

Curriculum

Unit – Participation of Dominican Veterans in World War II: An Overview

Level: Middle School/High School

Objective: Students will be able to describe the experiences of Dominicans who served in the U.S. military during World War II.

Background: Students in Global History and U.S. History courses often spend extensive class time studying World War II. Dominicans were involved in virtually every facet of the U.S. war effort. The Dominican Studies Institute's exhibit highlights Dominican veterans who served in both the European and Pacific theaters, in multiple branches of the U.S. armed forces. These same veterans, like other people of color, faced discrimination as soldiers in the U.S. An exploration of these veterans' experiences would be memorable and valuable for secondary history students.

Preparation:

Print each page of the [Fighting for Democracy: Dominican Veterans from World War II](#) exhibit posters. Hang at least two copies of each paper on the walls around the classroom. These will serve as "exhibits" in your classroom museum. Make sure that there is space around the edges of the classroom so that students can move freely from exhibit to exhibit and view each one.

Do Now:

When students enter the classroom, ask them to choose ONE of the two questions and write a written response to it:

- A. Do you have any friends or family who have served in the military? What have they told you about their experiences? What are the highlights for them? What are the challenges they face?
- B. What do you imagine would be the biggest challenges of serving in the military? Would you ever want to serve?

Share: Direct students to share their responses in pairs or small groups. Then ask a few students to share their group's responses with the full class.

Mini-Lesson: Explain to students that people of many different backgrounds have served in the U.S. military since the nation was founded. A CUNY Dominican Studies Institute exhibition recently documented the contributions of Dominican veterans to the World War II war effort. Today, students will have the opportunity to experience the exhibition within their own classroom.

Point out the “exhibits” that you have hung around the classroom. Explain that students should look at the sheets hung around the classroom as if they are museum exhibits. Most visitors to a museum do not read every word of every exhibit, and that will not be the goal of today’s activity. After all, in a museum, there are many details, and not every detail will be the most important or the most interesting to everyone. Students’ goal will be to identify and note details that they find either **IMPORTANT** or **INTERESTING**.

Demonstrate how you would approach an exhibit in this way. Project the [Miguel Ángel Escalera](#) exhibit so all students can see it. Then think out loud for students while taking notes.

For example:

“The first thing that catches my eye is the picture of the soldiers in the boat. It tells me that Escalera, the man featured in this exhibit, was a soldier who led troops through tough conditions in Germany. I’m interested in this, so here’s how I’d note it: **‘Miguel Ángel Escalera: led soldiers in boat across German river during WWII.’** I don’t need to write everything down, though. For example, this photo of Escalera sitting at a table with other veterans—it shows me that he reunited with other soldiers after the war, but I don’t think this is important or interesting enough to write down. I might take notes in my own words or copy key phrases, using bulleted notes or complete sentences. The key is that I should be able to come away from the exhibits with key details that I found most important and interesting.”

Gallery Walk: Encourage students to visit at least half of the exhibits, to get a broad sense of the whole exhibition. Students will circulate the classroom to take notes on each exhibit. Check in with students to ensure that they comprehend text and to ask probing questions.

Individual Review: Students will return to their desks to make sure that their notes are complete. Direct students to choose the key details that they think are worth sharing. They should mark key details with * for most important and ! for most surprising/interesting.

Small Group Discussion: Students share their most interesting discoveries in small groups.

Full Class Discussion: Students share with full class.