

## *Connecticut Explored Curriculum Lesson Plan*

**Topic:** How Would Rationing Effect Your Life?

**Article:** “If You Don't Need It, DON'T BUY IT,” by Amber Degn, *Hog River Journal*, Vol. 2, No.1, Fall 2008  
(attached at end of document)

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**Description:** In the lesson, students are encouraged to examine the extent that rationing during WWII, if implemented today, would change their current daily living habits. After students learn the significant sacrifices everyday Americans made during the war effort in the 1940s, students will examine the value of rationing to a nation during a time of war.

(For an additional lesson plan on manufacturing during World War II, see the WWII Waterbury lesson plan.)

**State Standards Addressed:**

*Content Standard 3: Historical Themes* – Students will apply their understanding of historical periods, issues, and trends to examine such historical themes as ideals, beliefs, and institutions; conflict and conflict resolution; human movement and interaction; and science and technology in order to understand how the world came to be the way it is.

*Content Standard 4: Applying History* – Students will recognize the continuing importance of historical thinking and historical knowledge in their own lives and in the world in which they live.

*Content Standard 14: Economic Systems* – Students will demonstrate that various economic systems coexist, and that economic decisions are made by individuals and/or governments, influenced by markets, cultural traditions, individuals and governments in the allocation of goods and services.

**Essential Questions:** What is the role of sacrifice by individual citizens in a country’s effort to win a war?

**Objectives:** Students will realize the extensive impact World War II had on the everyday American on the home front. Students will critically examine the role of the civilian during times of war.

**Historical Background:** World War II presented unprecedented challenges to the United States. Supplying the massive number of armed forces that were fighting across the world was a difficult and complicated process that began with a dramatic increase in federal spending. In 1939 the national government spent nine billion dollars. This figure is dwarfed by the \$95.7 billion spend in 1945 alone. At the height of the war, the government was spending about \$250 million each day. Not surprisingly, this level of government spending provided a boost to the economy, lifting it out of the Depression. In the 1930s unemployment never fell below 12%. (In

fact, by winter 1932, Connecticut unemployment rate was approaching 27%.) In 1943 the rate stood at 1.3%. To meet the demands of a wartime economy, the U.S. government created many new agencies to oversee the changes. The War Production Board was created to help convert American factories into war suppliers. The board used tax breaks, loans, and other financial mechanisms to facilitate the necessary changes. To help motivate factory owners the government guaranteed profits on war goods. This policy assured cooperation. To fill the factories with educated workers the War Manpower Commission was created for recruitment. The War Labor Board settled labor disputes. With such an enormous influx of money into the American economy, inflation was a significant threat, particularly when coupled with the shortages of daily necessities. To combat inflation, the Office of Price Administration controlled prices of items. As was the case in many other wars, Connecticut robustly responded to the call to for supplies in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Many factories were quickly converted to produce valuable military equipment including airplane fliers from Deep River; submarines from Electric Boat in Groton; jet engines, propellers and other aircraft parts were made at Sikorsky, Pratt and Whitney and Hamilton Standard; and brass and metal products from Waterbury (see WWII Waterbury lesson plan). In total, about eight billion dollars worth of military contracts were awarded to Connecticut during the war.

Increased production was only half of the equation for supplying the troops. The other half, equally important and extensive, was regulating consumption. Some materials such as rubber were no longer readily available or easily produced in the United States. Most of the U.S.'s rubber supply came from Indonesia, which was under Japanese control. The United States needed to make the most of its limited existing supply. While other raw materials were more easily acquired, the shipping lanes were vulnerable to attack by the German or Japanese navies making delivery unreliable. Rationing quotas were instituted and were designed to distribute the limited quantities of goods fairly, and keep their prices reasonable. In previous wars, rationing was viewed as a weakness, however in World War II it was a necessity practiced by all the nations. Rationing in the United States, while extensive, paled in comparison to the quotas set in other countries. Americans, for instance, received ten times as much beef as their English counterparts, twenty times as much as those in Russia, and fifty times as much as those in China. According to a Gallup poll taken during the war two-thirds of the American public supported the system. The necessity of the system was so widely known that even children understood its purpose. Commercial advertising during the war overwhelmingly focused on an item's wartime correlation. Not all items were rationed, only those closely associated with the needs of the military. Rubber products (used for tires and other transportation needs), gasoline (for powering equipment), oil (mechanical lubrication), sugar (used in explosives after refinement), cotton (used in soldiers' tents), nylon and rayon (used in parachutes), and metal (used in vehicle construction) were all rationed. Countless items that utilized these materials, such as safety pins, chicken wire fence, and refrigerators were therefore also regulated. Other items were rationed because they were more difficult to bring to the U.S. during a time of war. These items included spices, silk, fruit juices, coffee, tea, and cocoa. Predictably, the rationing quotas significantly changed daily life for people living on the home front, particularly women. The single item that Americans missed most was sugar. Prior to the war Americans consumed 24 ounces a day. That number was cut in half during the war. New recipes were published in women's literature with this in mind. Hoarding of sugar was also more common because it had a longer shelf life than items like beef. The rationing program was very successful. The rationing of gasoline for example resulted in the reduction of miles driven by one third by 1943. By 1944

the U.S. was producing 90% of its own rubber. Unlike the rationing programs in other countries, the program in the U.S. was curtailed at the end of the war.

