



LESSON:

NURSES IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Targeted toward Middle School (6-8), but can be easily adapted for students in grades 4-10

LESSON OVERVIEW:

Students use quotes and images to answer questions and explore the contributions of female nurses during the Spanish-American War. You can choose to read the materials with your student and discuss the questions together, or your student can complete the materials on their own.

Estimated time: 30-45 minutes

STEPS TO USE THIS LESSON:

1. **Before you start:** Print page 2 or copy and paste the questions into a Google doc or other editable file
2. Students read “1898: The U.S. at War with Spain” (pages 3-5) for an overview of nursing and its role during the Spanish-American War.
3. Students read the activity directions on page 6 and prepare to analyze images and quotes from primary documents.
4. Students answer the questions on the Student Worksheet (page 2) by reading the quotes about attitudes toward female nurses on page 7.
5. Students analyze the contemporary photographs (page 8) and quotes about the living and working conditions of nurses during the war (page 9). Then answer the questions on the Student Worksheet (page 2).
6. Students read about the limited opportunities for African American nurses during the war (page 10).
7. Students review the responsibilities and benefits of working as a nurse during the Spanish-American War (page 11), then have a discussion with an adult or friend about their answers to these reflection questions:
 - a. What would be *challenging* about nursing during the Spanish-American War?
 - b. What *opportunities* might women have had because of their service?
 - c. What kind of people would volunteer for this work?
 - d. How was nursing during the Spanish-American War similar to nursing now during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Name:



NURSES STUDENT WORKSHEET

Attitudes Toward Female Nurses

QUOTE 1:	QUOTE 2:
What was Colonel Hoff's opinion before and after the war?	Major Maus's opinion of female nurses did not change. What was his opinion?
Colonel Hoff doesn't say, but what could have caused his opinion to change?	The writer doesn't say, but why do you think his opinion didn't change?

Conditions in the Army Camps and Hospitals

IMAGES:	QUOTES
What do you see in the pictures?	What were some of the duties of the nurses?
What questions do you have after looking at the pictures?	What were their living quarters like?
What can you learn about the working or living conditions of the nurses from the pictures?	What were the sanitation conditions like? What were meals like?



1898: THE U.S. AT WAR WITH SPAIN

1

In 1898, the U.S. went to war with Spain after the explosion of the USS Maine in Havana Harbor. Cuba was a Spanish colony, and the U.S. government blamed Spain for the disaster. During the war, battles were fought in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines.

**Soldiers were dying, but
what killed them?**

2

More than 2,000 American soldiers died during this war, but fewer than 400 died in combat.

3

Many of the soldiers who died never saw combat or even left the United States. Instead, diseases like typhoid, malaria, and yellow fever caused most of the American casualties in the Spanish-American War.

**What killed the soldiers who did not die in
combat? Training accidents? Equipment
issues?**

**How do you win a war
against disease?**

4

The U.S. Army needed to improve sanitary conditions for soldiers: most lived in over-crowded, makeshift camps.

It also needed nurses.



U.S. troops marching during the Spanish-American War. (LOC/William J. Glackens, ca. 1898)



A BRIEF HISTORY OF NURSING



For most of human history, women have acted as nurses for family, friends, and neighbors. Nursing was often unpaid and done in people's homes after illness, injury, or as a person aged and couldn't take care of himself or herself.

Some women became more skilled than others: they may have had a relative who was a good nurse, or they may have just been healthy and had a strong stomach.

The Civil War (1861-1865) changed nursing in the United States. Nursing was needed on a large scale and experience was important. Women volunteered as nurses and some, like Clara Barton (pictured) and Florence Nightingale (who was British and served in the Crimean War) became famous for their nursing, leadership and organizational skills.

Training Programs

After the Civil War, more hospitals were built and many developed nurse training programs for women. By 1900, there were 400-800 nursing schools in the U.S.

Nursing students typically trained for 2-3 years. They lived in "nurses' homes" on the hospital grounds and weren't allowed to marry.

While they were students, nurses worked without pay. Some schools used the free labor to have nurses clean and do laundry. Some nurses spent more time doing these chores than learning in classrooms and laboratories.

