Enid wants 60. Others will go to USO centers throughout the state and to Fort Sill. The NYA hopes to collect at least 2,000 of these old sets which will be repaired in the Tonkawa shops.

Questions for Reading 3

1. How many NYA enrollees did the Navy recruiter sign up as radio technicians and operators?
2. Who made the additional beds and mattresses for the recruits?
3. How did the NYA and Navy collaborate to meet wartime demands?
4. What was the purpose of the [material drives](#) for old radio sets?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did military and aviation training in Ponca City and Kay County contribute to the success of the United States and its Allies in the war?

Extensions

1. Research: Chilocco Indian Agricultural School

The Chilocco Indian Agricultural School was a federal off-reservation boarding school for American Indian youth and young adults, located north of Ponca City. Students from tribes across Oklahoma and the West attended the school. While Chilocco was not a military training school during World War II, it had strong connections to service members and military veterans. Several graduates became Code Talkers during the war, and the school

was also home to a National Guard unit—C Company, 180th Infantry Regiment, 45th Infantry Division. Additionally, three Medal of Honor recipients have ties to the school.

Encouraging students to research and explore the school's history provides an opportunity to examine the complex history of federal boarding schools and the contributions of Native Americans in wartime service.

Resources to get started with research:

[Chilocco Indian Agricultural School](#) by Oklahoma Historical Society

[Chilocco Indian Agricultural School Collection](#) from Oklahoma State University

[Code Talkers](#) by Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian

2. Additional Reading: Local Jewish Refugees

Teacher Tip: Newkirk is in Kay County, Oklahoma. Among the NYA youth referenced in Reading 2 were a small number of Jewish refugee young adults from Europe. Their experiences provide context for understanding the complexities of overlapping global issues. You can use resources within [Lesson 2 \(Reading 3\)](#) and [Lesson 3](#) to make additional connections the local Jewish community in Kay County and its contributions to war time home front efforts.

Refugee Says Many Germans Discontent

NYA Youths Talk on Flight from Europe to Newkirk Rotary

The Ponca City News, August 1, 1940

Newkirk – Millions of German subjects are now under Adolf Hitler's rule are discontented but dare not show their feelings, Sam Tisser, Viennese refugee now with the NYA project at the 101 ranch, told Newkirk Rotarians and guests here Wednesday noon.

Hitler, Tisser pointed out, has a strong hold over the German people through a highly developed system of propaganda and highly organized secret police.

Tisser was one of three refugee youths who appeared at the meeting with William Robertson, NYA director of the ranch.

Studying for Parliament

He had the equivalent of two years in the university in Vienna and was receiving training to serve in the Austrian parliament when he was forced to flee Vienna because of his Jewish ancestry. He hopes to enter Oklahoma University this fall.

Speaking on the program with Sam were his twin brother, Max, and Emil Shoenhaut of Trieste, Italy. All three fled from Europe when the axis powers began an assault on all Jews.

In England 11 Months

After spending 11 months in England, the youths went to New York where in three months they were able to be placed in the NYA organization by Refugees, Incorporated, a Jewish refugee relief organization which pays all expenses of the boys in connection with the project. . .

Reading Questions

1. Why did Sam, Max, and Emil flee Europe? How did they get placed in the NYA to eventually be in Kay County, Oklahoma?
2. How might sharing stories like Sam Tisser's have influenced American views on Nazi Germany in 1940?
3. How does this story connect to broader themes of displacement and migration during World War II?

Lesson 2: Civilian Work and Service in Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains readings and photos to contribute to learners' understandings about how various forms of civilian work and service contributed to the war effort and helped strengthen the local community.

The first reading shares about paid industrial work at Continental Oil Company, highlighting the growing employment of women in these sectors to meet wartime demands. The other readings provide examples of volunteerism and contributions, such as work done by the Red Cross and efforts of the local Jewish community.

Objectives:

1. Explain why women entered the industry workforce, like the oil industry, and the importance of this to the home front.
2. Describe examples of volunteerism, financial support, and other contributions to wartime home front efforts.
3. Compare local, historical perspectives on service to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 6-9 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3
3. *Recommended:* Map of Oklahoma, with Kay County and Ponca City marked

Photos



Figure 6: Ponca City Refinery, Conoco / Continental Oil Company, c.1942-44. (Courtesy of Phillips 66)



Figure 7: Control laboratory in completed in Continental Oil Company's Ponca City refinery, showing women working after completing training. March 20, 1943. [Photograph 2012.201.B0142.0077]. (Credit: The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society)



Figure 8: Red Cross Motor Corps in a parade on July 4, 1943. Women can be seen driving each of the vehicles. Although this photo is not Kay County-specific, it is taken in Oklahoma and connects to visualizing details in Reading 2. (Credit: The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society)



Figure 9: A victory float in Ponca City by the American Legion, reading, "For God and Country" - All out for Defense." September 16, 1941. (Credit: The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society)



Getting Started: Essential Question

How did civilians in Ponca City and Kay County engage in both professional and volunteer efforts to aid the war and support their local community?



By the numbers:

In October 1942, Students at Washington School in Tonkawa collected 1,278 pounds of scrap iron in one [material drive](#). The scrap was sold and used to purchase savings stamps to be given as prizes.

- “School Scrap Contest Reported at Tonkawa,” *The Ponca City News*, Oct. 4, 1942

On September 14, 1943, about 2,500 Kay County locals gathered at a Ponca City building for a war demonstration by soldiers from the Oklahoma City air depot. A total of \$17,050 in war bonds was purchased. For bond purchases, children could ride in army jeeps. About 100 children took part.

- “Thousands Attend Local Rally, Buying \$17,500 in War Bonds,” *The Ponca City News*, September 15, 1943



Quotation to consider:

“Both men and women in the Ponca City district are turning down an excellent chance to learn a profitable machine shop or sheet metal trade, M.L. Powers, state supervisor of trade and industrial education, declared here this week after an inspection of equipment at the Ponca City high school. Ponca City has one of the best shops in the state but its machines are idle eight hours a day. The machines should be in use 24 hours a day turning out experienced workers for American war industries, he said. . .

Women are desired for the courses, Powers said, because defense plants estimate that 85 percent of their personnel will be made up of women workers next year because of the continued drain of the armed services on manpower. . .

Thirty-six men trained in sheet metal, foundry, arc welding and aircraft woodwork units at Durant are to leave Saturday for [Richmond, California](#), Seattle, Washington, and [Wichita](#), to enter defense work. There is no cost whatever for the courses. Full details may be obtained at the shops in the high school here.”

