VOICES OF VETERANS

WWII Oral History Lesson Plan

Oral History Interview with Mildred “Millie" Dalrymple

LESSON PLAN OVERVIEW

VOICES OF VETERANS

Suggested Grade

(Adjust difficulty as needed)

Grade 7 TEKS HIS 7(E); 20(A)
Grade 9 TEKS 7(F)

Time Required: One class period (plus lesson extension assignment)

Guiding Questions

What is oral history? What can we learn from oral histories that we can't learn from written sources? How might oral histories be less useful than the written record?

In what ways do you think the experiences of American women during WWII differed from men? In what ways might their experiences have been similar?

Why was the Women's Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) important during the war? What impact do you think it had beyond the war?

Objectives

By the end of the lesson students should:

understand some of the contributions and limitations of oral histories as a primary source; and

have a deeper understanding and appreciation for wartime volunteerism, and in particular for the women who joined the WASP.

Needed for the Activity

- Lesson plan activity sheet
- Pencil or pen
- Internet access with audio to voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/dalrymple
- If preferred, the interview excerpts can instead be read directly from the excerpts sheet

Activity Instructions

- Distribute activity worksheets (and excerpt sheets if desired) to students
- Initiate oral history warm up exercise (see below)
- Play (or read) the excerpts of Millie Dalrymple's oral history interview about being in the WASP
- Have students write answers to the excerpt questions and discuss as a group (Each excerpt discussion should last no more than 10 minutes)
- After the last excerpt, discuss the reflection questions as a group

Warm Up Activity (No more than 10 minutes)

Ask the students to choose a major historical event that happened within the last 50 years, but before they were born, and discuss the following as a group:

- Was it something you were taught in school?
- Have you seen it mentioned in books? In movies?
- Have adults talked to you about their memories of it? If so, did their personal stories affect the way you thought about that event?
- Familiarize the students with the concept that some primary sources are not in written records but are in the first-person recollections that are shared, and that we call this oral history

Lesson Extension

Students put together a presentation on a WASP-related topic. The presentation can take a variety of forms depending on teacher approval and the skills and interests of the student. Some potential examples:

- Short WASP recruitment video or 'wartime' newsreel
- Comic strip
- Short graphic novella
- Podcast
- Condensed biography of a woman in the WASP
- Curated digital exhibit of images (with accompanying interpretative text)
- Design a National WASP Memorial for placement in Washington, D.C.
- Short children's book about the WASP

Potential WASP Discussion Topics

Creation and Administration of WASP

Aircraft

Jobs in the WASP

WASP Logo/Mascot

Recruitment and Volunteering

Aeronautical Maps & Aviation Technology

Down Time & Social Life

Deactivation of WASP

Training Conditions and Techniques

History of Avenger Field

WASP Clothing

Later Recognition(s) & Congressional Gold Medal

Excerpt Markers

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 1
0:18:20 – 0:20:55
Interview Transcript, page 5

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 2
0:23:00 – 0:26:42
Interview Transcript, pp. 6-7

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 3
0:35:08 – 0:38:03
Interview Transcript, page 9

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 4
0:45:28 – 0:47:25
Interview Transcript, page 11

Lesson Notes for the Educator

Some potential topics to explore with the students in the group discussions:

• Throughout history, written records (newspapers, government documents, letters, private journals, autobiographies, maps, etc.) have disproportionately been created by those with power and wealth. As valuable as they are as historical sources, they provide only a limited window into what majorities of people thought and did in the past. Oral histories provide a democratizing balance by letting ordinary people speak for themselves. It also allows historians to learn about details of the past that no one at the time saw a need to commit to paper. Like documents, however, they too have their limits: shared memories can be distorted versions of the truth, or even outright lies. People can withhold vital information because they don't feel comfortable sharing, or the right questions were never asked. And one person's shared experience might not be representative of other people's in the past.

• Texas was an important training area in the war, especially for aviation. Men (and women) came from all over the United States as part of the war mobilization process.

• Over 23,000 Texans died in World War II. Combat deaths like Bill Davidson's are often what come to mind when students think of the dangers of war, but Dalrymple's story reminds us that training accidents also killed many brave Americans. The U.S. had a small standing army in 1941 compared to other combatant nations, and most of America's mobilized men and women were civilians with little or no military background. Discuss with the students the idea that risks were inherent in all kinds of areas of warfare (training within the U.S., on the seas, in the skies over Europe, etc.) and yet Americans still kept volunteering. Nearly 40 WASP died in the war.