Over time, as nursing schools competed, they began to improve their instruction.





ARMY EXPANSION & NURSE RECRUITMENT

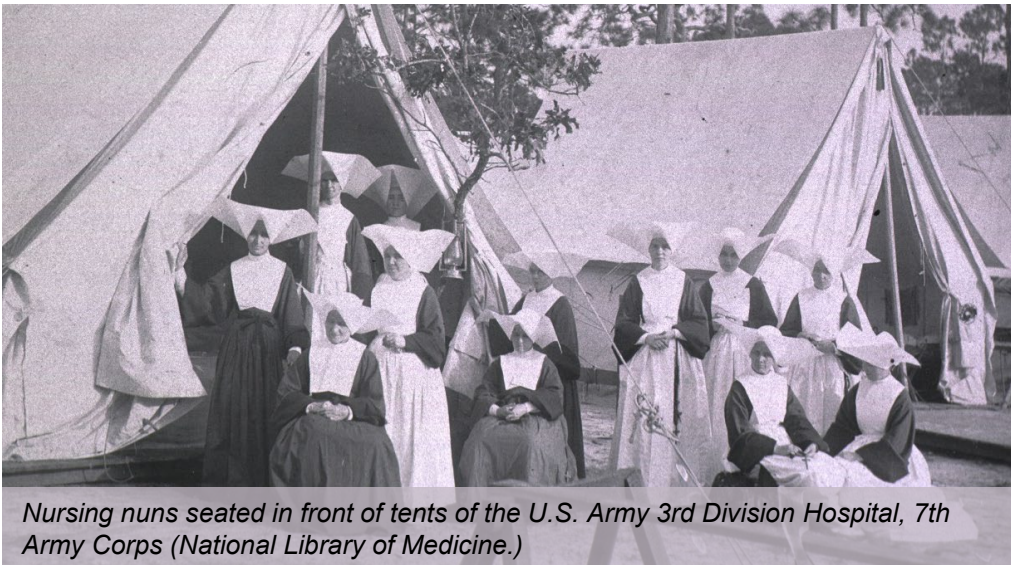


Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders at military camp, Montauk Point, New York, 1898. (LOC)

In April 1898, the United States declared war on Spain and the U.S. Army grew from 28,000 to 300,000 soldiers. The sudden increase in soldiers strained resources. Camps were overcrowded and undersupplied.

Problems with sanitation and overcrowding led to illness from diseases like yellow fever, malaria, and typhoid. The Army realized that they would need more nurses. Rather than let female nurses join the Army, they hired them on short-term contracts.

This was the first time that professionally-trained female nurses had been used in the military. While not serving *in* the military, they served as a quasi-military unit. Some people thought women shouldn't serve close to the frontlines and the fighting, but over 1,500 women served as contract nurses during the war and in the time immediately afterward.



Nursing nuns seated in front of tents of the U.S. Army 3rd Division Hospital, 7th Army Corps (National Library of Medicine.)

What
opportunities did
the war create for
women?

What challenges
did the war
create?

