

The Role of Women in the War of 1812: Laura Secord

Lesson Overview

In this lesson, students will investigate the role of Laura Secord in the War of 1812. They will explore the vital roles women played on the battlefields and assess the ways in which female participants have been compensated and remembered.

Grade Level

Grade 9 (can be modified for higher grades)

Time Required

Teachers should be able to conduct the lesson in one class.

Curriculum Connection (Province/Territory and course)

Nunavut -- Social Studies: Grade 9

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the names of various British and French colonies and the conflicts between them.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the essence of conflicts between colonial people and the British government.

Additional Resources, Materials and Equipment Required

- Access to a blackboard/whiteboard, data projector or chart paper and markers
- Appendix A: Women and War (attached)
- Appendix B: Laura Secord (attached)
- *Canadian Geographic War of 1812* poster-map
- Access to the internet

Websites:

Historica Minute: Laura Secord

<http://www.historica.ca/minutes/minute.do?id=10118>

Main Objective

Students will understand the vital role that women played in the campaigns of the War of 1812. They will realize that victory would not have been possible without the women who worked behind the scenes.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- recognize and value the role of women in the War of 1812;
- understand the lack of recognition and compensation many female participants encountered;
- characterize and define the word 'hero';
- indicate and locate the geographic area of the War of 1812.

The Lesson

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	Teacher Activity	Student Activity
Introduction	<p>Ask the class to define the term "hero". Record responses on the board/screen. Instruct the class to agree on one definition.</p> <p>Distribute one copy of <i>Appendix A: Women and War</i> to each student.</p> <p>Instruct students to record their definition of a 'hero' in the space provided.</p> <p>Enquire: "What types of roles and responsibilities existed during the War of 1812?" Record answers on the board/screen.</p> <p>Have the students consider the following roles/responsibilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government officials/policies • Officers/military leadership • Soldiers/Sailors • Producers of Munitions • Transporters of supplies to the front lines • Women <p>Instruct students to record the names of each group on <i>Appendix A: Women and War</i> in the space provided. Instruct students to list the types of duties performed by each group.</p> <p>Ask students: "Which of the groups on this list would be indispensable to the success of the war?". Rank them in order from the most important to the least, stating at least one reason for the top three.</p>	<p>Students participate in the brainstorming session.</p> <p>Students record definition.</p> <p>Participate in a discussion of roles and responsibilities during the War of 1812.</p> <p>As each group of people is placed on the board/projector screen:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List roles/responsibilities for each • Rank them in order from the most important to the least stating at least one reason for the top three.
Lesson Development	Emphasize that each of the groups on the list were important in the War of 1812 for various reasons and that today we are going	

	<p>to examine the vital role that women played during wartime.</p> <p>Introduce Laura Secord and provide a brief description of her upbringing. Highlight her actions after overhearing the plans of the enemy. Secord's actions were extremely brave because she could have been hanged as a spy if she had been caught.</p> <p>[Note: The only personal accounts from women during the War of 1812 were those who could read and write (usually officers' wives). Little is known about the experiences of the average woman but the roles they played were important to the troops. They cooked the meals in the army camps, cared for the wounded, made repairs to uniforms and equipment, and provided morale to the troops. We know their contributions were trivialized by those in command as very little was recorded about them. The treatment of Laura Secord's after the war also demonstrates this trivialization. She and her wounded husband lived in poverty for years. They petitioned the government to recognize Laura's contribution but were denied on several occasions.]</p> <p>Show the Historica Minute of Laura Secord.</p> <p>Using the <i>Canadian Geographic War of 1812</i> poster-map, point out the location of the Battle of Beaver Dams and its strategic location.</p> <p>Ask students: "Why was her trek through almost 20 miles of thick forest considered an act of heroism?" Instruct students to record their answer in the space provided in <i>Appendix A: Women and War</i>.</p>	
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Conclusion	Distribute <i>Appendix B: Laura Secord</i> . Review the instructions with the class. Instruct the class to complete Questions 1-4. Encourage discussion. Guide and assist students when necessary.	Review the instructions in <i>Appendix B: Laura Secord</i> . Ask questions as necessary. Complete the questions.
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Lesson Extension

- Conduct research and investigate how other groups were involved in and later recognized (or not) during the War of 1812 (e.g. First Nations, African Canadians, etc...).

Assessment of Student Learning

Assess students' participation in class discussions and completion of:

- Appendix A: Women and War
- Appendix B: Laura Secord

Further Reading

- Canadian Atlas Online War of 1812 theme
<http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/atlas>
- War of 1812 interactive map & timeline
<http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/war1812>
- Biography of Laura Secord
<http://www.warof1812.ca/laurasecord.htm>
- The Roles Women Played in the War of 1812
<http://umbrigade.tripod.com/articles/women.html>
- Introduction to the War of 1812
<http://www.warof1812.ca/intro.html>
- Historica/War of 1812
<http://www.historica.ca/peace/page.do?pageID=336>
- Parks Canada/ Fort George National Historic Site of Canada/The War of 1812
<http://www.pc.gc.ca/lhn-nhs/on/fortgeorge/edu/edu6/c.aspx>

Link to Canadian National Standards for Geography

Essential Element #2 – Places and Regions

- Political and historical characteristic of regions

Geographic Skill #5 – Answering Geographic Questions

- Formulate valid generalizations from the results of various kinds of geographic inquiry.