• The expectation that women would/should take on traditionally male roles, such as flying planes, working in factories, and serving in the military was not the norm in the United States in the 1940s. It was not without precedent (e.g. American Civil War, World War I), but the mobilization of women in large numbers in these areas (and its social acceptance) tended to be restricted to times of war. Each time, gains made by women proved to be both fleeting and foundational for long-term change.

• The WASP were not drawn from all sectors of American society. African American women were banned, and very few other women of color were accepted. The majority of women pilots were white and college educated. The cost of flying lessons and obtaining licenses also excluded many economically disadvantaged women from participating.

• The WASP were awarded a Congressional Gold Medal in 2010. The Navajo Code Talkers received it in 2000 and the Tuskegee Airmen in 2006. Allow the students to reflect on why recognitions for these groups took so long, and the significance such recognitions have for the individuals honored and for American society.

FIRSTHAND ORAL HISTORY ACCOUNT (EXCERPTS)

Millie Dalrymple:

Voices of Veterans Oral History Interview (April 9, 2010)

Recorded Interview (1:08:44): https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/dalrymple.html

Interview Transcript (pp. 1-17): https://voicesofveterans.org/oral-history/assets/dalrymple/Dalrymple_transcript.pdf

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 1

(Interview Recording: 0:18:20 – 0:20:55; Interview Transcript, page 5)

[Mildred "Millie" Dalrymple, née Inks, grew up in Llano, Texas, during the Great Depression. She met her husband, Bill Davidson, when he was a military cadet in San Antonio and she was a journalism student at the University of Texas at Austin. After the United States entered World War II, Bill became a B-17 bomber pilot and Millie went to work in the adjutant general's office in Austin. One day at work her life would drastically change…]

Millie Dalrymple: Well, I was at the office. I was working in the adjutant general office, and [my friend Kay D'Arezzo] was, too, and I used to go to the office, or the right building, and go to work. And then one day my mother came into the office with a telegram in her hand, and I hadn't heard from Bill in two weeks and my birthday had passed without any word from him, and when I saw the telegram, I knew. And she handed it to the colonel I was working for, but after I read it, I just breathed a sigh of relief, because it was not that he had been killed, it was that he was missing. And I knew he'd be fine because he was such a great guy and he would find a way to get home. But he didn't. His plane was damaged by flack. I had letters from his friends in combat with him, and they described his February the 4th flight. His plane had been damaged, I'm reading this, by flack over a target, a German ball bearing plant, and he couldn't keep up with the rest of the formation. He dropped back and radioed he would seek cloud cover. The bombers had to stay together to protect each other with their gunners, and when one of them was injured and dropped out of the formation, they were targets for all of the German fighters. So they wrote and told me that his bomber had been hurt and injured and they thought he might have been able to reach the English Channel. But apparently he didn't.

VOV Interviewer: How long was it before you got final word?

Millie Dalrymple: Oh, about a month. I returned to work and got the telegram that he was missing in action, but I had gotten letters from the other young men in his flight to say that at best he was a German prisoner, and at worst he had crashed into the North Sea. So I decided that…I read an article about women flying, and I decided that if Bill wasn't coming home soon, that's what I would do, so I did.

Questions

Allow students to share their reactions to the oral history and their answers to the following:

- What reason(s) does Millie Dalrymple give for learning to fly? What reasons might other women have had?
- Millie received important information about her husband from telegrams and letters, which is very different to how we communicate today. For families waiting at home during the war, why were these forms of communication so important?
- If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

[After her husband's death, Millie joined the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASP) in 1943 and reported to the WASP training facility in Sweetwater, Texas.]

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 2

(Interview Recording: 0:23:00 – 0:26:42; Interview Transcript, pp. 6-7)

VOV Interviewer: Well tell us what it was like the first day you got to the training camp there in Sweetwater.