**Strategies:** This lesson is particularly relevant to the United State history curriculum. While American military actions in Europe and the Pacific are frequently topics in other world history courses, life on the home front is an equally important story uniquely appropriate for the United States history class. This rationing lesson is ideal for starting the discussion of how domestic life changed everyone’s life in ways not seen since the Second World War. After completing the lesson on rationing, it is ideal to move on to see how the war impacted specific gender and ethnic groups around the country. From “Rosie the Riveter,” to Japanese Internment, to Indian Code Talkers, to the Double V campaign and the Bracero Program, there is no shortage of material.

### **Authentic Assessment Activity**

#### *Lesson Part 1*

- A. Prior to completing this lesson in class, students will complete a 2-day activity log (provided), in which each student will list and describe his/her daily activities during a weekday and a weekend day. This will ensure that each student will be able to examine the effect of rationing on his or her personal as well as public life[?].
- B. When students arrive in class, they will read the article [double check the capitalization of the title, it’s from a quote so I think it’s unusual]“If You Don’t Need It, Don’t Buy It” by Amber Degn. As students read they should fill out the guided reading worksheet that is provided.
- C. Once students finish the reading, they should read the list of items that were rationed during World War II and then examine their daily logs and check off every activity that would have been significantly affected by rationing.
- D. Students should complete the Rationing grid and guided reflection sheet.
- E. Students should present to the class the changes in their lives that rationing would require
- F. Guide the students in a discussion analyzing the different benefits and possible disadvantages civilian sacrifice could have to nation during a time of war.

#### **Materials:**

*Hog River Journal* Article: *If You Don’t Need It, Don’t Buy It*

Guided Reading worksheet and list of rationed items

Daily Activity Log

Rationing Grid

Rationing during wartime reflection sheet

### **Annotated Bibliography**

*Bristol Connecticut in World War II. Bristol, CT: World War II Historical Committee, 1947.*  
Similar to *Manchester Remembers*, this book examines the mobilization of Bristol residents during the war as well as the industrial changes made in support of the war effort.

John W. Jeffries. *Testing the Roosevelt Coalition: Connecticut Society and Politics in the Era of*

*World War II*. Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 1979.

Unlike the other books listed, this study focuses on the political aspects of Connecticut during this era, with an eye toward national politics.

Barbara McLean Ward, ed. *Produce and Conserve, Share and Play Square: The Grocer and the Consumer on the Home-front Battlefield during World War II*. Portsmouth, N.H., Strawberry Banke Museum and University Press of New England, 1994.

This is a more personal look at rationing and its effect on business and community relationships during the war.

Stewart Ross. *Rationing At Home in World War II*

This is a general history of the rationing program implemented across the United States.

Patricia C. Thorstenson. *Manchester Remembers: The Home Front at War, 1941-1945*.

Manchester, Grames Press, 1995.

This is a close up examination filled with detailed retrospectives of the effect of World War II on a single Connecticut town.

Albert E. Van Dusen. *Connecticut*. New York, Random House, 1961.

This broad history of Connecticut includes substantial information about every major period of American history and Connecticut's role in it. Particularly relevant is Chapter 20, "Arsenal of Democracy," covering the years 1939-1945.

**Field Trip Option(s):** While there are no museums that I know of in Connecticut specifically dedicated to World War II, the New England Air Museum and the U.S. Navy Submarine Force Museum may be some possibilities. See also the WWII Waterbury lesson plan for suggestions.

## Guided Reading Worksheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Describe several reasons why rationing was necessary or important to the war effort during World War II.
2. What items were rationed?
3. How was the rationing system instituted?
4. List and describe any emotions people experienced concerning any aspects of the rationing program mentioned in the article. Did the people's reactions toward the rationing program surprise you?

## List of some items rationed during World War II

Tires, bathing caps, raincoats, garden hose, sugar, meat, butter, cheese, eggs, milk, tea, chocolate, cloth, wood, metal, as well as rubber and leather ink, paper, carbon paper, pencils, pens, typewriter ribbons, erasers, paperclips, envelopes, cars, bicycles, gasoline, fuel, oil, kerosene, solid fuels, stoves, rubber footwear, shoes, canned fish, cheese, canned milk, typewriters, chicken wire, nylons, silk

Daily Activity Log Weekend Day

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Day 1 Time	Activity	Description	Time	Activity	Description
6:00 AM			3:00 PM		
7:00			4:00		
8:00			5:00		
9:00			6:00		
10:00			7:00		
11:00			8:00		
12:00 PM			9:00		
1:00			10:00		
2:00			11:00 +		

Day 2 Time	Activity	Description	Time	Activity	Description
6:00 AM			3:00 PM		
7:00			4:00		
8:00			5:00		
9:00			6:00		
10:00			7:00		
11:00			8:00		
12:00 PM			9:00		
1:00			10:00		
2:00			11:00 +		

## Rationing During Wartime

Part II Directions: List the four activities most dramatically by rationing. Then describe how that activity would be limited by the rationing limits imposed during World War II. Finally, describe how you would deal with this inconvenience.

