# THE WAR

## A KEN BURNS FILM

DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY KEN BURNS AND LYNN NOVICK

# Through the Eyes of Al McIntosh

## Subjects:

U.S. History, World History, Sociology, Psychology, Creative Writing, Journalism (Mass Media)

*Somehow, the gossip "grape vine" had heard that there was a telegram coming through after 6 p.m. last Friday for Mr. and Mrs. Ray Lester of Magnolia. Ray Lester heard about it and his heart was heavy. He started walking down the street. On the way he met "Scotty" Dewar, the depot agent.*

*"Which one is it?" asked Lester — because there were four boys to worry about in that family. After being told he went sorrowfully home to break the news to his wife … And it was a gracious gesture that was made at the dance in Magnolia that night. When the crowd heard the news — the dance was halted immediately out of respect to the memory of that fighting Marine who died … on Saipan.*

— Al McIntosh, Rock County Star-Herald

## Background:

While big-name journalists like Edward R. Murrow and Ernie Pyle traveled with the troops and reported on the "big picture," local newspaper editors like Al McIntosh of the *Rock County Star-Herald* in Luverne, Minnesota, frequently wrote about the effect of the war on local subscribers, including those who were fighting overseas. As the quote above shows, these small vignettes were patriotic, touching and often heart-wrenching.

## Activity:

Lead the class in a short discussion regarding the effect of war journalism on morale and public opinion of a conflict. Ask students to compare how newspapers might have reported earlier wars, such as the Civil War, compared to World War II. Note that even though new technology made it possible for people in the United States to learn more quickly about events happening in the theaters of the war, it still was up to local editors and correspondents to report the local impact of war events on communities and towns at home.

**GO TO CLIP**
(http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_details.php?id=5383&type=3)

As they view the clip, have students take note of McIntosh's tone and style of writing.

Now, explain to students that they will role play correspondents whose job it is to report to the "folks back home" not only about the major news stories of World War II, but also about how those stories impacted those folks back home. In order to accomplish this, it's highly recommended that students conduct research locally, by looking at archival hometown newspaper files. These generally can be found at the local newspaper office or public libraries and may be available either in bound copies or on microfilm.

Areas for students to target research include the following:

- Hard news, including battle information, related maps and photos, with an emphasis on how the war affected those on the home front, similar to the reports that Al McIntosh made during the war years.
- How the war impacted sports of the day (both professional and amateur).
- "House and home" stories about how the war affected the wives and children of servicemen (this might also be an opportunity for students to research stories about recipes during a period of rationing, or stories dealing with clothing shortages).
- Movie and entertainment stories, with an emphasis on the impact of the war.
- Advertisements and prices of goods, and how the war affected the availability of those goods.
- Editorials relating to a controversial aspect of the war, such as censorship.

After research is complete, divide the class into groups and assign various roles or stories to particular students, or allow student groups to select these on their own.

The groups will:

- Research and write the stories.
- Research the information, pictures, maps and other components of the newspaper.
- Investigate and write an editorial.

- Find photographs, maps, advertisements and other graphics that will let readers know what is happening.
- Edit copy and write headlines.
- Lay out the newspaper.

*Note: While there is substantial information on the Internet about World War II, remind the students that they are the reporters, photographers and editors, and the copy for the paper should be written in their own words. They should also remember to always check and cite their sources.*

Depending on the amount of technology available in the school, students can develop poster presentations by simply pasting the stories on posterboard or use software such as Microsoft Publisher to create pages that can be printed and/or made into Web pages available online.

## Extension Activities:

- After completing research in local World War II–era newspaper archives, compare coverage of events in the 1940s with current war zone coverage. Have students consider this quote by Andy Rooney:

*Reporters, one of their jobs is to create heroes for the American public. Ernie Pyle didn't write stories about cowards in World War II, even though there were some. It is a very difficult thing for a reporter to be anything but patriotic, because people don't want to read it. Editors don't want to print it. So reporters don't write anything that is not supportive of the troops. I guess you're a little dishonest. If you are following your own army, you do not write anything that might be interpreted as being unfriendly or not patriotic. I think it is very difficult to be a critical, tough, honest reporter during a war.*

How do Rooney's words fit in today's media environment? Students can write essays comparing and contrasting the different styles and format of coverage of events in the mid-20th century with coverage in the early 21st century.

