



## Introduction to World War II and Victory Gardens

**Objective:** Students will be able to create a diagram that illustrates learning a basic WWII overview, focusing on the Home Front and victory gardens.

**Procedure:**

- Make copies of the following handouts:
  1. WWII Overview
  2. WWII At Home
  3. What is a Victory Garden
  
- Explain to students that life was very different during World War II than it is today and that you are going to learn a little bit about what was going on in the world, in our country, and in their backyards.
  
- Create a chart on the chalkboard like this:

World War II 1939-1945		
Around the world	In the United States	In our community gardens

- Break students into three groups. Each group is in charge of one section. The teacher reads the handout (or a strong reader reads to each group) and then the group reports to the class and writes short phrases about each handout on the chalkboard.
  
- Class discussion follows about life during World War II with a focus on how communities worked together during a tough time.

**Assessment:**

Each student writes a short story about what it would be like to be a kid during World War II.

## World War II Overview

Before you can understand why the whole world went to war, you have to know that it was not the first time. World War I, then called the Great War (they didn't know there would be a second one) was fought from 1914-1918. When the war was over, the winners, including the United States, harshly punished the losers, mostly Germany. Things were tough for Germans after World War I. In fact, they were tough for everyone. The United States and the rest of the world went through the Great Depression in the 1930s.

When times are bad, people often turn to those who promise that things will get better. In Germany, that man was Adolf Hitler. Hitler led a group called the Nazis, and once he came to power, he was able to convince many Germans that others were to blame for Germany's difficult times. He built up an army and took away rights of those who he said were not true Germans. At the same time across the world, in Japan, the Japanese Emperor was telling his people that it was their right to conquer other countries to get the supplies needed to make Japan into a mighty nation.

The German Army went to war with France, Great Britain, and other European countries in 1939. The United States did not get involved right away. But on December 7, 1941, Japan attacked U.S. ships, planes, and people at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The U.S. President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, declared war on Japan, and then Germany declared war on the United States. Nearly the whole world was at war. The U.S. fought with the Allied nations, including Great Britain, Canada, Australia, China, and the Soviet Union. Germany and Japan were on the other side, and were called the Axis nations. Fighting raged throughout Europe, much of Asia and throughout the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

Five years after the war started, the Allies, led by General Dwight Eisenhower, invaded France in order to push the Germans out. June 6, 1944, was called D-Day. The Allies landed on the beaches in northern France and fought hard for nearly another year until the Germans finally surrendered in May 1945.

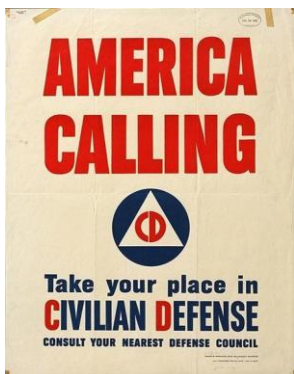
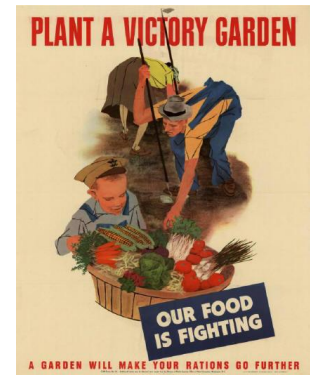
In the Pacific Ocean, the Americans fought Japan on island after island trying to get closer to Japan. The Allies called this island-hopping. Finally, in August of 1945, the Americans used a brand new kind of weapon—atomic bombs—on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese could see that they must surrender.

The war was not easy for either side. Many millions of people lost their lives. Many of them were not even soldiers. The Jewish people of Europe suffered greatly because of hate and intolerance. When World War II was over, the world swore that they would learn from the lessons of the war so that it would never happen again. Today, we study World War II so that we can learn from both the mistakes and the successes of the past.

## World War II At Home

Around 15 million Americans—mostly men, but women, too—served in the armed forces during the war. Almost 400,000 never returned. Despite the strain, Americans were determined to keep up their **morale** (spirit and cheerfulness). The government urged the public not to complain and to think of the war effort before their own personal needs. Here are some of the things Americans did:

**Victory Gardens** – One of the government's efforts to make sure that there was enough food for everyone — civilian and military alike — was the campaign for Victory Gardens. The idea was that everyone could raise some fruit or vegetables. They were a way for people to feel patriotic and contribute to the war effort, and provided 40 percent of vegetables grown in the country during the war. There were almost two million Victory Gardens in America during the war, from suburban backyards to small city plots of land.



