



Women’s Roles in the War of 1812

Anthony Ruggiero

Subject Area	Grade Level	Time
War of 1812, Women in War	7	45–50 Minutes

Lesson Description

Despite being an important event in U.S. history, the War of 1812 is often overlooked. As a result, women’s roles in the war are also overlooked. This lesson is designed to reveal the roles and experiences of women from during this pivotal moment in U.S. history.

C3 Standards

- D3.3.6—8.** Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources to support claims, noting evidentiary limitations.
- D4.1.6—8.** Construct arguments using claims and evidence from multiple sources.

Vocabulary

War of 1812

Nationalism

Strong feeling of pride, loyalty, and devotion to one’s country, often shown through a desire to protect and support the nation.

National Identity

Shared sense of belonging and connection that people have with their country based on common history, traditions, values, symbols, and experiences.

Patriotism

Love for and pride in your country, shown by caring about it and helping make it a better place.

Materials & Resources

PRIMARY SOURCES

Women in the War of 1812 Documents

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

See, Think, Wonder Worksheet

Causes of the War of 1812

Women in the War of 1812 Activity Sheet

Includes Guided Questions and Exit Ticket Prompts



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Lesson Plan • Educator Guide

War of 1812, Women in War

Grade 7

45–50 Minutes

Warm Up

Getting Started

Complete the **See, Think, Wonder Image Analysis Chart**.

The image is a depiction of Dolley Madison rescuing George Washington's portrait. This information is purposefully left out, as students will be reading a document about it later. This works as a setup for the activity.

Following the warm up, a brief overview of what was already discussed about the War of 1812 should be offered.

NOTE

Please see document for causes of the War of 1812.

Additionally, define the terms *nationalism*, *national identity* and *patriotism*. This is important as the war helped shape American identity and contributed to the growing nationalism at the time. Women's roles helped contribute to this. Furthermore, defining the term patriotism is important because the actions of women during this time period are considered acts of patriotism.

Use this as a transition to the activity. For instance, reveal that the image in the warm up is Dolley Madison rescuing the George Washington portrait and set up the inquiry activity.

Essential Question

To what extent were women pivotal to the success of the United States during the War of 1812?



Women's Roles in the War of 1812

Lesson Plan • Educator Guide

War of 1812, Women in War

Grade 7

45–50 Minutes

Questions & Activities

SUPPORTING QUESTION 1

How did women's actions during the War of 1812 demonstrate patriotism and nationalism?

SUPPORTING ACTIVITY 1

Document A: *Dolley Madison's letter helps to answer this question.*

Document A

Letter from Dolley Madison to Lucy Todd

1. Why might Dolley Madison have considered George Washington's portrait more important than some of her personal belongings?
2. How does her description of the portrait's rescue help us understand its importance to the nation?
3. What does Dolley Madison's determination to save Washington's portrait suggest about how Americans view the nation's founding & identity in 1814? Use evidence from the document to support your answer.

SUPPORTING QUESTION 2

How did women contribute to the war effort during the War of 1812 even though they were not soldiers?

SUPPORTING ACTIVITY 2

Documents B & C: *The excerpt from Margaret Bayard Smith's journal and newspaper excerpt announcing the death of Elizabeth Sands will help to answer this question.*

Document B

Journal Excerpt from Margaret Bayard Smith's Journal

1. What does this passage show about how women and children were affected by the War of 1812?
2. How did women respond when their city was attacked and their homes were in danger?
3. What roles did women have during the war, based on the ways they protected their families, gathered belongings, and survived difficult situations?

Document C

Newspaper Excerpt Announcing the Death of Elizabeth Sands

1. How does Elizabeth Warner Sands's role as a nurse demonstrate the importance of women's contributions during the War of 1812?
2. To what extent did women like Elizabeth Warner Sands contribute to American military success without participating directly in combat?



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Lesson Plan • Educator Guide

War of 1812, Women in War

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Assessment & Homework

Formative Assessment

Students will complete guided questions as they analyze the primary source documents. See questions & activities on previous page.

Summative Assessment

Students will complete one of the exit ticket options that answers the question for the lesson.

Choose **one (1)** of the following prompts to respond to. For your response, cite at least two (2) pieces of evidence from the sources to support your ideas:

1. You are a social media intern for the **National Women's History Museum**. Create an Instagram carousel (3–5 slides) that tells the story of women's impact during the War of 1812. Use evidence from the sources to show how women were essential to the American war effort and explain why their contributions deserve recognition today.

OR

2. Develop an argument that explains the extent to which women were pivotal to the success of the United States during the War of 1812. Your response should be 4–5 sentences long.

Modification & Extension

1. Guided questions help students identify pertinent information within the texts.
2. Students may work together to complete the activity.
3. In-text definitions help students better understand the passage given to them.
4. Visuals are provided both documents for students to connect the information to the person writing it.
5. Students have a choice for their exit ticket, which helps with engagement, and allows them to show their understanding in a way that works for them.



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Lesson Plan • Educator Guide

War of 1812, Women in War

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Further Research & Resources

The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict

by Donald R. Hickey

A detailed overview of the War of 1812 that explores the military conflict, civilian experiences, and the growth of American nationalism.

National Archives and Records Administration

War of 1812 Resources

Provides access to government documents, military records, and historical background related to the war.

[National Archives War of 1812 Resources](#)

National Park Service

War of 1812 Resources

Includes information about major events, people, and places connected to the conflict.

[National Park Service War of 1812 Resources](#)

Smithsonian Institution

American History Collections

Offers resources on American history, including women's changing roles during times of conflict.

[Smithsonian National Museum of American History](#)

TEACHER NOTES

The causes of the War of 1812, as well as any additional introductory information about the war should be taught *prior* to this lesson.