- Read one of Ernie Pyle's last columns, "On Victory in Europe" (http://ww.pbs.org/weta/reportingamericaatwar/reporters/pyle/europe.html), which shows the true cost of war as described by someone who had seen all too much of it up close. Have students compare the tone and style of Pyle's words with McIntosh's.
- Research a famous war correspondent from the World War II era, such as Pyle, Edward R. Murrow, Walter Cronkite or other correspondents from radio or print media. After students have read a few pieces of that correspondent's work, ask them to role play the correspondent and do readings of their accounts of battles, war conditions and the like.
- Script and videotape a simulated television news interview with a war correspondent during World War II (taking some liberties with technological realities at the time). Students can act out action in the background for effect.

Visit the "**SEARCH AND EXPLORE**" (**http://www.pbs.org/thewar/search_home.htm**) section of THE WAR web site for more information about Al McIntosh.

## Resources:

Eyewitness to History site on World War II (includes various primary source pages on events and persons in both the European and Pacific Theaters) (**http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/w2frm.htm**)

D-Day (American Experience) (**http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dday/**)

Interactive World War II Timeline (**http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/WW2Timeline/start.html**)

Radio Days Commentators and Radio News Events clip page (contains sound clips from various commentators and from various news events). (Note: not all the events listed are from World War II, but several are. Real Player is needed in order to listen to the sound clips online.) (**http://www.otr.com/news.shtml**)

The Victory Home: A World War II Reference Library includes various personal stories of the World War II home front as well as posters, radio ads from the World War II era, photographs, and more. (**http://tvh.bfn.org/sources2.html**)

On The Homefront (Library of Congress Learning Page) contains a large number of links to various aspects of life at home during the war. (**http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/homefront/resources.html**)

"What Did You Do in the War, Grandma?" includes several first person accounts by women who lived during the World War II era. Stories available include recollections from Civil Defense workers, female baseball players, as well as factory workers during the 1940s. (**http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/tocCS.html**)

The Authentic History Center World War II Collection (**http://www.authentichistory.com/ww2.html**)

"The Ground Beneath Our Feet: Virginia Fights World War II" (includes various primary sources such as pictures, letters, posters and others) (**http://www.vahistory.org/WWII/index.php**)

World War II Links on the Internet (Comprehensive list of online World War II sites, including several dealing with the homefront) (**http://history.sandiego.edu/GEN/ww2_links.html**)

"Stars and Stripes" Remembering World War II page (**http://stripes.com/webpages.asp?id=64**) Scroll down approximately two-thirds down the page in order to view the World War II Archives links. While these pages and stories do not represent the American homefront, in

several instances, they do highlight reporting of events in the US as American servicemen would have read about them.

## Standards:

This lesson addresses national content standards established by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) (http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/)

### US History:

**Benchmark 4:** Understands how World War II influenced the home front (e.g., the impact on science, medicine, and technology; how Americans viewed their achievements and global responsibilities at the war's end; how minorities contributed to the war effort and the contradiction between their treatment at home and the goals that they were fighting for in Europe; the effects of the relocation centers on Japanese American families)

**Benchmark 7:** Understands how World War II influenced American society (e.g., how the war fostered cultural exchange and promoted nationalism and American identity, the effects on gender roles and the American family)

### Language Arts:

**Benchmark 2:** Drafting and Revising: Uses a variety of strategies to draft and revise written work (e.g., highlights individual voice; rethinks content, organization, and style; checks accuracy and depth of information; redrafts for readability and needs of readers; reviews writing to ensure that content and linguistic structures are consistent with purpose)

**Benchmark 3:** Editing and Publishing: Uses a variety of strategies to edit and publish written work (e.g., uses a checklist to guide proofreading; edits for grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling at a developmentally appropriate level; refines selected pieces to publish for general and specific audiences; uses available technology, such as publishing software or graphics programs, to publish written work)

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