

Citizen Involvement in the War Effort at Home— Food Rationing Patricia Plaut AHTC Summer Institute 2007

Abstract:

The main focus for students in the four lessons outlined below is to have them look at food rationing and see how families during WWII handled food rationing. Additionally, how did food rationing help the war effort? This unit is set up to have students look at primary sources both from Illinois and nationally.

Background:

Citizens were asked to help in the war effort from the recycling of scrap metal, paper, grease and dead farm animals, to canning basic foods. Additionally, “[a]bout 20 items -- including rubber, gasoline, liquor, and canned goods --were rationed because the resources used to produce or transport these goods, such as tin used for canned goods, were needed to produce or transport equipment and supplies for the troops. ... The first item rationed was sugar, in April 1942. The issuing of War Ration Book One to all Americans the following month created shortages of many other goods. It also led to a thriving black market in both rationed goods and phony ration books.” By February 1943, War Ration Book Two was issued “limit[ing] purchases of certain goods by assigning these goods points and allowing each person a certain number of points per year.” This enabled the Office of Price Administration (OPA) to control the distribution and sale of items and thus “prevent[] acute shortages and high inflation.” (Price, p.14-15) (For more information on rationing see <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/ratinstr.htm>)

“Sugar rationing in Illinois was first instituted on April 20, 1942. Households were required to declare their stockpiles ... [e]very man, woman, and child were rationed twelve ounces of sugar a week. This was one half of the prewar consumption of one and a half pounds...Housewives baked less frequently and used saccharin, corn syrup, honey, maple syrup, and other sugar substitutes.” (Bailey, page 74) Sugar is important to the making of jams and jellies. Other sugars do not give the same quality jell as table sugar gives. Canning of fruits for the winter months also takes a large amount of sugar. Canners can use three different syrup solutions to can fruit, the recipes found in the Math Connection Worksheet. (Rombauer)

In 2003 the national consumption of sugar was about 142 pounds of sugar/sweeteners per person (up from 119 lbs from 1970). Most of this sugar is found in beverages and processed foods. Soda and processed foods were not used much or did not exist during WWII. (Amber Waves)

Essential questions:

- Why was rationing important during WWII?
- How would your eating habits change if your foods were rationed tomorrow as in 1943?
- There were benefits to rationing. With less gasoline and rubber, traffic deaths dropped sharply. Can you think of other ways in which rationing might have benefited Americans?
- Why was it important to have families can all kinds of food during WWII? We used the canning of fruits as an example in this unit?

Duration:

There are four, 30-50 minute lessons.

Assessment:

Students will be given three types of assessments.

-The first assessment to be completed at the end of each day consists of writing a short summary of what they learned each day, or for them to give a bullet list of the 6 most important aspects they learned from the day's lesson.

Use the questions found under essential questions above for the students to answer on the fourth day.

-The second type of assessment is classroom participation. Here the teacher will keep track of students actively engaged. A tally sheet would be useful.

-The final assessment is in the completion of the Math Worksheet Connection. This work sheet can be worked on as whole class, individually, or as a combination of the two depending on the complexity of the question and the level of your students' math ability.

Setting the purpose:

Students in 5th grade learn about WWII and the Holocaust in Social Studies. Now is the time to have them look at more local involvement with the war. Rationing of foods is one way in which food supplies were evenly distributed to the public and the armed forces. Each individual, including children, could help with the war effort by following food rationing. 5th grade students could see their food choices change because of the war. They might even see themselves helping out with the food choices purchased for each week when using the food rationing coupons.

Lesson Plan:

Before starting this series of lessons, give students some background information on food rationing so that when viewing the primary sources they have prior knowledge of rationing and its importance to the war.

- The local primary source used on Day 2 was specifically a letter from a woman in Illinois asking to have her sugar ration extended due to reasons of illness.
- The remaining primary sources could be considered national sources. In some cases, as in Day 1, the poster used was published by the government and distributed across the nation. Though the source was found in the Oregon archives, this poster was used in other states as well. The photographs used on Day 3 are do not always identify where they were taken, but they are generic enough that similar photos could have been taken anywhere within the continental US.

➡ Day 1

Have students look at the first primary source: "Rationing: A Necessary But Hated Sacrifice". In small groups have students read all 6 pictures found on the poster and discuss these pictures.

- Why would they mention on Picture 1 that loose stamps could not be used? Then look at Picture 5 and discuss why stamps had to be torn out of the ration book in front of the grocer or delivery person.
- Look at the top of the pictures, there is a statement in the middle of the paragraph saying: "Foods are going to our fighting men. They come first! Your ration gives you your fair share of the foods that are left." Why do you think this poster had this added sentence?
- Imagine going to the grocery store on the last day and the last hour of the rationing day. Could some rationed foods be sold out? Would you be able to get that item the next day? Why do you think that they have written above the pictures: "BUY EARLY IN THE DAY"?
- Who created this document and why? What was the purpose of this document?
- Have them think how grocery shopping today is different from that during WWII.