**Civil Defense** – Even though battles were not being fought on American soil, people at home prepared through the Office of Civilian Defense. Volunteers would keep a lookout for enemy planes. People also prepared their own homes and cars. In coastal towns, lights were either blacked out or dimmed so that enemy planes would not have a target at night. Windows were covered with dark materials like blankets so that light from the inside wouldn't show on the outside. Lampposts were painted black on their top so that the lights would only shine downward.

**Radios** - In 1944, 30 million homes had at least one radio — some had more than one. Without TV, newspapers brought the images of war back to the home front, but it was the radio that was the best source for the latest news. The radio was also a way for the government to stay in touch with the American public. President Roosevelt used the radio to his advantage by talking to the people directly in his famous "fireside chats."





**Scraping** – One way in which all Americans could feel patriotic was in collecting materials needed for the war effort. Rubber, metal, and paper were some of the highest priorities. Kids would organize metal drives in their neighborhoods. They would collect old toys, old pots and pans, and even bottle caps off the street in order to make a small difference in the war effort. Paper was scarce too so everyone saved paper for recycling. Students would go door to door collecting

scrap paper. They felt it was their patriotic duty.

**V-mail**, or Victory Mail, was a new invention for people writing letters during the war. Everyone knew how important it was to write your loved one when he or she was overseas. They were far away from home and often in danger for their lives, and a letter from home was a great boost for morale. Delivering letters to the front was not an easy task. The government promoted V-mail, which used film reels that were smaller for shipping than bulky paper, because it was cheaper while families liked it because of its speed.



**War Bonds** – Waging war costs money, and lots of it. In order to raise some of that money, the American government sold war bonds and stamps. If you bought a war bond for \$18.75, it would be worth \$25.00 ten years later. If you did not have \$18.75 all at once, like most kids, you could buy war stamps. Each stamp was worth 10 cents, and you would paste each stamp into a book until they added up to \$18.75. It became very patriotic to buy bonds and stamps. In fact, one of the most popular Christmas gifts during the war was a war bond!

**Rationing** – During the war, food was rationed because the troops had to be fed and most of the ships that carried goods were used for war supplies. People received ration books, which had coupons for certain items like sugar, coffee, butter, meats, and canned goods. The coupons allowed you to buy the item in the store. Even if you had the money, if you did not have a coupon, you could not buy that food! Rationing meant everyone got a fair share when there weren't enough supplies. Besides food, clothing and gas were rationed too. Because of gas and rubber shortages, Americans were forced to do less driving. That meant that many homes had to be careful of how many times they went to the movies, went on picnics, or even to the store.



# What is a Victory Garden?



During **World War II**, Victory Gardens were planted by families in the United States (*the Home Front*) to help prevent a food shortage. This meant food for everyone!



Planting Victory Gardens helped make sure that there was enough food for **our soldiers fighting around the world**. Because canned vegetables were rationed, Victory Gardens also helped people stretch their ration coupons (*the amount of certain foods they were allowed to buy at the store*).



Because trains and trucks had to be used to transport soldiers, vehicles, and weapons, most Americans ate local produce grown in their *own communities*.



Many different types of vegetables were grown—such as **tomatoes, carrots, lettuce, beets, and peas**. Victory Gardens were responsible for bringing Swiss chard and kohlrabi onto the American dinner table because they were easy to grow.



At their peak there were more than **20,000,000 Victory Gardens** planted across the United States. That was one Victory Garden for every seven people!



By 1944 Victory Gardens were responsible for producing **40% of all vegetables** grown in the United States. More than one million tons of vegetables were grown in Victory Gardens during the war. That is the weight of 120,000 elephants OR 17,000 army tanks!



People with no yards planted small Victory Gardens in **window boxes** and watered them through their windows. Some city dwellers who lived in tall apartment buildings planted rooftop gardens and the whole building pitched in and helped.



Many schools across the country planted Victory Gardens on *their school grounds* and used their produce in *their school lunches*.



The U.S. government printed **recipe books** describing how to prepare **home grown vegetables** to make nutritional and tasty meals. Agricultural companies gave tips on how to make seedlings flourish in different climates.



Excess food grown in Victory Gardens was *canned and used during the winter months* to help supplement the amount of food available.



Growing Victory Gardens gave Americans on the **Home Front** a feeling that they were doing something helpful to win the war (*and they were*)!