- "Poncans Offered Machine Courses: Workers in Demand in State Industry, State Official Says," *The Ponca City News*, September 18, 1942



Read to Connect

Reading 1: Newspaper Article

Women in Blue Denim Pick Up the Tools Men Laid Down . . . Production Goes On

They Prove Eager To Show the Axis U.S. Determined
Given Applicants Rigorous Training

The Ponca City News, March 21, 1943

Down through the centuries woman has stood shoulder-to-shoulder with man, helping him to defend to the death what both believed to be right.

Saintly Joan of Arc left the sylvan acres of her father's farm early in the 15th century to lead French soldiers to victory in the bloody battle of Orleans. More recently, Marie Curie, co-discoverer and developer of radium, defied death to carry vitally-needed x-ray equipment to French soldiers, wounded while defending Paris from the German invasion of 1914.

Today, fighting-mad and courageous American women are taking an active and vital part in the greatest war of them all!

Everywhere wives, mothers, sisters, sweethearts . . . even grandma and Aunt Molly . . . are expending their energy in industries hit hard when Johnny grabbed his gun and went to war.

Modern Woman Backbone of Nation

Verily, modern woman . . . has become the backbone of the nation in turning out industrial production which will win the war.

The rugged, he-man oil industry is no exception!

One of the latest departures from customs of that two-fisted family is Continental Oil company's program of training and employing women as testers in the control laboratory of its Ponca City refinery.

There, in a modern laboratory, 28 women graduates of a rigorous training course are satisfying their desire to 'do something' in the war effort. Through diligent study and actual practice they have mastered the secrets of a test tube... are now making tests to assure

uniformity in quality of Conoco products used in the fighting machinery of America and other allied nations... working in eight-hour shifts both day and night.

Who are these women who have gone to war in Continental Oil company's control laboratory? Most of them are married... many are wives or sisters of company employees now on leave of absence while serving in the armed forces... 60 percent are wives of servicemen...three have children...half of them have attended college...the majority studied chemistry in college or high school... ages range from 17 to 34 years. All are intelligent, quick to learn. Formerly they were office workers, housewives, school teachers, saleswomen.

These 28 women now actually at work in the control laboratory were selected from the first two classes to complete Continental Oil company's training course. A third class is now in progress of training.

President Starts Plans to Replace Manpower

It was soon after the attack on Pearl Harbor that President Dan Moran started plans to alleviate the increasing shortage of manpower. Included was the program to train women as laboratory testers. A special laboratory with modern equipment was established for this purpose. Inasmuch as women, other than stenographers, had not previously worked in the refinery it was necessary also to erect a building containing locker, shower, and dressing rooms for the new contingent.

Public announcement that Continental Oil company would train and employ women as testers proved to be as attractive as a dollar-day sale... they literally swamped the personnel division. For two weeks their applications were received...only 135 were given the rigid examination required for candidates.

After examination papers had been graded, women with highest ratings were interviewed by a committee. . . . This committee selected 15 candidates for the first class. Second and third classes started a short time later.

The course of study outlined for women testers compressed into a six weeks' course what had previously been equivalent to a two-year college course, or a year's apprenticeship. Supervisor and teacher of the classes is A.H. Erwin (chief tester in the laboratory), veteran of 20 years in the control laboratory, and a former chemistry instructor in college extension work.

Each Costs Company \$300 for Training

Each woman completing the training course costs the company \$300 in addition to training pay... plus the gift of three attractive blue denim uniforms and a textbook. . . .

They Will Prevent Lag in Production

Men formerly predominated in the payroll division and the order and distribution division... both staffs now include several women workers.

So it is all around Continental Oil company. In the land department where a woman draftsman labors... in the personnel division where a woman does fingerprinting and photography...in the engineering division where women are file clerks. Everywhere women are picking up the tools men have laid down...and they are turning out production!

Although Pearl Harbor can be named as the real cause for this readjustment, personnel figures show that the rapid conversion of women to men's work started in July 1942. Up to that time, the trend was not noticeable.

How long women will remain in industry, no one knows. But this Continental does know. Production will win the war... and thousands of American women, like these testers, seismograph crew computers, and office workers, will never let that production lag. They have assumed a responsibility at which they won't fall... because they are the backbone of these United States.

Questions for Reading 1

1. How does the introduction, mentioning women like Joan of Arc and Marie Curie, help set the stage for talking about women's work during the war?
2. Why did Continental Oil Company start training women for industrial jobs?
3. What were some of the previous occupations or background of the women who joined the program?
4. How did the training program at Continental Oil show changes in society because of wartime needs during World War II?
5. In the Quotation to Consider, why did Powers believe more people, especially women, should take trade courses at the high school?

Reading 2: Newspaper Article Excerpts

Examples of Work Done by the Red Cross in Kay County

Teacher Tip: Two short readings show some of the many ways local Red Cross efforts supported wartime initiatives, including training, preparedness, and volunteer activities like making slippers. Consider allowing students to choose either Reading A or B, then pair up to share key details from their selected text.

Reading A: First Aid Training Given by Red Cross Helps War Effort

The Ponca City News, March 3, 1943

...Courses in Red Cross home nursing have been given for 30 years and at the present the need for them is more apparent because the war emergency has overcrowded many areas and consequently overtaxes local health resources. Three hundred and thirteen Ponca City women have completed the Red Cross home nursing course under the chairmanship of Miss Jessie Hammer.

Twenty girls are enrolled in the Red Cross motor corps under Miss Marianne Looney and are taking intensive training. Under the supervision of the highway patrol they have had a course in blackout and convoy training driving. Last week 14 cars with 20 girls made the convoy to Blackwell where they had a lesson in blackout driving around obstacles such as bales of hay, sandbags, wire entanglements. They were joined by the Blackwell corps for convoy to Tonkawa then to Ponca City making a round trip of 50 miles.

They have had demonstrations of machineguns, shotguns, and a lecture on firearms. Their training also includes demonstrations with gases, military drill, classes in ju jitsu taught by highway patrolman. Several are interested in applying for club mobile work; one application has already been sent in.

Through the efforts of this group 125 people have had their blood typed at the Ponca City hospital and are registered for transfusions in case of disaster.

Reading B: Hospitals Get Slippers Made by Red Cross

The Ponca City News, June 17, 1945

Tonkawa – More than 1,000 pairs of hospital slippers were shipped from local Red Cross headquarters during the period from November to May, according to Mrs. Howard R. Harold, local production chairman. Efforts of local Red Cross workers have been centered on slippers for some time, since the needed materials are available, and information coming in to local officials indicates that no item is more appreciated in hospitals for service men than slippers.

One hundred more pairs of slippers are expected to be shipped from here in June. Other items are being requested, of course, but lack of materials often hampers the production of these goods.

