

Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin, Her Voice and Legacy

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Description: This lesson explores the life and political activism of Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin, one of the most overlooked activists in American history. Starting in the Progressive Age, students will also examine her votes during WWI and WWII, and her opposition to the Vietnam War. Students will corroborate evidence through primary sources written by Rankin and others in her life to determine her core values. Ultimately, the summative assessment will be a creation of a textbook entry for Congresswoman Rankin, as she is often overlooked in history.

Short Description: Students will explore the life of Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin by critically reading primary and secondary sources to determine her worldview and perspective. As an assessment, students will create a new textbook entry on her career.

Grade level: 9th-12th

Time: 1-2 class periods

Objective:

1. Students will corroborate primary and secondary sources to better understand the values, sentiments, and political beliefs of Jeannette Rankin
2. Students will understand Jeannette Rankin as an activist who was not only a pacifist, but advocated for those who were the most vulnerable and oppressed in 20th century America.
3. Students will create a textbook entry to showcase what they have learned about Jeannette Rankin.

Prerequisites: Students should understand that while largely ignored by mainstream textbooks, Jeannette Rankin was the first female Congresswoman in United States history, a Republican from Montana, Progressive and the only Congressperson to vote against both World War I and World War II.

Materials

1. Primary and Secondary Sources In Four Eras (Pre-Congress, WWI, WWII, and Post-WWII) (Provided)
2. Evidence Gathering Sheet (Provided)
3. Assessment (Provided)

Additional Information

[Jeannette Rankin's FBI File](#)

Procedures

Do Now: Running on an isolationist and Progressive platform, Jeannette Rankin from Montana, became the first woman to serve in Congress, elected in 1916. Please pick one and respond.

1. How do you think Jeannette Rankin's gender influenced her political behavior in Congress, if at all? Why?
2. Did Congresswoman Rankin have an obligation to specifically represent women's issues, as the only female member, in Congress? Why or why not?

Discuss Do Now.

1. Inform students they are going to be look at primary and secondary sources to determine the worldview and ideology of Congresswoman Rankin to establish connections across the four time periods in her life (Pre-Congress, WWI, WWII, and Post-WWII).
2. Distribute evidence gathering sheet (included on page 11). Allow students to work in groups of four with one student completing each section.
3. After each student has completed their section, have students share out with their group and allow students to identify themes and complete the "Bringing It All Together!" question.
4. Conclude with Think-Pair-Share practice with one of the following questions (teacher discretion)
 - What were the values of Congresswoman Rankin? Be sure to provide direct evidence from the texts and activities today.
 - Why do you think Americans, if they know her at all, only focus on WWI and WWII, and not her other activism?
 - Do you agree or disagree with her votes in World War I and World War II? Why or why not?
 - Why do you think she has largely gone forgotten in American history?

Assessment/Homework

Take out a US History textbook and showcase the lack of Congresswoman Rankin in the textbook. If time is remaining, have students evaluate whether she should be more present or not in the textbook.

For homework, students will write a two-three paragraph response to be taped into our textbook (See Page 12 for assessment)

Standards

D2.His.4.9-12.

Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

Section 1: Jeannette Rankin before World War I

“[W]e should wish [the care of 150 orphans in the state asylum] to be a model for all women to follow. . . [W]e could see that these children were given intensive study. . . especially along the line of preventing disease and of keeping health and happiness curves about normal. The principles of education, the effect of work and play and idleness on character building, could be studied watching the children 24 hours a day. . . . In time this institution would become a storehouse of information on child life and care. . . . In time we could standardize motherhood, as all service to society must be standardized. . . . A scientific course could be developed that would prepare women for scientific motherhood. . . . Is it too much to hope that in time. . . we have no ‘Topsies.’”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, Montana Federation of Women’s Clubs, Lewistown, 4 June 1914, Jeannette Rankin Papers, Montana Historical Society.