Millie Dalrymple: Well, it was an awful lot of girls from an awful lot of places. They were from all over the United States, and there were about 70 or 80 of us. We went to the Bluebonnet Hotel in Sweetwater and most of us had the minimum [flight] hours of 35 hours, but no, some of them were real pilots, had lots and lots of hours. But it sort of didn't make any difference how many hours you had because you had to go to learn to fly the military way. I was fortunate in that Kay, my friend, and I were in the same, with our names each, she was a Drezzo [D'Arezzo] and I was a Davidson, so we were both in Flight D, and we were roommates with six other girls whose last names began with E and F. That was 12 young girls with two commodes, two showers, and two sinks. We shared those with the next adjacent room. It was not exactly, not even Motel 6. There were 12 of us to share just those two commodes and things, and Sweetwater is a dust bowl, unless it rains, and then it becomes a mud bowl. And I was from Texas, so it wasn't all that big of a shock to me, but it was to the girls from the north that came down there and hadn't even been to Texas before. And Kay, my friend's military background made her a good selection for the honor of being our squadron commander, so she appointed me Flight 1 Lieutenant. I had to wake everyone up and shout cadence while we marched to all of our classes and to the flight line. It was a new experience and sort of fun. Two, three, four, hup, two, three, four. Have you been in the military?

VOV Interviewer: Yes ma'am, I'm in the Marine Corps, so I know what you're talking about a little bit.

Millie Dalrymple: OK, but it was sort of fun. We were in primary training in the Fairchild PT-19, and then it was Richton Bi-wings Steerman PT-17. And our instructors were civilians, and each had three students assigned by our heights. That was because we had to check out cushions to be able to see over the instrument panels, and I was, these are metal bucket seats. We didn't have cushions, and so you sat on your parachute, and if the parachute wasn't big enough, you had to have a cushion, and I was a three-cushion pilot.

Questions
Allow students to share their reactions to the oral history and their answers to the following:

- How would you describe what daily life was like for the trainee WASP?
- Seventy years later, how does Millie Dalrymple sound when she talks about these experiences? What makes you think that?
- If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 3

(Interview Recording: 0:35:08 – 0:38:03; Interview Transcript, page 9)

VOV Interviewer: So after the nine months of training and you finally graduate, where did they send you to next?

Millie Dalrymple: Well I went to Maxwell Family Government Alabama, and [Kay D'Arezzo] went to Love Field, Dallas, Texas, and there was only one other WASP that went to Maxwell with me.

VOV Interviewer: What was Maxwell Field like when you got there?

Millie Dalrymple: I want to tell you about something else.

VOV Interviewer: OK, sure.

Millie Dalrymple: On one trip, let me think, where is it – after advanced [training], I was going by my grandparents and followed the Colorado River until I got to Sandy Creek and then saw the pink granite rock that's near their house, but when I got back to the base I found out that I had deviated and waggled my wings at my grandparents and then a little bit further down at my aunt

and uncle, and when I got back I was about oh, not more than 15 minutes off my ETA, but Kay, my friend climbed up on the wing after I taxied in and told me that Mary Helson, one of our classmates, had been killed in a mid-air collision with a trainee who was on her very first solo. Both girls were killed, but because I was also late and because they had crashed before they got onto the pattern, they didn't know which of the AT-6s, the advanced trainers, were involved in the crash the other girl had been on her first solo. So they knew who she was, but they didn't know which of the AT-6s that were missing.

VOV Interviewer: And so there was some fear then that they thought you had crashed.

Millie Dalrymple: It was either me or the other girl, because both, we were the only two planes that were late and they hadn't gotten to the crash site by the time I got back. So Kay my friend finally phoned the friend, my wing, as soon as I taxied in and said that Mary Helson had been killed in a mid-air collision. And there wasn't any provision for sending her body back either. So each class took up a collection to send their fellow pilot's body back to their family because there was no provision for it in our civil service contract.

Questions
Allow students to share their reactions to the oral history and their answers to the following:

- What important information does Millie's story reveal about the WASP?
- If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 4

(Interview Recording: 0:45:28 – 0:47:25; Interview Transcript, page 11)

VOV Interviewer: Did you do any ferrying of planes from one base to another and that sort of thing?

Millie Dalrymple: Well, other WASPs did, but I did not. My main job was whatever happened at Maxwell Field, and it was mostly copilot on the B-24s, or if Mission Headquarters of Eastern Training Command and a lot of them had to go to Washington and so they needed a pilot to take 'em to Washington. Well also, if there was a plane down somewhere, we had to take parts. We just had a variety of things that we did there. We put slow time on the new engines, and well, the only problem was, you see, and I've written this down and I can mention it, those B-24s could fly many, many hours and our bladders had to be pretty well taken care of because there were no relief tubes for women. So we didn't drink much before going on one of those missions.