Work of the women from the rural communities is especially appreciated by those in charge of production. Many farm women continue to give much time to Red Cross work in the face of additional work at home at this time of year.

Questions for Reading 2

Reading A:

1. Why was the need for Red Cross home nursing courses heightened during the war?
2. What kind of training did the Red Cross motor corps girls receive?

Reading B:

1. Why did the Red Cross focus on making hospital slippers, and what limited their ability to produce other requested items?
2. Why do you think the article specifically mentions the contributions of rural women? Why may they have had additional responsibilities?

Summarize: Based on both texts, summarize some of the different ways the Red Cross supported the local community and service members during the war.

Reading 3: Newspaper Article Excerpts

Teacher Tip: The following two reading excerpts and background can be used as a collection to show examples of local Jewish contributions and volunteerism. The extension activity in [“\(H\)our History Lesson: Women’s Contributions to the Home Front in Paterson, New Jersey, WWII Heritage City”](#) can be used as a point of comparison. The reading shows the ways a B’nai Brith lodge in another Heritage City volunteered for war efforts.

Background for Students: Ponca City and Kay County had a small but organized Jewish community. In 1938, local Jews established affiliations with national Jewish organizations, including a B’nai B’rith lodge. B’nai B’rith historically focused on community service, human rights, and advocacy for Jewish people. Local Jewish organizations often supported war efforts on the home front by donating to Red Cross funds and contributing in other ways.

During World War II, the area's Jewish population grew as work opportunities attracted new residents. Ponca City locals also hosted Jewish religious services at the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war camp for soldiers stationed there. Some of these Jewish service members later chose to settle in Ponca City, becoming part of the permanent local Jewish community.

Reading A: Gift of \$50 Added to City Red Cross Fund Wednesday

The Ponca City News, July 3, 1940

With a gift of \$50 to the local Red Cross war relief fund from B'nai Brith, Jewish fraternal organization, Ponca City added \$78.44 to her fund Wednesday, bringing the total to \$2,162.13

B'nai Brith stated in the letter accompanying the check, 'Our objectives are friendship, charity and brotherly love and a better understanding between the Jews and Christians. We therefore are very appreciative of the work which the Red Cross is doing in connection with the joint distribution committees and the overseas refugee service.' . . .

Reading B: B'nai B'rith Buys \$3,457 in Bonds and Stamps

The Ponca City News, May 12, 1942

A total of \$3,457 worth of war bonds and stamps was sold to members of the Northern Oklahoma chapter of the B'nai B'rith at a bond drive picnic here Sunday, according to Myer O. Dritch, of Tonkawa, secretary of the organization.

The bonds were bought by 15 members of the organization from Ponca City, Tonkawa, and Blackwell.

In addition to these immediate purchases the members pledged over \$3,000 additional for purchases during the next six months.

Questions for Reading 3

1. Reading A: How much money did B'nai B'rith donate to the Red Cross war relief fund, and what was their reasoning for this donation?
2. Using the background and readings, how were some ways the Jewish community in Ponca City contributed to local and national war efforts?
3. How do these examples of contributions and volunteerism connect to broader home front initiatives during World War II? *Connect to additional data in "By the Numbers."*

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did civilians in Ponca City and Kay County engage in both professional and volunteer efforts to aid the war and support their local community?

Additional Resources

[Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities - Ponca City, Oklahoma](#) by Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL)

WWII Heritage Cities Lesson Collection
Ponca City and Kay County, Wisconsin

[Jews](#) by Oklahoma Historical Society

[The Conoco Museum \(Phillips 66\): Virtual Tour](#)

[War Production Board](#) by Oklahoma Historical Society

[World War II](#) by Oklahoma Historical Society

Lesson 3: Tonkawa Prisoner-of-War Camp in Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains readings and photos to contribute to learners' understandings about the Tonkawa Prisoner-of-War (POW) Camp. The readings provide background on the purpose of the camp, and the experiences of prisoners there. This includes a newspaper article and memoir excerpts by former prisoners.

Objectives:

1. Describe the purpose, conditions, and social dynamics of the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war (POW) camp using primary sources.
2. Describe how the POW camp affected the local community, including both benefits and challenges.
3. Synthesize local, historical perspectives on the complexities and ethical questions surrounding POW camps on the U.S. home front.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 10-14 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3
3. *Recommended:* Map of Oklahoma, with Kay County and Tonkawa, Ponca City marked



Getting Started: Essential Question

How did the presence of the Tonkawa camp affect the local community, and what was life like for the POWs on the home front?

Photos



Figure 10: Tonkawa Prisoner-of-war camp; “Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories,” courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.

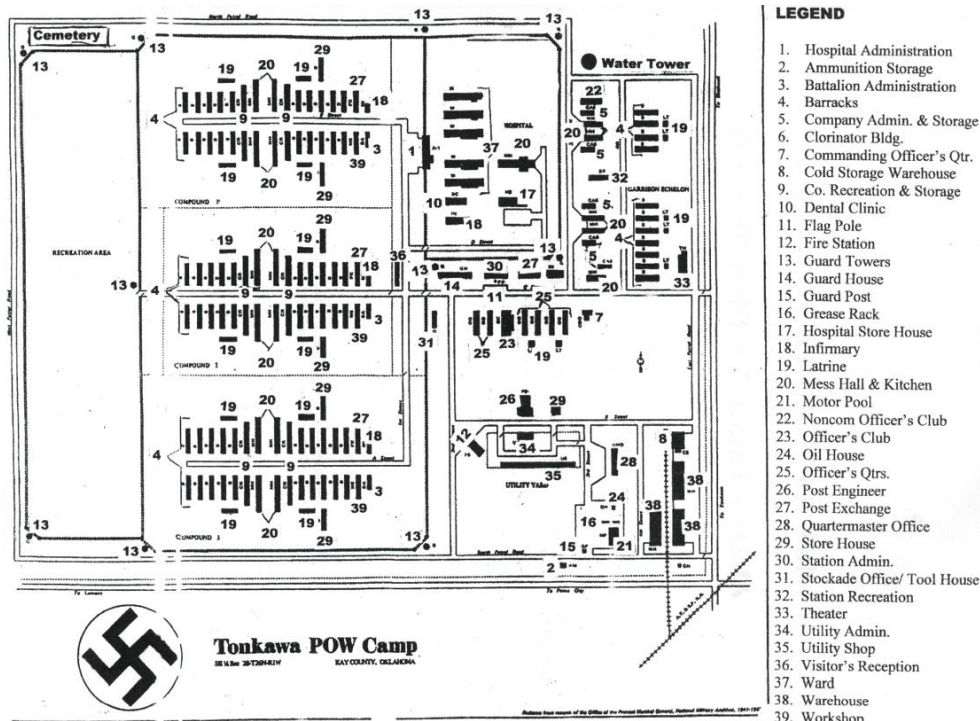


Figure 11: Map of the Tonkawa Prisoner-of-war camp; “Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories,” courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.