“[B]abies are dying from cold and hunger; soldiers have died for lack of a woolen shirt. Might it not be that the men who have spent their lives thinking in terms of commercial profit find it hard to adjust themselves to thinking in terms of human needs? Might it not be that a great force that has always been thinking in terms of human needs, and that always will think in terms of human needs, has not been mobilized? Is it not possible that the women of the country have something of value to give the Nation at this time? It would be strange indeed if the women of the country through all these years had not developed an intelligence, a feeling, a spiritual force peculiar to themselves, which they hold in readiness to give to the world.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, “Woman Suffrage,” Congressional Record, 10 January 1918

“All over the country women are asking for the vote. . . . We are a force in life, a factor which must be considered in all problems. . . . While we Montana women have broader opportunities than the women of any other part of the world, we want the ballot in order to give opportunity to less fortunate women. . . . Census reports show that there are eight million women engaged in manual labor in this country. They are not there because they don’t want to stay at home, but because they must work if they are to live.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, Woman’s Day speech, Missoula, Montana, quoted in Daily Missoulian, 2 May 1914,

We are busily at work in this state getting our preliminary organization in shape. This means the precinct organizations and the training of a corps of efficient workers. . . . We want a capable, efficient woman in every precinct in the state. . . . These precinct captains will form in each county the county committee, and the county committees in turn will elect their chairmen, who will form the state committee and will elect the state organization.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Anaconda Standard, July 10, 1913,

Section 1: Jeannette Rankin before World War I

FOR CONGRESS
Jeannette Rankin
REPUBLICAN TICKET

NATIONAL WOMAN SUFFRAGE
PROTECTION OF CHILDHOOD
STATE AND NATIONAL PROHIBITION
FARM LOAN LAW
EQUAL TAXATION

*Look for the name "Miss Jeannette Rankin" on ballot
If you don't see it ask the Judge of Election*

Circulated and Paid for by Montana Good Gov't Organization.
(OVER)

Printed by State Pub. Co. Helena

A black and white portrait of Jeannette Rankin, a woman with dark hair, wearing a light-colored, textured hat and a dark jacket. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera.

Source: *For Congress, Jeannette Rankin, Republican Ticket, circa December 1917.*

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:For_Congress,_Jeannette_Rankin,_Republican_Ticket.jpg

Section 2: Jeannette Rankin and World War I

“Her appearance was of a woman on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She clutched at her throat repeatedly. Her hands were alternately wrapped around each other. She sat upright, then dropped forward in her seat. Occasionally she threw back her head and looked fixedly at the white lights shining through the stained glass ceiling of the House of Representatives. She stroked her head tiredly. . . Slowly Miss Rankin arose to her feet. . . Every eye in the chamber was fixed upon her. There was no sound. As she came fully to a standing posture Miss Rankin threw back her head and looked straight ahead. Her hands groped for the back of the seat before her; they found it, and she gripped it hurriedly, nervously. ‘I want to stand by my country, but I cannot vote for war,’ she said. . . A score of men called upon Miss Rankin to answer ‘aye’ or ‘no,’ not understanding that she intended to vote ‘no’ without actually using the word.”

Source: Washington Times, 8 April 1917

“[The] hardest part of the vote was the fact that the suffragists were divided, and many of my beloved friends said that you will ruin the suffrage movement if you vote against war.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, interview by John C. Board, 29 August 1963

“It is a common conviction that Representative Rankin missed, for herself and for the cause with which her name is closely identified, a golden opportunity when, the other day, she had her vote recorded in opposition to the wishes of the overwhelming majority of the people of her country; but while this act cannot be recalled, Miss Rankin will not be denied other opportunities perhaps equally golden. . . . [I]t seems reasonable to believe that, when the roll shall be called upon them, Miss Rankin’s voice will ring out clear and firm on the right side.”

Source: Christian Science Monitor, 11 April 1917

“Disarmament will not be won without their aid. . . . Half of the human race does not fight and has never fought. . . . [W]hy should men not learn something. . . . from the non-fighting female.”

Source Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Joan Hoff Wilson, “Jeannette Rankin,” speech to the Montana History Conference, Helena, 4 April 1977.

Section 2: Jeannette Rankin and World War I

JEANNETTE RANKIN
MONTANA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON

June 1, 1917.

Dear Friend:-

I have been deeply concerned about the war, just as you have been, else I should have written to you sooner.