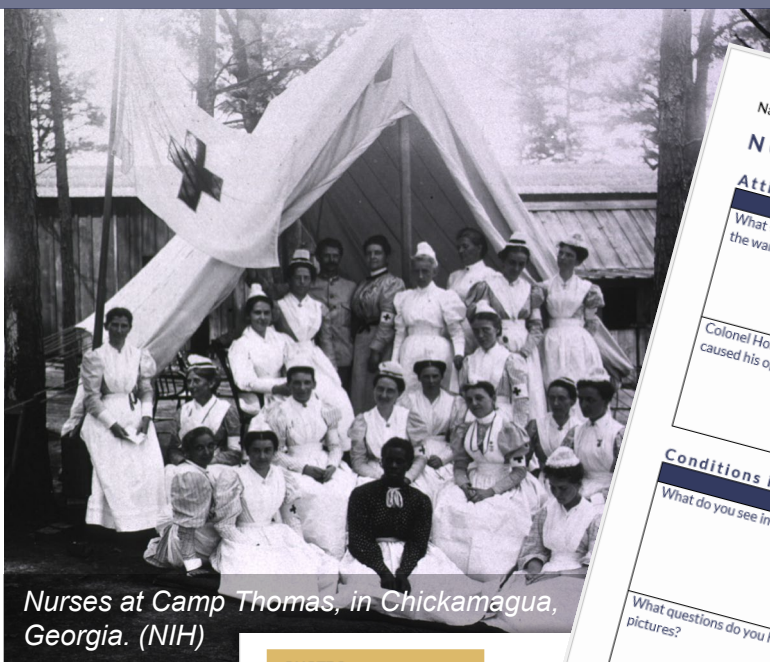


OPPORTUNITIES & CHALLENGES

The Spanish-American War presented female nurses with new challenges and opportunities. Their responses to these challenges and opportunities impacted women and nurses who came after them.

Your Mission:

Use the primary sources (documents, writings, or photographs created by the people who experienced an event) in this packet to draw conclusions and make inferences about attitudes toward women working as nurses and the conditions they faced. Use the questions on the Student Worksheet to guide your analysis of the primary documents.



Nurses at Camp Thomas, in Chickamagua, Georgia. (NIH)

QUOTE 3:

"We had no disinfectant whatsoever to use. There was not even one wash basin in these wards for the nurses to wash their hands. At one time when there was a shortage of water for several days, we were requested 'not wash at all'...Every one of the nurses had contracted dysentery..."

- Nurses Helen B. Schuler and Florence M. Kelly on the conditions at Sternberg Field Hospital at Fort Thomas, Georgia²

QUOTE 4:

"We were undernourished and exhausted & got 15 hours of sleep a night."

QUOTE 5:

"[After being assigned to the army hospital at Montauk Point, Long Island, New York] we had to hustle to . . . get into uniform. . . . We worked from 5 o'clock until about 8 o'clock without food"

ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY
HISTORY EDUCATION SERIES

Name: _____

NURSES IN THE SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

Attitudes Toward Female Nurses

QUOTE 1:

What was Colonel Hoff's opinion before and after the war?

QUOTE 2:

Major Maus's opinion of female nurses did not change. What was his opinion?

Colonel Hoff doesn't say, but what could have caused his opinion to change?

The writer doesn't say, but why do you think his opinion didn't change?

Conditions in the Army Camps and Hospitals

IMAGES:

What do you see in the pictures?

QUOTES

What were some of the duties of the nurses?

What questions do you have after looking at the pictures?

What were their living quarters like?

What can you learn about the working or living conditions of the nurses from the pictures?

What were the sanitation conditions like?

What were meals like?

SPANISH-AMERICAN WAR

NURSES 1



ATTITUDES TOWARD FEMALE NURSES

QUOTE 1:

“When you first arrived we did not know what to do with a contingent of women in the camp, now we are wondering what we should have done without you.”

- Colonel John Van Rensseler Hoff, chief field surgeon at Camp Thomas, Georgia in a letter to Anna Maxwell, a nurse¹

QUOTE 2:

“I believe, as a rule, that the female nurse should never be employed in military hospitals, except under conditions, such as existed during the Spanish-American War, when an enormous army was placed in the field, and overwhelmed with sickness, there being at the time scarcely sufficient trained hospital corps men in service to attend to the needs of one army corps.”

- Major L. M. Maus, surgeon in charge of the U.S. Hospital at Fort Hamilton, New York, in a letter to Surgeon General Sternberg (June 3, 1899)²

