

Lesson Plan Template: When Dreams Came True: A Case Study of the GI Bill

Class: U.S. History / Social Studies Grades 6-12

Introduction: On June 22, 1944, the GI Bill of Rights was passed by Congress and signed by President Roosevelt. This four-day lesson on the GI Bill is designed to make students aware of the contributions of Veterans and the history of the GI Bill as it relates to World War II.

The lesson will involve two primary teaching techniques:

- lecture/discussion and
- small group work.

Student understanding is designed to meet the seven objectives for this lesson and will be measured via two tools:

- individual involvement in discussion in the lecture and concluding discussions; and
- individual and group involvement in the small group activity.

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will understand how and why the GI Bill of Rights:

1. became law;
2. differed from historical attempts to help veterans after earlier American wars;
3. was necessary after World War II;
4. was an example of a law that worked – a law that truly made dreams come true;
5. addressed the needs of people who had previously been excluded from achieving the American Dream – especially in terms of expanding educational opportunities, accessing affordable housing in the suburbs, and increasing involvement in service, white collar, and professional jobs in the public and private sectors;
6. expanded the role of the federal government and presidential powers within society and the economy, and how such expansion was consistent with the new federal powers of the New Deal; and
7. continues to influence the lives of Americans throughout the remainder of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century.

Show-Me Standards: The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Grade- and Course-Level Expectations for Social Studies contains several rationales for examining the GI Bill.

Standards 3a-x, 3b-m, 2c and 6g allow teachers to address the GI Bill as follows:

2. Knowledge of principles and processes of governance systems
 - c- Processes of governmental systems Explain how laws are made, interpreted and enforced Standard SS1 1.10, DOK-2
- 3a Knowledge of continuity and change in the history of Missouri and the United States
 - x-Causes, comparisons, and results of major twentieth-century wars
- 3b. Knowledge of continuity and change in the history of the world
 - m-Causes, comparisons and results of major twentieth-century wars
6. Knowledge of relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions
- g. Effect of laws and events on relationships Standard-SS6 1.6, 3.6, DOK-2

When Dreams Came True: A Case Study of the GI Bill

Day One: Introduction:

Show the DVD "No One Walks Alone" music video and the "Long Version-"The Montgomery GI Bill", beginning through 9 minute point.

Show a 4-minute clip from the 1946 film, *The Best Years of Our Lives*. This piece is located approximately 9-1/2 minutes into the movie (including credits). It begins with, "Hey Al, remember what it was like when we went overseas?" and ends about four minutes later with "Hey, we got to get out of the nose" – right before they leave the plane. Before showing the clip, provide the students with the following background information about the clip. It consists of a conversation between two soldiers and a sailor who are returning home from the war to their small mid-western city: an Air Force Captain from lower class background who was a soda jerk before the war and is returning to the rail yard slums of his parents and wife; an Army Sergeant from the upper class who was a VP of a small bank before the war and is returning to his lovely wife and two perfect children who have been leading their own lives while he was away; and a Navy grunt from a middle-class family who was a high school student before the war and has lost both his hands and has had them replaced with hooks. An interesting point is that this young man was not a trained actor, but an actual veteran who had lost his hands in World War II. In this conversation, the veterans discuss their hopes, dreams, and fears about the future.

(*Note about the movie:* This was one of the most important and timely movies ever made right after the war – and it is as relevant today as it was in 1946. The film chronicles the returning soldiers' relationships with the family and friends from whom they've been parted for so long, and realistically shows that the world they're returning to is not the same one they left years earlier. These three men, whose paths would have been unlikely to cross before the war - and even now back in civilian life, there are worlds between them - find themselves turning to one another for support, united by their experiences in the war and their disconnection from their homes. A great description of the film – which won 7 Oscars in 1946 including Best Picture – is available at <http://www.filmsite.org/besty.html>.)

Discussion after the clip:

- What do these three veterans of WWII have in common?
- How would you define their American Dream? Your American Dream? How do they compare and contrast?
- Do you think they will achieve their dreams? How and why?
- How would you compare and contrast the dreams of soldiers returning from WWII with the dreams of soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq?
- Do you think today's soldiers will achieve their American Dream?

Transition: In *The Best Years of Our Lives*, the three veterans shared a fairly simple American Dream – a small house for their family and a steady job. In the next four days, we will examine this Dream and how the GI Bill of 1944 became a law that truly made dreams come true. As we have this discussion, please keep in mind your definition of the American Dream and how it compares and contrasts with those soldiers returning from World War II and those returning from contemporary wars.