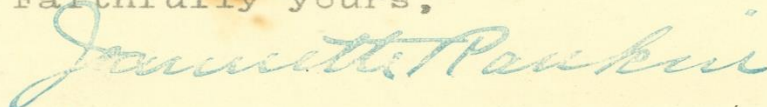
While we are anxiously doing what we can to help with the war, we must not forget that the homes we are fighting to protect and the children who are to be future citizens, need the attention of every woman. For if our homes and our children are neglected at this time, we shall lose more than we will gain. I know you have been thinking about these things, and will be interested in the bulletins I am sending you.

In spite of the fact that the women all over the country seem to claim me as their special representative, my first service shall always be to you folks out home, and I want you to feel perfectly free to call upon me whenever I can be of the slightest service to you.

No doubt you have read in the papers about my "red hair" and "sending the fathers to war" and other inventions of the eastern press. I wish you were here to see Congress working and to know the true facts.

I wish you would find a moment to write to me.

Faithfully yours,



Source: Constituent Letter from Jeannette Rankin <http://history.house.gov/Blog/2017/April/4-17-Womanly-Rankin/>

Section 3: Jeannette Rankin and World War II

“As a woman, I can't go to war and I refuse to send anyone else.”

Source: Congressional Record, 8 December 1941

“I knew it was coming. . . .Roosevelt was deliberately trying to get us in the war. . . .I didn't let anybody approach me. I got in my car and disappeared. Nobody could reach me. . . .I just drove around Washington and got madder and madder because there were soldiers everywhere I went. . . .I don't remember whether I 12 thumbed my nose at them or not, but I resented them.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, interview by Malca Chall, 1974, audio recordings and transcripts, Suffragists Oral History Project

“This time Germany has a chance to conquer the world. . . .[D]on't stick to your ideas because you've had them since the last war. This situation IS different, I tell you.”

Source: Maury Maverick, mayor of San Antonio and supporter of Jeannette Rankin's 1917 vote, to Jeannette Rankin, 12 November 1940

“I always knew you were like the Rock of Gibraltar. And so you are. I feel proud to know you and prouder that I can say that we are friends. What you have done today will go down in history. . . .[Y]ou have made an impression on the whole world. . . .”

Source: Katherine Anthony, close personal friend, to Jeannette Rankin, 8 December 1941

“You have turned the clock back for women! . . .Thank God our country does not have to depend on such unrealistic persons as you! You doubtless flatter yourself on standing by your ‘principles,’ but inflexible principles like yours would put us under the Nazi heel. You will not hold an enviable position in the history of our times.”

Source: Mary B. Gilson, to Jeannette Rankin, 8 December 1941

Section 3: Jeannette Rankin and World War II



Source: Telegram sent to Rep. Rankin following her vote against World War II



Source: The Zanesville Signal, December 8th, 1941

Section 4: Jeannette Rankin and Post-World War II

“Women must devote all their energies today in gaining enough political offices to influence the direction of government away from the military-industrial complex and toward solving the major social disgraces that exist in our country... We are here together to work for the elimination of war.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, Susan B. Anthony Hall of Fame Speech, 1971

“The draft could be abolished if women spoke loudly enough to be heard. But they don’t. Women remind me of the cows on our ranch in Montana. A cow has a calf and after a while some man comes 14 along and takes the calf away. She bawls for a while, then goes on and has another calf.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, quoted by Associated Press, unidentified newspaper, April 1967

“I tell these young women that they must get to the people who don’t come to the meetings. It never did any good for all the suffragettes to come together and talk to each other. There will be no revolution unless we go out into the precincts. You have to be stubborn. Stubborn and ornery.”

Source: Jeannette Rankin, quoted in Life, March 3, 1972

Section 4: Jeannette Rankin and Post-World War II



Source: Anti-Vietnam Protest led by Jeannette Rankin, Photograph. Associated Press.

<http://www.apimages.com/metadata/Index/Associated-Press-Domestic-News-Dist-of-Columbi-/4447ff4702e5da11af9f0014c2589dfb/6/0>

The Jeanette Rankin Brigade Mass women's peace action

SAN FRANCISCO — When Congress reconvenes in January, the opening session will be met with the demand that its first order of business must be ending the Vietnam war and the withdrawal of American troops from Southeast Asia.