Activity	How it would be affected?	How would you change your behavior?
Sample: Driving to school	I would probably not want be allotted gas credits for this luxury	I would likely carpool with students that live closest to me as opposed to driving alone or with friends  Or I would take the bus
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		



### Part III

Write a ½ page reflection of how you would feel as you were making these lifestyle adjustments during World War II. Use quotes and explore the different thoughts and emotions you might have in different circumstances. Also consider the perspectives of the Connecticut residents offered in the article.

### Part IV

Now that you understand the significant extent and role that rationing played in the lives of civilians during World War II, consider the role of civilian sacrifice during wartime in general. On the bottom half of the backside of this paper answer the following questions:

1. Would the thoughts and feelings toward rationing during World War II be the same during other wars like the war in Iraq or Vietnam? Why or why not?
2. What is the value of civilian sacrifice to a nation during a time of war?
3. Should civilian sacrifice, whether through rationing or other ways, be implemented by the government during all times of war?

# "If You Don't Need It, DON'T BUY IT"

By Amber Degn

When asked recently what she remembered about rationing during World War II, one Windsor woman recalled her father, a well-respected local figure, stocking up on sugar in April 1942 when he learned it would be rationed the next month. "He hid it in an upstairs closet. We could have been fined. He loved sugar in his coffee, that was the only thing." The stigma associated with hoarding rationed goods was both a reality and a bit of wartime propaganda. Printed on each ration book was the threat of a \$10,000 fine and imprisonment for violations, declaring them "an effort to deny someone his share . . . Such action, like treason, helps the enemy." At a time when many of Windsor 's boys were fighting overseas, this stigma was very powerful. Sixty years later, the woman, who was just a teenager in 1942, asked to remain anonymous so that her father's good name would not be tarnished by his wartime sweet tooth.

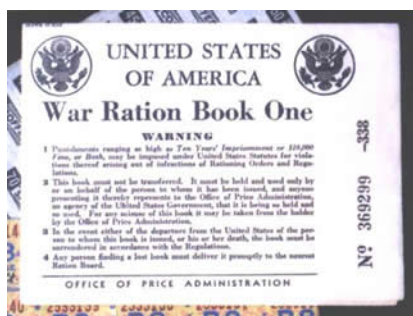


Photo: Thomas Denenberg

Exhorted by the federal Office of Price Administration (OPA) to "Give your whole support to rationing. . . Be guided by the rule: 'If you don't need it, DON'T BUY IT,'" Americans restricted consumption of tires, gasoline, sugar, butter, red meat, shoes, stockings, and many other products and materials. The federal government instituted rationing and price controls to provide equal distribution of scarce goods and to control inflation. In May 1942, Windsor's War Price and Rationing Board 112-28 distributed 10,299 sugar ration books

to every man, woman, and child in town at the John Fitch High School.

Interviews with long-time Windsor residents Doris (Douglas) Butler and Mary ( Clark ) Giffin revealed that neither felt extreme hardship during the war, because "everyone was in the same boat." Instead of consuming red meat they ate more fish and game. Butter was replaced by Oleo, a new product that came in a small bag. Both women recall kneading the bag so the little round ball filled with yellow powder would blend with and color the contents.

Everyone had a Victory garden, either in a plot in the public garden or at home. Giffin recalled that her father, tobacco grower Arthur Clark, had less success in his backyard garden than in his tobacco fields. The town of Windsor provided gardening classes for residents with brown thumbs and canning courses that taught residents how to preserve the "tomatoes, tomatoes, tomatoes" Butler remembers harvesting.

Those who commuted by car, such as Butler 's next door neighbor Harmon Barber, who worked at the Travelers, received a B sticker for their windshields, permitting them enough gas to get to and from work. Those who drove only for pleasure received an A sticker, and were limited to

approximately three gallons per week. Truckers got T stickers, and could buy as much gas as necessary, as could those with E stickers who were usually policemen or other emergency personnel.

Rationing, as the small OPA-distributed books filled with stamps stated, was a vital part of the home front war effort. Rubber-producing countries were under Japanese control. Ships normally delivering coffee and sugar to the U.S. now were used for military purposes. Tin used in cans was required for armaments and cans for soldiers' rations. With the army needing 15 million combat boots, shoe leather was also rationed. Butler 's 1945 wedding shoes were plastic and Clark 's father sacrificed one of his shoe stamps so his daughter could have a pair of dress shoes at college.

While rationing and recycling were necessary, victory gardens were a less critical, but important morale booster as American farms continued to produce during the conflict. These gardens provided a way for Windsor and communities across the country to play a role in the war effort and no doubt eased more than one guilty conscience fretting over a bag of sugar in the upstairs closet.

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The Windsor Historical Society, located at 96 Palisado Avenue, is open Tuesday to Saturday 10 AM to 4 PM. For more information call 860-688-3813.

Amber Degn is curator of the Windsor Historical Society.