Lecture/Discussion: The lecture/discussion is designed for one-day of about 1 hour. It consists of two parts: the History of the GI Bill and the Consequences of the GI Bill. Both of these address Objectives 1-5.

Days Two (and Three): Checking for Understanding through Discussion and Guided Practice.

Students work individually and collectively on small group projects designed to check their understanding of Lesson Objectives 6 and 7.

- Poster interpreting the GI Bill
- Power Point presentation
- Animoto Presentation (or Similar Web 2.0 tool)
(<http://animoto.com/play/fKJjtzQ0qkILX1tR10oEdA>)
- Song/Rap

Day Three (or Four): Closure. Teacher will conclude the lesson by involving students in a discussion of the most important issues to remember about the GI Bill and its influence over American society during the past 67 years.

Checking for Understanding and Guided Practice: The initial evaluation of how well students understood the information provided during the first day occurs through a series of discussion questions included in the lecture/discussion. The questions are designed not only to gauge student comprehension, but to ask them to make some analytical connections and objective predictions. The next evaluation takes place in the course of the group activity designed to guide students through an understanding of Objectives 4, 6 and 7.

Small Group Activity: Students, in small groups, will create a product (poster, PowerPoint, Rap, Web 2.0 creation...) to represent their interpretation of the GI Bill.

Closure: This lesson is intended to be the culminating discussion for a three-to-four week unit on World War II. The concluding statements below address only those needed for closure of the four-day lesson – after the lecture/discussion has occurred and the student group projects are completed. They will not substitute for the closure that must be designed for the entire WWII unit.

Concluding Statements:

We began our discussion of the GI Bill with an introduction to three veterans returning from World War II who were sharing their hopes for achieving the American Dream. We continued with a discussion of the historical origins of the GI bill and the consequences of its passage. Your group work explored how the GI bill expanded the role of the federal government and presidential powers into the lives of the American people, how the GI Bill continued to shape American lives over the past 60 years, and how the GI Bill was a unique American law that truly helped to make dreams come true.

Now, let's try to come up with at least five points that you think are essential to understanding the GI Bill and that are absolutely essential to understanding the end of World War II and the ways it influenced the next 60 years of American history. [Ask for student input and write all their thoughts on the board. Then, through class discussion of the merits of each, narrow them down to five upon which they can all agree]. These conclusions will vary from class to class but should include: **The GI Bill was a law that worked for the American people – one that helped dreams come true for many veterans and their families.**

Ask a student to place all five points on a large poster for extra credit. Post these on the wall and continue to refer to them at appropriate times throughout the remainder of the semester. Be sure to weave these points into future discussions of that involve the analysis of late-20th Century social problems and domestic policy issues.

Materials:

A video player and DVD of the GI Bill provided by the Troops To Teachers office.

Teachers may also want to access the following resources, all of which were used to help design this lesson.

Bennett, Michael J. *When Dreams Came True: The GI Bill and the Making of Modern America*. Dulles, Virginia: Brassey's, 1996.

Department of Veterans Affairs, Web Site for the history of the GI Bill at http://www.gibill.va.gov/benefits/history_timeline/index.html

GI Bill Act of June 22, 1944 full text of the Act at http://www.higher-ed.org/resources/GI_bill.htm

Skocpol, Theda, "Delivering for Young Families: The Resonance of the GI Bill" at http://prospect.org/cs/articles?article=delivering_for_young_families

The Best Years of Our Lives. Directed by Samuel Goldwyn, 1946.

The Best Years of Our Lives Review at <http://www.filmsite.org/besty.html>

Camelon, David. "How the First GI Bill Was Written ..a Wild Ride from Georgia." *THE AMERICAN LEGION MAGAZIN* Feb. 1969: 22+. Web. <http://www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/gibillpitkinpt2.pdf>

Materials:

The GI BILL's History

Born Of Controversy: The GI Bill Of Rights

It has been heralded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government—one that impacted the United States socially, economically and politically. But it almost never came to pass.

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944—commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights—nearly stalled in Congress as members of the House and Senate debated provisions of the controversial bill.

Some shunned the idea of paying unemployed veterans \$20 a week because they thought it diminished their incentive to look for work. Others questioned the concept of sending battle-hardened veterans to colleges and universities, a privilege then reserved for the rich.

Despite their differences, all agreed something must be done to help veterans assimilate into civilian life.

Much of the urgency stemmed from a desire to avoid the missteps following World War I, when discharged veterans got little more than a \$60 allowance and a train ticket home.

During the Great Depression, some veterans found it difficult to make a living. Congress tried to intervene by passing the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, commonly known as the Bonus Act. The law provided a bonus based on the number of days served. But there was a catch: most veterans wouldn't see a dime for 20 years.