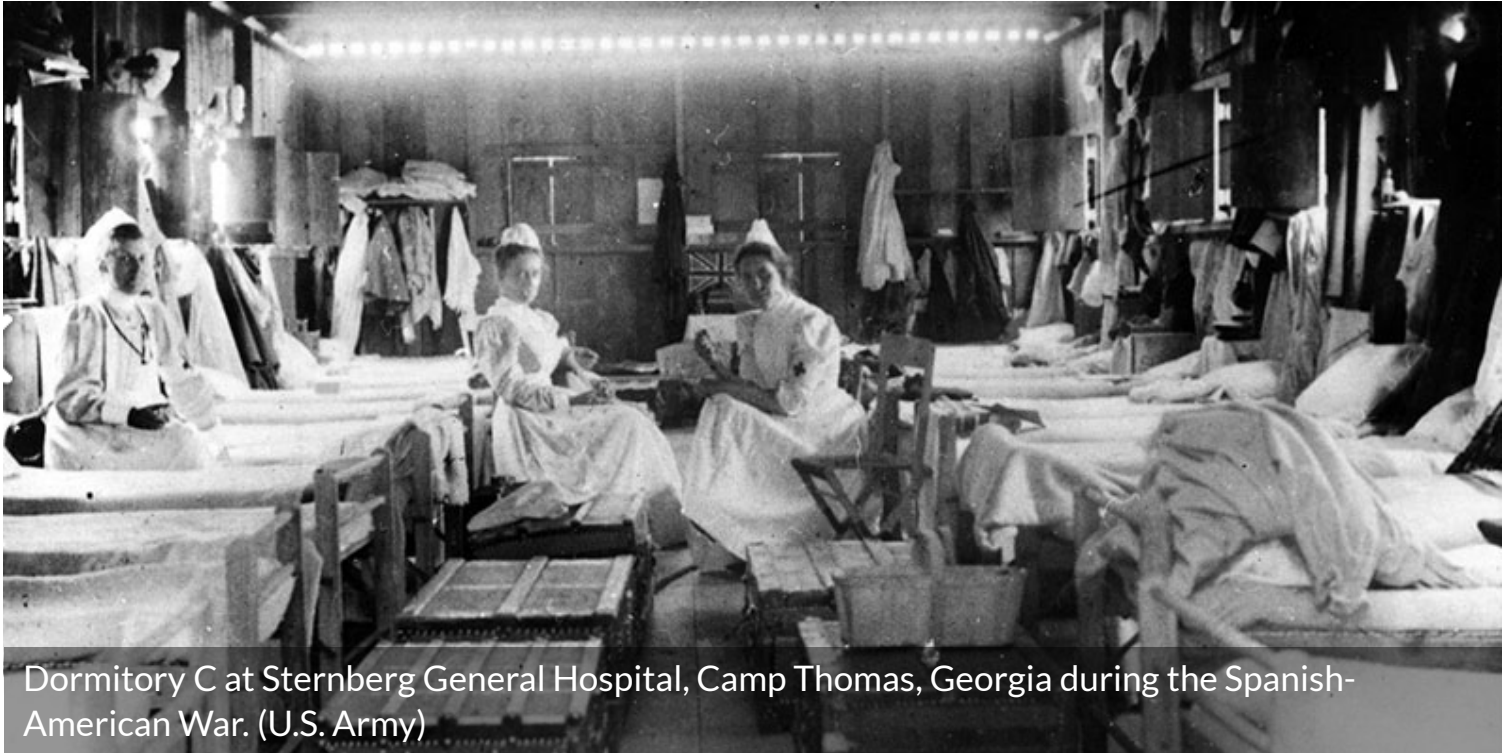
*hospital corps men: the soldiers who worked in U.S. Army hospitals

1. Goldenberg, *Nurses of a Different Stripe*

2. Kalisch, “Heroines of ’98”



CONDITIONS IN ARMY CAMPS & HOSPITALS



Dormitory C at Sternberg General Hospital, Camp Thomas, Georgia during the Spanish-American War. (U.S. Army)



Nurses and Army personnel in a hospital ward tent in Manila, Philippines. (NLM)



CONDITIONS IN ARMY CAMPS & HOSPITALS

QUOTE 3:

"We had no disinfectant whatsoever to use. There was not even one wash basin in these wards for the nurses to wash their hands. At one time when there was a shortage of water for several days, we were requested 'not wash at all'...Every one of the nurses had contracted dysentery..."