VOV Interviewer: It seems like you would get dehydrated not being able to drink anything.

Millie Dalrymple: That's right.

Questions
Allow students to share their reactions to the oral history and their answers to the following:

- Based on this excerpt, how would you describe the jobs and working conditions of the WASP?
- If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

End of Class Reflection Questions

Time permitting, lead the students in a group discussion and ask them to reflect on Millie's experiences overall:

1. Compared to historical documents, why might oral histories like Millie Dalrymple's be valuable to historians and later generations?
2. Why do you think Millie's experiences during the war left such a lasting impact on her?
3. What do you appreciate or understand about World War II that you maybe didn't before listening to Millie's story?

LESSON WORKSHEET

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Reflection Questions

1. Compared to historical documents, why might oral histories like Millie Dalrymple's be valuable to historians and later generations?

2. Seventy years later, how does Millie Dalrymple sound when she talks about these experiences? What makes you think that?

3. What do you appreciate or understand about World War II that you maybe didn't before listening to Millie's story?

Instructions

Use information from the interview to answer the following questions. If time permits, discuss in small groups or engage in a class discussion.

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 1

What reason(s) does Millie Dalrymple give for learning to fly? What reasons might other women have had?

Millie received important information about her husband from telegrams and letters, which is very different to how we communicate today. For families waiting at home during the war, why were these forms of communication so important?

If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

LESSON WORKSHEET

VOICES OF VETERANS

Reflection Questions

1. Compared to historical documents, why might oral histories like Millie Dalrymple's be valuable to historians and later generations?

2. Seventy years later, how does Millie Dalrymple sound when she talks about these experiences? What makes you think that?

3. What do you appreciate or understand about World War II that you maybe didn't before listening to Millie's story?

Instructions

Use information from the interview to answer the following questions. If time permits, discuss in small groups or engage in a class discussion.

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 2

How would you describe what daily life was like for the trainee WASP?

If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

LESSON WORKSHEET

VOICES OF VETERANS

Reflection Questions

1. Compared to historical documents, why might oral histories like Millie Dalrymple's be valuable to historians and later generations?

2. Seventy years later, how does Millie Dalrymple sound when she talks about these experiences? What makes you think that?

3. What do you appreciate or understand about World War II that you maybe didn't before listening to Millie's story?

Instructions

Use information from the interview to answer the following questions. If time permits, discuss in small groups or engage in a class discussion.

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 3

What important information does Millie's story reveal about the WASP?

If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?

LESSON WORKSHEET

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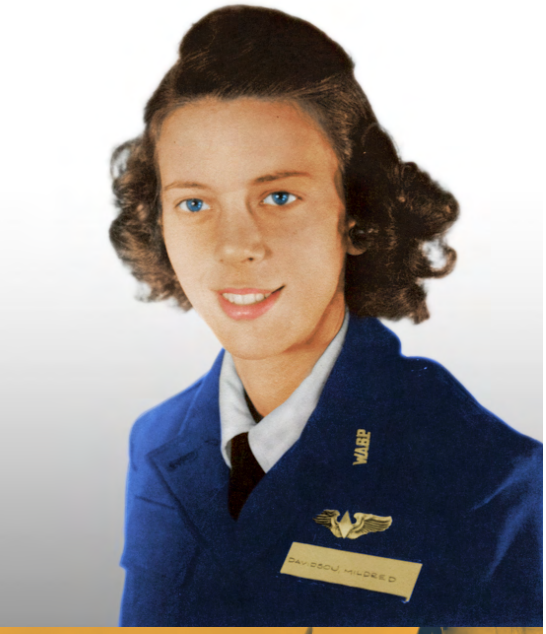

Reflection Questions

1. Compared to historical documents, why might oral histories like Millie Dalrymple's be valuable to historians and later generations?

2. Seventy years later, how does Millie Dalrymple sound when she talks about these experiences? What makes you think that?

3. What do you appreciate or understand about World War II that you maybe didn't before listening to Millie's story?

Instructions

Use information from the interview to answer the following questions. If time permits, discuss in small groups or engage in a class discussion.

Dalrymple Interview Excerpt 4

Based on this excerpt, how would you describe the jobs and working conditions?

If you were doing the interview, what follow-up question(s) would you have asked her and why?