This demand will be presented by woman power, organized into the Jeanette Rankin Brigade.

The women plan to convene a Congress of American Women to develop programs "dedicated to reshaping American society and restoring our country to the community of nations."

Besides demanding that the legislators act to end the war, the women will demand that Congress:

- Use its power to heal a sick society at home;
- Use its power to make reparations for the ravaged land we leave behind in Vietnam;
- Listen to what the American people are saying and refuse the insatiable demands of the military-industrial complex.

This movement was inspired by an appeal by Jeanette Rankin, 86, the nation's first woman in Congress, elected in 1917. "If we had 10,000 women willing to go to prison if necessary," she said in May, "that would end it. You cannot have wars without the women."

Miss Rankin, a militant leader of the suffragette movement that eventually gained women the right to vote under the 19th Amendment, voted in 1917 against U.S. involvement in World War I and also opposed American military commitment in World War II.

"This is no time to be polite," Miss Rankin said. "The army isn't polite when it selects a young man and says 'come and fight'. But they don't take the politicians and decision makers to fight."

Miss Rankin's militant opposition to the Vietnam war was taken up by about 75 prominent women throughout the country who issued a call for the

nationwide convening of the Jeanette Rankin Brigade in Washington.

Women for Peace and the Women's Intl. League for Peace and Freedom have rallied to support of the action and a drive is now underway to get the largest possible number of women to Washington for the joint opening session of Congress.

Supportive action by women who cannot go to Washington will be planned in various localities.

One facet of the Congress of American Women will be discussion of electoral action, says Nikki Bridges, San Francisco chairman of the brigade.

"Many of us feel we should support peace candidates where they exist and go into politics ourselves in other places, because that way you get a forum you don't otherwise have," she says.

At present efforts are being made to get support from as many peace and women's

political organizations that have the type of program in which peace is just one facet," Mrs. Bridges says. "We don't want men, but do want their money and support."

Among the initial sponsors are women from many walks of life bound together by a common concern about the war — Mrs. Benjamin Spock; Mrs. Rosa Parks (of the Montgomery Alabama bus boycott); author Jessica Mitford; Grace Mora Newman (sister of Dennis Mora of the Fort Hood Three); Mrs. Ann Eaton, author Kay Boyle, Mrs. Harry Belafonte; Mrs. Esther Pike, Mrs. Martin Luther King, Jr.

National executive secretary of the group is Mrs. Vivian Hallinan.

Detailed plans are still in formation, Mrs. Bridges says, but organizations and individuals are invited to join in any way they can. The San Francisco Bay Area office telephone number is 474-4456.

—M. F.



JEANNETTE RANKIN
'No time to be polite'

groups as possible. "We also want the support of groups like churches and labor unions, and

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Source: Jeannette Rankin File, Federal Bureau of Investigation pg 62 <https://vault.fbi.gov/jeannette-rankin/jeannette-rankin-part-01-of-01/view>

Representative Jeannette Rankin Graphic Organizer

Time Period	What are Congresswoman Rankin's Positions?	How do you know what you know?	What can we learn about her values and belief systems from these sources?
Section 1: Jeannette Rankin before World War I			
Section 2: Jeannette Rankin and World War I			
Section 3: Jeannette Rankin and World War II			
Section 4: Jeannette Rankin and Post-World War II			

Bringing It All Together! What themes or similarities do you notice through the life of Representative Jeannette Rankin?

Assessment

Based on what you have learned in this lesson, discussion of Congresswoman Rankin, and close reading of primary and secondary sources, you are going to write a NEW textbook entry for Jeannette Rankin.

As you do, please consider the following questions:

- 1) Who is she? What is her significance? What were her accomplishments as a citizen and Representative?
- 2) What were her values? What did she care about?
- 3) Why is she a controversial figure in American history?

The best answers will include reference to multiple primary sources and be approximately three paragraphs long.

If you are struggling, consider each question above as one paragraph. This will help guide and frame your textbook entry!

Alternative Assessment: If you do not believe, like many textbook publishers do, that Representative Rankin should not be included at length in the textbook, please write an argumentative response defending your claim.