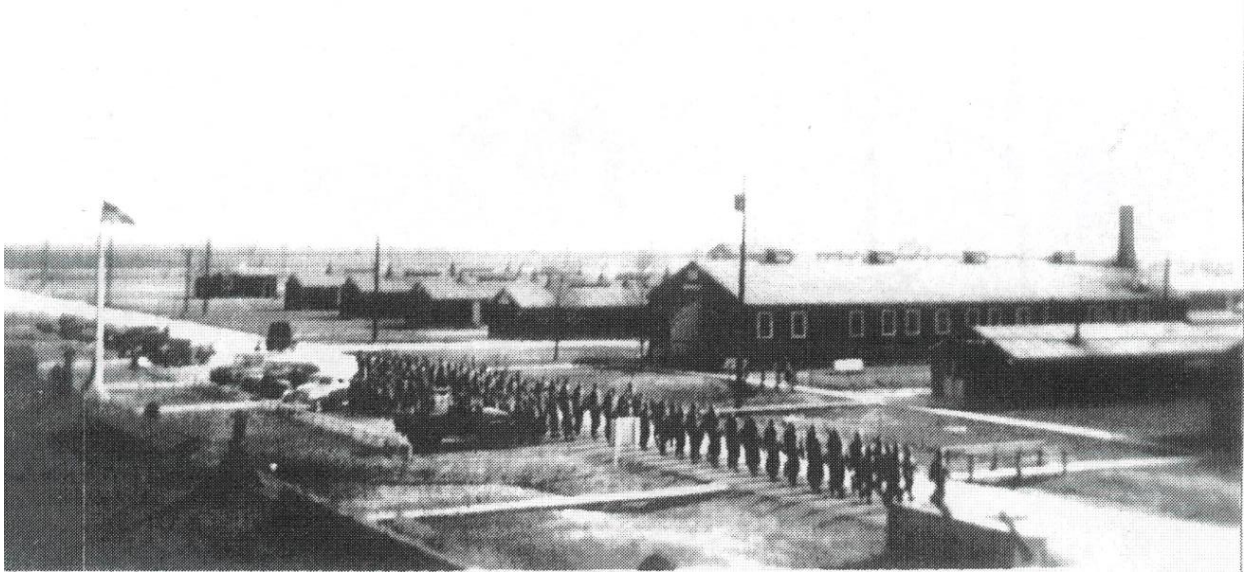


Figure 12: Tonkawa Prisoner-of-war camp; “Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories,” courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.



By the numbers:

- More than 130,000 German soldiers were taken prisoner from the Afrika Korp. They were brought by ship to the United States, stopping in Norfolk prior to being transported to camps.
- There were approximately 22,000 prisoners-of-war in Oklahoma, with 31 camps across 26 counties.
- The camp at Tonkawa was 160 acres with more than 180 wooden structures, designed for 3,000 prisoners. There were also 500 US Army guard troops, service personnel, and civilian employees.



Quotation to consider

“Colonel Eckel feels that if prisoners of war are sent to camps such as the Tonkawa camp that the move will undoubtedly prove to be a ‘good advertising’ move on the part of the United States government. The prisoners, he says, will be treated fairly and possibly during the process, will learn a great deal about the United States much of which will be favorable and will be carried back to their individual countries at the conclusion of the war. If a favorable attitude is developed among prisoners, he says, undoubtedly the attitude of persons in the enemy countries toward the United States will be influenced by their reports.”

- “Experience of Aliens in Tonkawa Camp May Prove Boon to U.S. Following War,” *The Ponca City News*, February 9, 1943

Read to Connect

Teacher Note: More than 130,000 German soldiers were taken as prisoners of war from the Afrika Korps. They were first brought by ship to Norfolk, Virginia, then they were transported to camps. One of the camps was the camp in Tonkawa, Kay County, Oklahoma, activated in January 1943.

The first reading provides background on the development of the camp, one year after its founding. Readings 2 and 3 provide personal memories via written memoirs from German soldiers who were prisoners there. You may use the camp at Tonkawa to compare to other prisoner-of-war camps in the United States, such as the [Papago Park prisoner-of-war camp in Tempe, AZ](#).

Reading 1: Newspaper Article

U.S. Prisoner of War Camp at Tonkawa is Year Old Today

The Ponca City News, January 18, 1944

Tonkawa – One year ago, general order No. 6, issued by the headquarters, eighth service command, officially activated the prisoner of war camp here, it was announced by the camp public relations office. . . When the camp was activated, Capt. Theodore S. Maffitt, post engineer, was the only soldier here, having arrived on Nov. 17, 1942, to check construction, study layout, and post himself on the probable needs of the camp after completion and activation. Captain Maffitt has been stationed at the camp since first arriving here.

[A] highlight of the past year was the arrival of the first German prisoners of war, on August 20. Several trainloads of prisoners arrived here within a few weeks following that date.

Formerly Grain Farms

The prisoner of war camp, originally called the Tonkawa internment camp, stands on what were once four extremely productive small grain farms. In all 12 buildings were on these farms, all of which, with two exceptions, have either been demolished or transported to other locations. The exceptions are a two story building now standing on the southwest corner of the reservation, and a metal barn to the north of the garrison area of the camp.

Negotiations and planning were completed about the middle of 1942, but it was not until Oct. 9, 1943, that construction work actually began. Construction costs were estimated at one and one-half million dollars.

When the camp was first opened, there were no mess facilities available, and the military personnel ate all their meals in local restaurants. On March 8 the first mess at the camp opened for enlisted men. A week later the mess hall expanded to the extent of feeding the officers and civilian employees.

8,000 Persons See Camp

On April 5 an 'open house' was held, and an estimated 8,000 civilians filed through the gates to the camp. The first military police escort guard companies arrived at the camp in August. Their primary duty is to guard the prisoners of war, while the headquarters company handles the administrative work.

The camp consists of three compounds for the prisoners, a 150-bed hospital, officers' and enlisted men's barracks, offices, recreation buildings for the officers and enlisted men, warehouses, and stables. A cemetery was built for prisoners. At the present time one man is interred there.

Theater, Recreation Building

For many months the camp had inadequate recreational facilities for the enlisted men stationed here, but early in November a combination theater and recreation building was put in use, and moving pictures are shown to the military personnel three times a week. This building is also used on Sunday as a chapel. Religious services for the prisoners of war are conducted in the compounds.