➡ Day 2

Have students read the second primary source: "Document 28 – Communication from Mrs. George Buckley Concerning Sugar Rationing" both the transcription found on page 75, and Document 28. (Bailey)

- Explain the circumstances in which Mrs. George Buckley had to miss out on her sugar ration.
- Should the rationing board have shown leniency in Mrs. Buckley's case?
- If Mrs. George Buckley did not get her allotted sugar, what would happen to her winter supply of certain foods?
- Do you suppose that Mrs. Buckley was the only person in the US that had this problem?
- What are other reasons why a person might fail to get their allotted sugar on the specified days allowed to purchase?
- If about 3 pound of pears makes one quart of canned pears, and you can obtain about 24 quarts of canned pears per bushel, how many cups of sugar would it take to can a bushel of pears using a thin syrup solution? How many pounds of pears would you use to can this bushel of pears? How many weeks of sugar rationing in 1943 would one person have to save up to have enough sugar to can a bushel of pears? See Math Connection Worksheet.

➡ Day 3

Have students get into small groups and distribute a photograph to each group (see "Day 3 ... in the bibliography). Rotate the photographs between groups if time permits. Ask students to look at the photographs taken from the war and answer the following questions (see list below questions):

- What is the story behind the photograph?
- What is the photograph telling us about food rationing?
- Knowing what the photograph is telling you, how would this affect you if you were living under food rationing times?
- What do you notice about other aspects of the photograph, clothing, hairstyles, displays. How do we look differently today from the people in the pictures?

[To obtain the photographs below, click on the main webpage (URL found in the bibliography section) and in the search term box copy and paste each entry below]

Photographs: [Library of Congress, American Memory](#)

- Sugar rationing. Application form which will have to be filled out by every person to whom war ration book no.1 is issued when sugar rationing starts within a few weeks. Applicants will register at public schools on dates to be announced shortly
- Preparation for point rationing. Catherine M. Rooney, 6th grade teacher at the Murch Elementary School, Washington, D.C., explains to her interested pupils how to use war ration book two when shopping for processed foods
- Food in England. A shopkeeper cancels the coupons in a British housewife's ration book for the tea, sugar, cooking fats and bacon she is allowed for one week. Most foods in Britain are rationed and some brand names are given the designation "National"
- Preparation for point rationing. Never too young to learn, these future homemakers receive first-hand experience in looking for point values as well as prices and information on labels when buying canned and bottled foods with war ration book two
- Preparation for point rationing. Miss Elizabeth Law, who teaches an adult homemaking class at Mckinley High School, Washington, D.C., explains the use of war ration book two to a group of homemakers at the school. The relationship of balanced diets to point-rationed foods is taught to adult classes open to all D.C. homemakers
- Wartime food demonstration. Explaining methods of "extending" meats now that rationing is limiting civilian meat purchases, wartime food demonstrator Alice Burtis puts finishing touches to a meat loaf before an audience in Washington, D.C.

- Preparation for point rationing. "Know your points and your food values" is the lesson being taught these home economics pupils in the McKinley High School, Washington, D.C. A student indicates the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables in conserving rationing points

[World War 2 Ex RAF.co.uk](http://www.worldwar2exraf.co.uk)

[Food Rationing Time Line](#)

(Quantities shown are per person per week); Food Rationing in World War 2 part 5

[Oregon Secretary of State, Archive Division \(Oregon Archive Division\)](#)

<http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/ratblack.htm>

Rationing: A Necessary But Hated Sacrifice, Life On The Home Front: Oregon Response to World War II. Oregon Secretary of State Archives Division, specifically the URL shown below.

➡ Day 4

Additional mathematical connection:

Below is a worksheet that contains the information needed to compute the information requested from the primary document from Mrs. George Buckley.

There are three more math questions that might enlighten students' understanding of the impact of sugar rationing to their daily lives.

Math Connection Worksheet

Bibliography:

- Amber Waves, the Economics of Food, farming, Natural Resources, and Rural American. Amber Waves, November 2005.
<http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves/November05/Findings/USFoodConsumption.htm>
- Bailey, Robert E., Evans, Elaine Shemoney. Illinois At War, 1941-1945: A Selection of Documents from the Illinois State Archives, Teacher's Manual. Illinois State Archives Office of the Secretary of State Springfield 1994.
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- Rationing: A Necessary But Hated Sacrifice, Life On The Home Front: Oregon Response to World War II. Oregon Secretary of State Archives Division,
<http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/ratinstr.htm>
- Rombauer, Irma S., Rombauer Becker, Marion. Joy of Cooking. 1975 edition. The Bobbs-Merrill Company. New York. Pgs. 805-806.

Day 3 photo discussion sources:

- Library of Congress: American Memory. <http://memory.loc.gov/>
- World War 2 Ex RAF.co.uk: <http://www.worldwar2exraf.co.uk/>
- Rationing: A Necessary But Hated Sacrifice, Life On The Home Front
<http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/exhibits/ww2/services/ratblack.htm>