

PRE-VISIT ACTIVITY #4: BUILDING LIBERTY SHIPS IN MOBILE

Background Information:

Mobile had a vital role to play in the war effort during World War II. The sleepy Southern town sprang into action and produced ships so speedily that, at the height of production, the shipyards were able to launch one a week. These ships would go on to help the Allies win the war. Shipbuilding is a theme of one the galleries in the *Old Ways, New Days: The Story of Mobile* exhibit. The purpose of this activity is to familiarize students with the history of shipbuilding in Mobile and the city's contribution to war effort so that they will have a better understanding of what they are seeing in the gallery.



Objectives:

After reading an informational handout on Liberty Ship Production in Mobile, participating in a question and answer session, and producing a 2-dimensional model of a Liberty Ship, students will be able to describe the role of cargo ships, and shipbuilding in Mobile during World War II.

This lesson also supports the objectives of the Alabama Course of Study listed below.

Social Studies

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| 4th Grade | #13 | Describe the economic and social impact of World War II on Alabamians. |
| 6th Grade | #8 | List key figures, significant events, and reasons for the involvement of the United States in World War II. |
| | #9 | Identify changes in the American home front during World War II. |

Materials Required:

Copy of *Building Liberty Ships in Mobile* for each student, copy of Liberty Ship Outline for each team of students, copy of *Lets Build a Liberty Ship* Activity Sheet for each student, pencils or pens, posterboard, markers or crayons, gray and black paint, scissors, clean-up supplies

The Lesson:

First, review basic facts about World War II with your students. Questions you could ask:
When did World War II happen?
Which countries were fighting?
Why were the countries fighting?
Which countries were allied with the U. S.?
Why did the U.S. enter the war?

Hand out a copy of *Building Liberty Ships in Mobile* to each student. Read aloud or have students take turns reading aloud.

Questions you could ask to check for comprehension:

- Why were cargo ships so important to the United States during World War II?
- What did cargo ships carry during World War II?
- What do you think would have happened during the war if the ships had not been built?
- How were the workers in the shipyards able to build the ships so quickly?

The Activity:

Tell your class that they are going to work on teams to build a Liberty Ship. Divide your class into shipbuilding teams of 4 people per team. Distribute a complete set of the Liberty Ship Outline to each team. Also hand out copies of *Lets Build a Liberty Ship* activity sheet. Each person on a team will be responsible for completing one section of the ship. Using the *Lets Build a Liberty Ship* Activity Sheet, have your students color their section of the ship the appropriate colors with crayons or markers. Then have them label each part of their piece of the diagram with black markers or crayons.

When they have completed their sections, have them tape the sections together and cut out the outline of the ship. You might want to let them omit the cranes because they are difficult to cut out. They can then use this cutout to trace the outline of the ship onto a 12" X 40" piece of poster board. They will then cut out the outline of the ship and color (or paint) it gray. Each team can name the ship and color (or paint) the name on the bow (front) of the ship. When the teams have completed the project you can make a fleet of Liberty Ships by covering a bulletin board with blue paper and attaching the ships.

BUILDING LIBERTY SHIPS IN MOBILE

World War II was a war fought by two groups of countries. It is called World War II because so many countries were fighting that it seemed as though the whole world was at war. The United States fought on the side of the Allies and entered the war in 1941 after the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Allies were a group of nations trying to free Europe from the control of Germany and an evil leader named Adolph Hitler. The Allies were also trying to free Asia from Japanese control. Both Japan and Germany had invaded other nations. The leaders of these nations wanted to expand the territory of their country. World War II didn't end until 1945.

During WWII, most of the Allied nations depended on items and food shipped across the ocean from other countries. They needed these things to make goods and provide food for their people. Even the United States relied on coal and oil shipments. The United States also needed to send its finished products to other countries.

In 1939, Germany began using their submarines to sink cargo ships. The submarines tried to sink more ships than the Allies could build. Every ship lost was important. The cargo that the ship was carrying was lost when the ship sank. More importantly, all of the future cargoes that the ship would have carried would not get to where they were supposed to go. To stop the cargo losses caused by German submarines, the Allies needed ships that could be built rapidly. The Liberty Ship was designed to meet this challenge.

Liberty Ships were a type of cargo ship built during World War II. The first ship built was the SS PATRICK HENRY. President Franklin D. Roosevelt gave a speech about the ships and told the country that these ships would bring liberty to Europe. After his speech, people started calling them Liberty Ships.

In September of 1941, an emergency ship building program began. Mobile was chosen as one of the locations for the program. Mobile played a vital role in the war effort during World War II. The sleepy Southern town sprang into action and produced ships so speedily that, at the height of production, the shipyards were able to launch one a week.

During the war years, a lot of the people working in shipyards in Mobile and throughout the country were women. This was unusual at the time. In the 1940's, most women did not go to work. In most cases, this was the first chance women had to work outside of the home.

Liberty ships built in Mobile were some of the first ships in the world to be welded together instead of held together with rivets. Teams of workers built different sections of the ships. The sections were then welded together. This is still the way that ships are built today.

118 Liberty Ships were built in Mobile during World War II by the Alabama Dry Dock & Shipbuilding Company. Across the nation, a total of 2,710 Liberty Ships were finished in just 4 years time.