Many prisoners have been used on farms in this vicinity to relieve the labor shortage, and have proven very successful, it was stated. Any farmers desiring to employ prisoners should contact their county agents, who will make the necessary arrangements.

Questions for Reading 1

1. What was the purpose of the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war camp?
2. What was the original purpose of the land where the Tonkawa camp was built?
3. How might the loss of this land have impacted local farmers and the larger community? Consider the critical demand for food production during the war effort.
4. How did the Tonkawa prisoner of war camp evolve from its initial construction to its full operation?
5. How did the camp provide for military personnel stationed there and the prisoners?

Reading 2: Memoir Excerpt

Background for students for both Reading 2 and Reading 3: "Two of the men that were interned at Camp Tonkawa as World War II prisoners of war have written some of their memories during their stay. Their names are Bernhard Pollei of Bad Durrenberg, Germany, and Max Wolfel of Frankfort, Germany. Both men have had the opportunity to return to Tonkawa to revisit where they once lived as prisoners of war as very young men."

- *From "Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories," courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma*

The following texts were translated to English by Joachim and Charlotte Block but left in a German style to keep the writers' intent.

Als Kriegsgefangener Von (Prisoner of War of) 1943-1945 in Camp Tonkawa, Oklahoma

By Bernard Pollei

. . . The camp was divided into 3 compounds that we called camps 1, 2 and 3. I was assigned to camp 1. . . Each company consisted of 5 barracks. After being assigned, each of us selected a bed. Gradually one got to know some comrades, since after all we were complete strangers to one another. There were hardly more than two who came from the same unit. Except for seeing them, I had never become acquainted with anybody in my barrack. Air Force and Army were together in the barracks. Besides that, rank and file from private to corporal, sergeants and other non-commissioned officers from staff sergeant to first sergeant were completely, e.g., during meals, when there was at least one 'non-com' (non-commissioned officer) sitting at each table to see that order was kept. That was not done by order of the Americans, but belonged to the Prussian discipline.

The first procedure was registration. All fingerprints were taken and an identity number was assigned. I was given the number: 8WG-49617. . . From the boards and other wood lying around most everyone soon had made a stool, a table or both. So, gradually the daily camp life began.



Figure 13: Staff Sergeant Bernhard Pollei, German prisoner at Camp Tonkawa. Pollei is the author of Reading 2. "Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories," courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.

The food was good and plenty, only the sweet potatoes were not to our taste and then were not served again. The use of peanut butter first had to be learned. Soon there were teachers, students and intellectuals of other occupations who declared themselves willing to give lessons. That was done in math, English, the science of art as well as in other subjects. I chose Latin. So every morning began with a lesson according to plan and everybody grabbed his stool and headed for the room meant for his lessons.

In the afternoon, soccer and tennis were played or other types of sports were engaged in, that way the time of day flew by. In the evening walks were taken along the fence, mostly in pairs or three at a time and all kinds of things were told or discussed. It didn't take long before a theatre group and a band were formed. That's the way time was used. Perhaps at this point I may add that in my 4-year war captivity I was always treated correctly. We soldiers of different nationalities and in fact enemies, encountered one another with respect. . .

In accordance with the Geneva Convention, then soldiers up through the rank of corporal were obliged to work, whereas from the rank of sergeant on, it was allowed that work be done only on a voluntary basis . . .

Questions for Reading 2 and Quotation to Consider

1. Describe the organization of the camp.
2. What activities did the prisoners do to pass time?
3. How did the Geneva Convention affect which prisoners were required to work?
4. Analyze the tone the author uses when describing his time at the Tonkawa camp. Do you find it surprising? Why, or why not?
5. *Quotation to Consider:* How does Colonel Eckel's view of prisoner-of-war camps as a form of "good advertising" for the United States shape your understanding of how the US hoped to influence enemy nations after the war? Do you think this strategy was effective or fair? Why or why not?

Reading 3: Memoir Excerpt

Background: "Vehmgericht" refers to a medieval system of secret tribunals led by "free judges," where death was the sole punishment handed down. The text includes sensitive content involving a death within the camp, highlighting some of the complex challenges in managing prisoner-of-war camps on the home front.

Remembering Camp Tonkawa

By Max Wolfel (1921 –2004)



Figure 14: A picture of Max Wolfel from his prisoner index card as a German prisoner-of-war. Wolfel is the author of Reading 3. "Camp Tonkawa, 1943-1945, Prisoner of War Stories," courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.

... After all were dealt with, we were taken to the railway station of Norfolk. When we, following instructions, entered the railway cars, exclamations like 'Boy oh boy' weren't seldom. Those upholstered cars were a pleasant surprise for every one of us. And when the [African American] steward offered us coffee and sandwiches, we forgot for the short time our anti-American feelings. The guards at both ends of the car had strict orders, not to take risks. If one wanted to go to the toilet, he had to raise his hand, and the guard accompanied him to the end of the car. And thus the guard was permanently under way. Soon we found out, that was a means to totally confuse the guards. One guard after one hour didn't want to anymore, and he went now from one to the other and said, he was a soldier exactly as we were. So from then on we went by ourselves, and he was pleased with it. . .

On that ride we were on the go for almost four days and four nights – well, America is quite large. But where we were moving to, we had yet to find out. One could watch the sun during the day, one could discover individual signs at the railroad stations, but we didn't know what they meant.

When the first trains with prisoners arrived at their places of destination, whole towns went out to watch. In Mexia, Texas, in the Eastern Mountain Region, the population lined up along the railroad street and apprehensively looked at the seemingly endless stream of German prisoners of war, that poured forth from the train: 3250 men in short trousers and sand-colored uniforms, with cloth caps with the large peak, characteristic of Rommel's elite troops. The column of prisoners covered the whole give kilometers to the camp, remembered an old established citizen of Tonkawa, whom I met again during my visit to Oklahoma. 'Consider we were a small town,' were his words, 'and we just experienced, that our population increased by fifty percent.'

... At the beginning, the War Department had no control over the internal happenings in the community of the prisoners. In many larger camps midnight tribunals and vehmgericht were organized, that pronounced judgment on 'traitors' and 'deserters,' and sentenced them. And there also in my camp in Tonkawa, on 04 November 1943, the following case happened: The private first class Kunze participated unsuspectingly in a secret night-time gathering of about 200 prisoners in the dining hall of the camp. The doors were closed, and

after a short while he noticed, the gathering had been called together by the speaker, to be witness, how a traitor among them was exposed. The traitor, he learned to his horror, that was he himself!