- Nurses Helen B. Schuler and Florence M. Kelly on the conditions at Sternberg Field Hospital at Fort Thomas, Georgia³

QUOTE 4:

"We are in terrible distress for nurses and can't understand the delay in sending them—there ought to be 50 good nurses in Washington willing & glad to come here. We have now in the hospital 150 cases of typhoid fever & and six trained nurses to take care of these & and there are 100 more cases waiting to come. We need 30 trained nurses & cannot do with less."

- Major J.W. Bayne, M.D., in a letter to Dr. McGee, describes the conditions at Camp Thomas, Georgia and the need for additional nurses⁴

QUOTE 5:

"[After being assigned to the Army hospital at Montauk Point, Long Island, New York] we had to hustle to . . . get into uniform. . . We worked from 5 o'clock until about 8 o'clock without food

of any kind, and when we went to breakfast we would get black coffee and some kind of mush, Indian meal or oat meal, then back to work [until 8 p.m.]. I remember one dinner I went to where there was nothing but boiled cabbage and black coffee."

- Rose M. Heavren, a nurse, from a speech about her experiences at a reunion of Spanish-American War Nurses, March 28, 1950⁵

3. Gessner, "Heroines of Health"

4. Gessner, "Heroines of Health"

5. Kalisch, "Heroines of '98"



UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Not all women were able to benefit when the nursing profession opened to women. When the Civil War ended in 1865, black women were not allowed to earn formal nursing credentials. Over time this slowly began to change.

In 1879, Mary Mahoney (pictured) became the first African American woman in the United States to study and train as a professional nurse. Eventually nursing schools for black women opened. These schools were segregated until the mid-1900s.

While Mahoney did not serve as a nurse during the Spanish-American War, she argued for the equal treatment and professionalism of African American nurses.

The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), handled the recruitment of nurses during the War. They would not accept any black volunteers.



Mahoney, the first African American woman to work as a professionally trained nurse in the U.S. (Public domain)



McGee, date unknown. (NIH)

Dr. Anita Newcomb McGee was a gifted organizer and acting assistant surgeon in the U.S. Army—a very high ranking position for a woman at the time. She created the DAR committee that chose nurses during the war and advocated for them after the war ended.

However, some black nurses did serve during the Spanish-American War. At the time, many people falsely believed that African Americans were naturally immune to tropical diseases. The Surgeon General asked Namahyoke Curtis, a prominent minority nurse in Washington, D.C., to recruit black women to serve as contract nurses.

These women did not necessarily have nursing credentials. Two of the 32 women recruited by Curtis actually died of typhoid fever during the war. By contracting directly with the Army, as many as 80 black women may have served as nurses during the war.



WOULD YOU WANT THIS JOB?

Responsibilities:

- 14-hour shifts
- 20-minute lunch break
- Provide your own uniform
- Give ice baths and dress wounds
- Prepare food
- Feed soldiers
- Administer medicine
- Keep wards clean

Benefits:

- \$30 a month
- Lodging (sometimes)
- Meals

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What would be *challenging* about nursing during the Spanish-American War?
- What *opportunities* might women have had because of their service?
- What kind of people would volunteer for this work?
- How was nursing during the Spanish-American War similar to nursing now during the COVID-19 pandemic?



MORE INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This lesson was developed by ANC's Educational Team to align to national social studies standards. Even if the Spanish-American War is not part of your current curriculum content timeline, the learning activities in this lesson plan will support students in developing the social studies thinking and analysis skills described below:

- Students will identify that the roles of women have changed over time and how historical events have impacted those changes.
- Students will identify historic contributions of women to the military.
- Students will use primary documents to draw conclusions and make inferences about:
 - The attitudes toward women nursing in the Army before and after the Spanish-American War
 - Contributions made by women to the war effort
 - Challenges faced by nurses during and after the war

STANDARDS:

Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.

Common Core Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.D2.His.1.6-8: Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.
- NCSS.D2.His.5.6-8: Explain how and why perspectives of people have changed over time.
- NCSS.D2.His.16.6-8: Organize applicable evidence into a coherent argument about the past.

FOR TEACHERS:

More detailed lesson plans and additional educational resources from Arlington National Cemetery can be found at: https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1NE3hhZ0gecp3QVrSKakZCwl_nStt--gM?usp=sharing