Appendix A: Women and War

What is a hero?

Important participants in War of 1812:

Participant	Roles/responsibilities	Ranking	Reason

In what ways can Laura Secord's trek through the woods be considered heroic?

Appendix B: Laura Secord

Laura Secord, née Ingersoll, heroine of the WAR OF 1812 (b at Great Barrington, Mass 13 Sept 1775; d at Chippawa [Niagara Falls], Ont 17 Oct 1868). During the War of 1812, Laura walked 30 km from Queenston to Beaver Dams to warn the British officer, James FitzGibbon, that the Americans were planning to attack his outpost. She had overheard some American officers discussing their plan while dining at her house. Two days later, 24 June 1813, the Americans were ambushed by Indians at Beaver Dams and surrendered to FitzGibbon. (Source: [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)).

The following are **three accounts of Secord's heroic event** as recorded by Sarah Anne Curzon (who wrote a biography of Laura Secord in 1887):

1. This is a letter Laura Secord wrote in 1861 when she was 85 years old to a historian (Benson J. Lossing) who was writing a book on the War of 1812.

DEAR SIR,—I will tell you the story in a few words.

"After going to St. David's and the recovery of Mr. Secord, we returned again to Queenston, where my courage again was much tried. It was there I gained the secret plan laid to capture Captain Fitzgibbon and his party. I was determined, if possible, to save them. I had much difficulty in getting through the American guards. They were ten miles out in the country. When I came to a field belonging to a Mr. De Cou, in the neighbourhood of the Beaver Dams, I then had walked nineteen miles. By that time daylight had left me. I yet had a swift stream of water (Twelve-mile Creek) to cross over on an old fallen tree, and to climb a high hill, which fatigued me very much.

"Before I arrived at the encampment of the Indians, as I approached they all arose with one of their war yells, which, indeed, awed me. You may imagine what my feelings were to behold so many savages. With forced courage I went to one of the chiefs, told him I had great news for his commander, and that he must take me to him or they would all be lost. He did not understand me, but said, 'Woman! What does woman want here?' The scene by moonlight to some might have been grand, but to a weak woman certainly terrifying. With difficulty I got one of the chiefs to go with me to their commander. With the intelligence I gave him he formed his plans and saved his country. I have ever found the brave and noble Colonel Fitzgibbon a friend to me. May he prosper in the world to come as he has done in this.

LAURA SECORD.

"CHIPPEWA, U.C., Feb. 18, 1861."



2. This is a letter Colonel Fitzgibbon wrote to the government to help Secord be recognized as a war heroine so she could receive a pension. (His wrote three times but the government of the day refused to grant any such request.)

FITZGIBBON'S CERTIFICATE:

"I do hereby certify that Mrs. Secord, the wife of James Secord, of Chippewa, Esq., did, in the month of June, 1813, walk from her house in the village of St. David's to Decamp's house in Thorold, by a circuitous route of about twenty miles, partly through the woods, to acquaint me that the enemy intended to attempt by surprise to capture a detachment of the 49th Regiment, then under my command; she having obtained such knowledge from good authority, as the event proved. Mrs. Secord was a person of slight and delicate frame; and made the effort in weather excessively warm, and I dreaded at the time that she must suffer in health in consequence of fatigue and anxiety, she having been exposed to danger from the enemy, through whose line of communication she had to pass. The attempt was made on my detachment by the enemy, and his detachment, consisting of upwards of 500 men, with a field-piece and fifty dragoons, was captured in consequence. I write this certificate in a moment of much hurry and from memory, and it is, therefore, thus brief.

"(Signed) JAMES FITZGIBBON,
"Formerly Lieutenant in the 49th Regiment."

3. The third is an account of how the Prince of Wales rewarded Laura Secord for her heroic deed after hearing about her account.

Mr Lossing also wrote:

"When, in the summer of 1860, the Prince of Wales visited Queenston the veteran soldiers of the Canada side of the Niagara frontier signed an address to his Royal Highness; Mrs. Secord claimed the privilege of signing it. 'Wherefore?' was asked. She told her story, and it was allowed that she eminently deserved a place among the signers. Her story was repeated to the Prince. He was greatly interested, and learning that the heroine had not much of this world's goods, sent her \$500 soon after his return home, in attestation of his appreciation of her patriotism."

Her sole surviving daughter at this date, says the gift was carried to her mother by ten gentlemen who had formed part of the Prince's suite.

From:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/secrd10h.htm#secord>

1. Give at least three reasons why the government of the day refused to recognize Laura Secord as a hero of the War of 1812.

2. It is understandable to deny Laura Secord's attempts to receive a pension from the government if the only evidence was just her personal account. Why would they still refuse after Captain Fitzgibbon wrote three times to verify her story?

3. Why did the Prince of Wales give a large sum of money (in those days) of \$500 to Laura Secord?

4. Give an example where this type of discrimination happens in modern day Canada and explain why it still happens.