He was accused of having informed American offices about secret installations in Hamburg, i.e. the camouflage of the Hamburg railroad station. For the Allied Forces; bombing rains, until then, it couldn't be located – but two days after that information, it was reduced to a rubble. By general secret ballot, Kunze was found guilty and beaten to death. In that special case, five guilty persons were seized, among those the camp speaker – all older non-commissioned officers of the 'Afrika-Korps' – were put before an American court-martial in the nearby Camp Gruber and found guilty... The five Germans were on 10th July 1945 executed. . .

Questions for Reading 3

1. Describe the train ride from Norfolk based on the descriptions and memories of the author.
2. How did local communities respond to the arrival of German prisoners? Why was the camp population increase significant to the people in Tonkawa?
3. What does the Kunze incident show about fear, loyalty, or belief systems among the prisoners?
4. What ethical challenges may the American military and government have faced in responding to or preventing violence at the camp, or others like it?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did the presence of the Tonkawa camp affect the local community, and what was life like for the POWs on the home front?

Investigating Further

Evaluate the ethical considerations behind how both the Germans and Americans managed their POW camps during the war. Consider the treatment of prisoners, adherence to the rules of the Geneva Convention, and the potential motivations behind each country's actions. To what extent do you think each upheld ethical standards, or were influenced by wartime biases? Support your response with evidence from the lesson readings.

Extension: Research perspectives, histories, and conditions at other United States and German POW camps to contribute to your response. One example can be [Papago Park Prisoner-of-War Camp in Tempe, Arizona](#).

Additional Resources

[Oklahoma's Nazi Prisoners](#) (27:45) from Public Broadcasting Service

Lesson 4: Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the World War II home front in [Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma](#), [World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains photographs, readings and a culminating project. The first reading, a newspaper article, shares perspectives and reflections on British cadets training in, and leaving, Ponca City. The second reading connects the region to the designation of a Heritage City. The culminating project contributes to learners' understandings of the city as a WWII Heritage City, with the opportunity to combine lesson themes from the three other lessons in the Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma lesson collection. This is to summarize the city's contributions and encourage connections to the overall U.S. home front efforts.

Objectives:

In a culminating product:

1. Describe World War II home front military training in Ponca City and Kay County, such as in aviation and radio.
2. Summarize the contributions and volunteerism of local civilians to home front wartime efforts.
3. Explain the role and impact of the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Kay County.
4. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Ponca City and Kay County and other Heritage city(s) / World War II home front(s).

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 15-18 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2
3. Maps, project materials (as needed)
4. Student graphic organizers (See Figure 19 at end of lesson, for reference)

- Create Comparison Matrices for your students to use. To compare two cities, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows. Label the left column Theme/Topic and the other columns City 1 and City 2. For a Comparison Matrix for three cities simply add an additional column.
- Create two Single-Point Rubrics to assist students' self-assessment. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting teacher-selected standards. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting objectives.
- For the rubric on standards, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improvement," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Standard)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Standard." Leave the first and third columns blank. In each row of the second column identify a Standard and indicate a space for noting the evidence for meeting the standard. Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column.
- For the rubric on objectives, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improving toward Objective," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Objective)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Objective." Leave the first and third columns blank. In the four rows of the second column identify these four objectives:
 - a. Describe World War II home front military training in Ponca City and Kay County, such as in aviation and radio.
 - b. Summarize the contributions and volunteerism of local civilians to home front wartime efforts.
 - c. Explain the role and impact of the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Kay County.
 - d. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Ponca City and Kay County and other Heritage city(s) / World War II home front(s).

Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column. See the last photo of this lesson for reference.



Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was Ponca City and Kay County chosen as an American World War II Heritage City, and what are its similarities and differences to other home front cities?

Photos



Figure 15: An aerial photo of the site of the Darr School of Aeronautics, taken shortly after the end of the war on July 9, 1947. Johnson, Bill. [Photograph 2012.201.OVZ001.2576]; The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society.

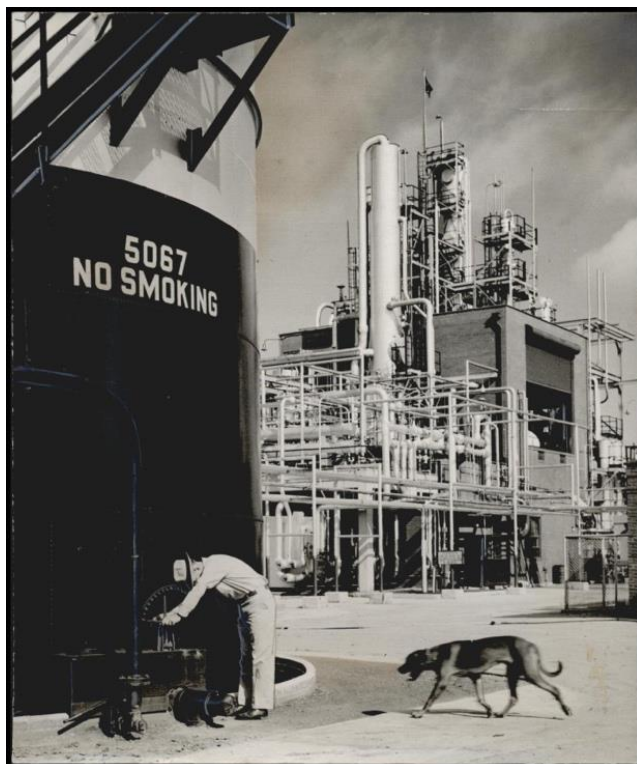


Figure 16: Continental Oil Company in Ponca City, 1942. Guard dogs were used as extra security in patrols to protect against potential sabotage. [Photograph 2012.201.B0142.0079] Credit: The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society.

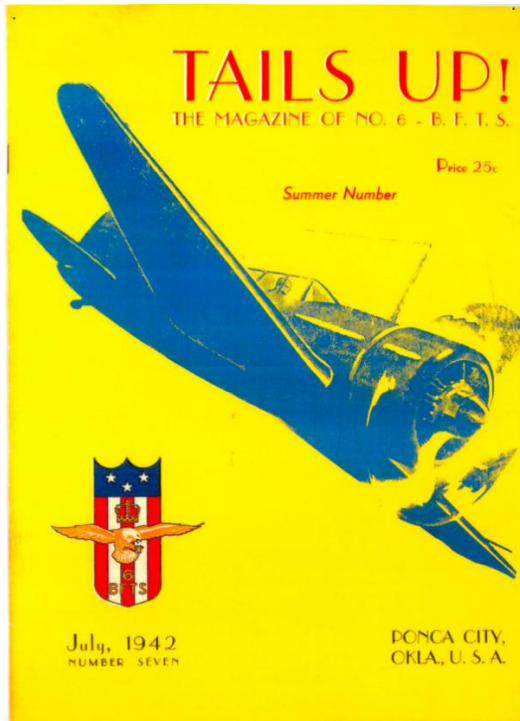


Figure 17: The July 1942 cover of “Tails Up!” a magazine for the aviation trainees in Ponca City. Courtesy of University of Central Oklahoma.