A group of veterans marched on Washington, D.C., in the summer of 1932 to demand full payment of their bonuses. When they didn't get it, most went home. But some decided to stick around until they got paid. They were later kicked out of town following a bitter standoff with U.S. troops. The incident marked one of the greatest periods of unrest our nation's capital had ever known.

The return of millions of veterans from World War II gave Congress a chance at redemption. But the GI Bill had far greater implications. It was seen as a genuine attempt to thwart a looming social and economic crisis. Some saw inaction as an invitation to another depression.

Harry W. Colmery, a former national commander of the American Legion and former Republican National Chairman, is credited with drawing up the first draft of the GI Bill. It was introduced in the House on Jan. 10, 1944, and in the Senate the following day. Both chambers approved their own versions of the bill.

But the struggle was just heating up. The bill almost died when Senate and House members came together to debate their versions. Both groups agreed on the education and home loan benefits, but were deadlocked on the unemployment provision.

Ultimately, Rep. John Gibson of Georgia was rushed in to cast the tie-breaking vote. The Senate approved the final form of the bill on June 12, and the House followed on June 13. President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed it into law on June 22, 1944.

The Veterans Administration (VA) was responsible for carrying out the law's key provisions: education and training, loan guaranty for homes, farms or businesses, and unemployment pay.

Before the war, college and homeownership were, for the most part, unreachable dreams for the average American. Thanks to the GI Bill, millions who would have flooded the job market instead opted for education. In the peak year of 1947, veterans accounted for 49 percent of college admissions. By the time the original GI Bill ended on July 25, 1956, 7.8 million of 16 million World War II veterans had participated in an education or training program.

Millions also took advantage of the GI Bill's home loan guaranty. From 1944 to 1952, VA backed nearly 2.4 million home loans for World War II veterans.

While veterans embraced the education and home loan benefits, few collected on one of the bill's most controversial provisions—the unemployment pay. Less than 20 percent of funds set aside for this were used.

In 1984, former Mississippi Congressman Gillespie V. "Sonny" Montgomery revamped the GI Bill, which has been known as the "Montgomery GI Bill" ever since, assuring that the legacy of the original GI Bill lives on, as VA home loan guaranty and education programs continue to work for our newest generation of combat veterans.

In 2008, the GI Bill was updated once again. The new law gives veterans with active duty service on, or after, Sept. 11 2001, enhanced educational benefits that cover more educational expenses, provide a living allowance, money for books and the ability to transfer unused educational benefits to spouses or children.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt signs the G.I. Bill into law.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Statement on Signing the G.I. Bill
June 22, 1944

This bill, which I have signed today, substantially carries out most of the recommendations made by me in a speech on July 28, 1943, and more specifically in messages to the Congress dated October 27, 1943, and November 23, 1943:

1. It gives servicemen and women the opportunity of resuming their education or technical training after discharge, or of taking a refresher or retrainer course, not only without tuition charge up to \$500 per school year, but with the right to receive a monthly living allowance while pursuing their studies.
2. It makes provision for the guarantee by the Federal Government of not to exceed 50 percent of certain loans made to veterans for the purchase or construction of homes, farms, and business properties.
3. It provides for reasonable unemployment allowances payable each week up to a maximum period of one year, to those veterans who are unable to find a job.
4. It establishes improved machinery for effective job counseling for veterans and for finding jobs for returning soldiers and sailors.
5. It authorizes the construction of all necessary additional hospital facilities.
6. It strengthens the authority of the Veterans Administration to enable it to discharge its existing and added responsibilities with promptness and efficiency.

With the signing of this bill a well-rounded program of special veterans' benefits is nearly completed. It gives emphatic notice to the men and women in our armed forces that the American people do not intend to let them down.

By prior legislation, the Federal Government has already provided for the armed forces of this war: adequate dependency allowances; mustering-out pay; generous hospitalization, medical care, and vocational rehabilitation and training; liberal pensions in case of death or disability in military service; substantial war risk life insurance, and guaranty of premiums on commercial policies during service; protection of civil rights and suspension of enforcement of certain civil liabilities during service; emergency maternal care for wives of enlisted men; and reemployment rights for returning veterans.

This bill therefore and the former legislation provide the special benefits which are due to the members of our armed forces -- for they "have been compelled to make greater economic sacrifice and every other kind of sacrifice than the rest of us, and are entitled to definite action to help take care of their special problems." While further study and experience may suggest some changes and improvements, the Congress is to be congratulated on the prompt action it has taken.