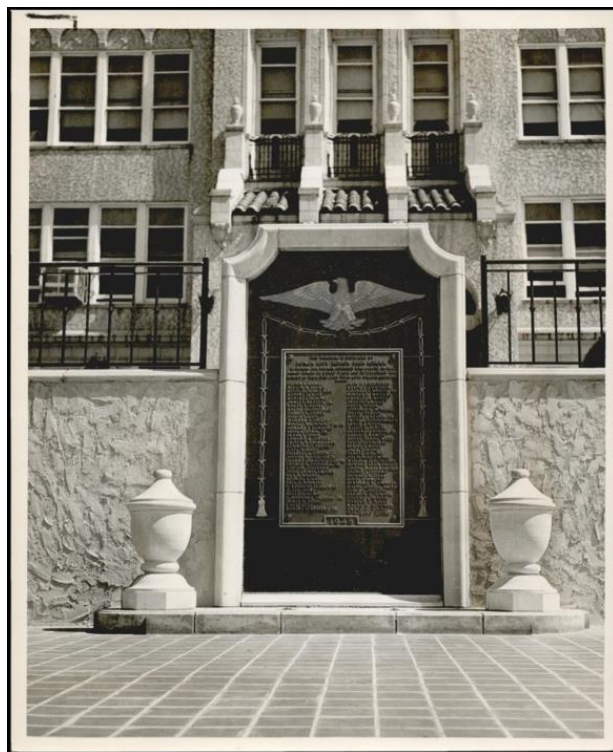


Figure 18: The Oklahoma Times featured a photo of a \$10,000 memorial to Ponca City High School students who lost their lives in the war. June 30, 1949. Lucas, Jim. [Photograph 2012.201.B1059.0311], photograph, June 30, 1949; The Gateway to Oklahoma History, Oklahoma Historical Society.



Quotations to consider:

“It’s a woman’s war as well as a man’s in Ponca City, where many women who have relatives in the army or navy are furnishing the power behind the lines of a fighting front. Women who formerly were housewives, waitresses, stenographers, or who never worked at anything before, are learning to rivet and weld as well as men. They learn a new trade in order to replace men in war production lines, providing more fighters for the country. . .

‘I don’t have to work,’ said Mrs. Adah Lindsay, an inspector at the Mid-American Canvas manufacturing company. ‘My husband works at Continental and he can support me. But I have a stepson and two brothers, and I can back them up when they have to fight by working here in Ponca City.’”

- “Variety of Tasks Undertaken by Women to Aid War Effort,’ *The Ponca City News*, July 19, 1942

“Harold Cogman never forgot the friendliness people here showed him during his pilot training to defend his homeland. Although at the time the United States was reluctant to get involved in World War II, the native Scot was encouraged by the support of Oklahomans while stationed at the old Darr Flight School. Cogman arrived here in August 1941 with the first group of Royal Air Force student pilots for training from American civilian pilots. He said Saturday he was so impressed with the goodwill shown him during his six-month stay he turned down job offers in Argentina, South Africa and the Middle East after the war to return to Ponca City to look for work.

‘The people were so fantastic and I had met several families who are friends here...’”

- “RAF Students Recall Oklahoma Hospitality,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, September 10, 1989



By the numbers:

- The population of Ponca City and Kay County increased at the time. Some factors included the Royal Air Force training at the Darr School, new wartime employment opportunities, and later, the staffing of the Tonkawa Prisoner of War Camp. At the time of opening, the Darr School had 40 employees, which increased, plus 200 construction workers, and pilot students. For a rural and small community area, this growth in a short time was significant.

- Kay County had a population of 46,084 in 1940 which grew slightly in the 1950 census to 48,922.

Reading 1: Newspaper Article

Teacher Tip: The following article only connects to some aspects of Ponca City and Kay County as a Heritage City. The photos help provide more considerations of local efforts, but it is recommended you use the other lessons in the collection for a more complete picture and connections mentioned in this article, such as the Continental Oil Company and the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war camp.

So Long, Cousins

The Daily Oklahoman, April 23, 1944

By Morris P. Moore

A month before Pearl Harbor this reporter went to Ponca City to look over that strange people in blue, who battered but not beaten down, had come to Oklahoma to start a Royal Air Force school.

Ponca City was pretty well lined up to stare, and although the British don't stare, they were doing the British equivalent: wondering what kind of place they'd come to, where Indians and blankets are seen on the streets amidst the evidences of such wealth and prosperity, and to them, waste of money.

The RAF school has now closed, having accomplished its purpose of turning out hundreds of pilots. Last week I returned to see what has happened in those 32 months of association between the two peoples. What I found is heartening. If our differences with the British in the post-war world should be submitted to the boys who have visited Ponca for six months, and to their Ponca hosts, there'd be no battered noses.

Plenty of Evidence

Finding lasting friendships, or hands across the sea stuff in Ponca City is easy. You can't keep the lump out of your throat when you read the letters that come back from the boys themselves and from their parents. One will tell about life at home, and add as if it were an afterthought, that he had won the Distinguished Flying Cross. Another, from a parent, will tell of the death in action of a pink-cheeked lad who'd left Oklahoma only a few months ago.

At first it was awkward. Americans were frankly curious. But the British learned that beneath the curiosity was a genuine, hearty friendliness. And the British seemed standoffish, but the Americans learned they didn't mean it that way.

For two years, British cadets have literally lived in Ponca City homes every hour they could be away from the job of learning to fly. As one class, after six months here, will leave, the boys would tell newcomers about this home or that one, and the new ones would come out. Families 'adopted' particular boys or particular groups, who went weekend after weekend to the same home. They slept and ate and cooked and made pictures and washed dishes and wrote letters and went fishing and made beds and raised flowers and made notes and told about their homes, and then they were gone.

Some are Coming Back

Living rooms in Ponca are loaded with pictures of RAF pilots. Many of them have gold stars pasted across the front. On many a table is a pile of letters from abroad. More than one Britisher plans definitely to return after the war and live here. Some half a dozen have American brides, although marriage was frowned on by the RAF, on the very reasonable grounds that the boys were here to learn to fly, not to get married.

Arthur E. Taft, an accountant with Continental Oil Co., and Mrs. Taft, have entertained many boys. He summed up the British this way: "Almost all the boys were delighted with America, its friendliness, its distances, its soda fountains and cars. Remarkably few were the least bit snobbish. They were usually shy and reticent at first but it was due more to a desire to avoid giving offence than to coldness. Upon cultivation, they proved warm hearted, often affectionate, and surprisingly clean and thought and speech. They were intensely loyal and appreciative. Often they found it difficult to tell of their appreciation. They were not usually given to sentimental expression but never lacked the ability nor the will to write it. I think most of them would instantly accept the gage of battle from anyone who might slander Ponca City or Oklahoma." . . .

USO Is Center of Good Will

The Lions club of Ponca City sent out Christmas greetings to all the boys who had graduated, S. B. Crawford, secretary, received more than 500 replies. They didn't tabulate returns, but Ponca was genuinely sorrowed at the number of letters from parents, thinking the club, and reporting the death of the boy to whom the greetings were sent.

The USO got underway with the club room last autumn... Establishment of a prisoner of war camp at Tonkawa has increased the job of the USO. Many of the military policemen are from Brooklyn. Understanding the Brooklyn boys has been more difficult than learning how to talk to the British.

What do the British want to see in America, during their few off hours? Most of them are eager to visit places they've read about, the Grand Canyon, New York, the Will Rogers memorial, and the Texas desert to see cactus plants. . .

Goodbye at the Station

The Ponca City News was dotted throughout the time the British were there with items about how the cadets were doing in action all over the world. And it is interesting that these news items came almost invariably in letters to Ponca City people, not through official RAF channels. Deaths of boys were reported in notes from parents to Ponca families. . .

Every two months for more than two years there was a touching scene at the Santa Fe station in Ponca, when a class would be shipped out. Hour of departure was supposed to be secret but 'Mom and Pop' Ponca (and a lot of pretty girls) had a way of knowing. The cadets would have less than 15 minutes at the station, but that was time enough for snaps all around. The Poncans choked up, and there were usually tears, and the British, more reserved and less emotional, fumbled through the good-byes. But the letters that followed were more touching by their very formality, and the sentiments when stripped of their formal verbiage, really meant, in Oklahomanese, 'So long cousins, I'll be seeing you some day.'

Questions for Reading 1 and Quotations to Consider

1. Explain how each photo and quote relate to Ponca City and Kay County being named a Heritage City.
2. How did the military training, such as with British aviation cadets, support the war efforts and the Allies?
3. What challenges might the British cadets and the American families in Ponca City have faced as they got to know each other and shared life in Kay County?
4. Why do you think the cadets wrote letters back to Ponca families even after they returned to war? What does that say about the relationships they built?
5. How might these relationships between British cadets and American families have influenced post-war views between the US and the United Kingdom?

Reading 2: Heritage City Designation

Excerpt from: "[House Report 115-998](#), "To Direct the Secretary of the Interior to Annually Designate at Least One City in The United States as An 'American World War II Heritage City,' and for other purposes" (October 30, 2018)

" . . .PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H.R. 6118 is to direct the Secretary of the Interior to annually designate at least one city in the United States as an "American World War II Heritage City".

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

On December 7, 1941, military forces of the Empire of Japan attacked the U.S. Naval Fleet and ground bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 8, 1941, one day after what President Roosevelt referred to as, "a date which will live in infamy," the United States declared war against the Empire of Japan. Three days later, on December 11, 1941, Japan's ally, Germany, declared war on the United States. Sixteen million Americans, mostly young working-age men, served in the military during World War II, out of an overall United States population of 113 million.

While an unprecedented number of Americans served in World War II, the country drastically increased its war production on the home front, serving not only the needs of the armed forces of the United States but her allies as well--in what President Franklin Roosevelt called "The Arsenal of Democracy." The combination of millions serving in the military, during a period of necessary and drastic increases in production, led to significant social changes on the American home front.

The World War II period resulted in the largest number of people migrating within the United States in the history of the country. Individuals and families relocated to industrial centers for good paying jobs out of a sense of patriotic duty. Many industrial centers became "boomtowns," growing at phenomenal rates. One example, the City of Richmond, California, grew from a population of under 24,000 to over 100,000 during the war. . ."

Questions for Reading 1 and 2, Photos

1. What was the purpose of the bill (H.R. 6118) according to the report?
2. What contributed to Ponca City and Kay County's growth in population?
3. How did home front contributions, both paid and volunteer, in Ponca City and Kay County support the US and the Allies? Consider both information from this lesson and from past lessons.
4. Why do you think Ponca City and Kay County was designated as a World War II Heritage City? Connect details from the bill and evidence from the first reading, and/or other readings from the Ponca City and Kay County lessons.
5. Are there other cities you think of when considering home front contributions during wartime? Which, and why?

Culminating Activity/Mastery Product

To demonstrate student understanding, support students in creating a final product that meets the following objectives:

- a. Describe World War II home front military training in Ponca City and Kay County, such as in aviation and radio.
- b. Summarize the contributions and volunteerism of local civilians to home front wartime efforts.
- c. Explain the role and impact of the Tonkawa prisoner-of-war (POW) camp in Kay County.
- d. *Optional:* Describe similarities and differences of Ponca City and Kay County and other Heritage city(s) / World War II home front(s).

Mastery products should be:

- . . . **student-led**; Students work as individuals or in collaborative groups.
- . . . **student-directed**: Students are offered a variety of choices for product type.
- . . . **student-organized**; Teacher facilitates by providing students with the comparison matrices and/or resource links from throughout the series of lessons.
- . . . **student-assessed**; Teacher supports student self-assessment and reflection by providing students single-point rubrics to assess for meeting standards and/or lesson objectives.

Note: Depending on time and scope, the comparison of Ponca City and Kay County, Oklahoma to another WWII Heritage or home front city(s) within the mastery product (objectives) may be omitted. However, comparing cities is recommended, as it connects students to a deeper understanding of the WWII home front.

Examples of mastery product choices include, but are not limited to:

- **Written**: Letter (opinion or informative), essay, poem, narratives, biography, articles, class book or children's book, speech or debate (then presented orally), blog / website, plaque or historical displays, pamphlets or rack cards
- **Graphic Organizers**: timeline, flowcharts, mind or concept content maps, Venn diagrams, comparison matrices, posters
- **Artistic Expression**: song, dance, theater (ex. skits), 3-D models, dioramas, photo journal, stamp and coin designs, visual art, architecture/building or monument, museum design

- **Media design and creation:** podcast, historical markers, social media content, interactive virtual maps or tours, infographics, video, comic strips or graphics, game design, slideshows, digital scrapbook

Please view the [NPS Heritage cities lesson collection](#) for information and resources on other cities.

Single-Point Rubric

Areas for Improvement	Proficient (Meeting Standard)	Areas of Exceeding Standard
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
Points		

Figure 19: Single-Point Rubric (Standards; Blank) [Teacher selects priority standards for assessment.] Courtesy of Sarah Nestor Lane

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