



Minnesota's Golden Girl: LTC Hortense McKay

LESSON PLAN

Grade: 9-12

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Subject: Social Studies, History

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Duration: One Class Period
(60 minutes)

"Dedicated to Care: LTC Hortense McKay" is an intimate and compelling documentary that delves into the extraordinary life of Brainerd, MN hero, Lieutenant Colonel Hortense McKay. McKay was a dedicated nurse whose courage and commitment shaped her legacy and paved the way for women in the military.

This lesson plan engages classrooms in a guided exploration of Hortense's trailblazing life. From her rural beginnings, to her remarkable service in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps during World War II, students will reflect on the unique qualities which garnered her a Congressional Gold Medal.

Where to Watch:

Web Viewing:

- Lakeland PBS Website: <https://lptv.org/local-show/dedicated-to-care-ltc-hortense-mckay/>
- YouTube (has ads): <https://youtu.be/uhruInfC-JU?si=EGarrWOLFJghwU1>

Smart TV:

- Download the free PBS App
- Search for "Dedicated to Care: LTC Hortense McKay"

Lesson Plan: *Minnesota's Golden Girl*, LTC Hortense McKay

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Standards Addressed | *Minnesota K-12 Academic Standards Social Studies 2011*

History	Grade Level: 9-12	9.4.3.12.3
<i>Substrand 3: World History</i>		
	<i>Standard 12:</i> A rapidly evolving world dominated by industrialized powers, scientific and technological progress, profound political, economic, and cultural change, world wars, and widespread violence and unrest produced a half century of crisis and achievement. (A Half Century of Crisis and Achievement: 1900—1950).	
	<i>Benchmark 3:</i> Describe the social, political and economic causes and main turning points of World War II. (A Half Century of Crisis and Achievement: 1900—1950).	
History	Grade Level: 9-12	9.4.4.21.6
<i>Substrand 4: United States History</i>		
	<i>Standard 21:</i> The economic growth, cultural innovation and political apathy of the 1920s ended in the Great Depression which spurred new forms of government intervention and renewed labor.	
	<i>Benchmark 6:</i> Evaluate the economic impact of the war, including its impact on the role of women and disenfranchised communities in the United States. (Great Depression and World War II: 1920—1945) activism, followed by World War II and an economic resurgence. (Great Depression and World War II: 1920—1945).	

Standards Addressed | Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects

Key Ideas and Details	<i>Literacy in History/Social Studies</i>
<i>Grade: 9-10</i>	
9.12.2.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
9.12.3.3	Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.
<i>Grade: 11-12</i>	
11.12.2.2	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

11.12.3.3	Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
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Teaching Tips | *Minnesota's Golden Girl: LTC Hortense McKay*

Essential Question: In what ways did Congressional Gold Medal recipient Lieutenant Colonel Hortense McKay help pave the way for women in the military?

Supporting Questions

- What does it mean to be awarded the United States Congressional Gold Medal?
- How did LTC McKay distinguish herself by her leadership qualities and bravery as a female nurse during her long military career?

Historical Thinking or Civics Skills

- Understanding Diversity of Historical Experience (Historical Thinking)
- Analyzing Civic Engagement (Civics)

Vocabulary

- Congressional Gold Medal (Explored in the “Before Viewing” activity below)
- LTC (Lieutenant Colonel, also explored in the “Before Viewing” activity below)
- Influenza
- Pacific Theatre

Procedure

- Use the lesson plan below to help engage students with this documentary through guided discussion and related activities.
- Print one double-sided worksheet (attached) for each student to complete during the lesson.

Teachers note: Consider consulting [this article](#) (scroll to bottom of webpage) as a brief introduction to the subject matter prior to beginning.

Before Viewing (15 minutes)

Digital Deep Dive: This section of the lesson plan requires classroom computer access. In the event that student computer access is not possible, teachers may still use these websites to assist students in the development of helpful context for viewing the documentary.

1. Students should visit the US government's official website for the Congressional Gold Medal [here](#). In pairs or individually, instruct students to read the introduction and take 3-5 minutes to scroll through the list of people who have won this award in the past.
 - a. Ask students to write down their notes to the prompts in section A of the student worksheet.
 - b. Engage the entire class in a brief discussion that addresses the following questions.
 - i. What is a Congressional Gold Medal?
 - ii. What groups or categories of people have won a Congressional Gold Medal in the past?
 - iii. From looking at the list of past winners, what qualities do you think a medal winner is likely to possess?

Teachers' Notes:

- This website above explains that the Congressional Gold Medal is an “expression of national appreciation for distinguished achievements and contributions.”
 - Consider inviting students to imagine what might qualify as “distinguished achievements” or ‘contributions” for soldiers in the military—particularly those in combat roles.
2. Students should visit the US Army's official website of soldier ranks [here](#).
 - a. Prompt students to search the site to locate Hortense's rank of Lieutenant Colonel (LTC).
 - b. Remind students to record their notes in section B of the student worksheet.
 - c. As a class, briefly discuss and compare answers to the following questions:
 - i. What is a Lieutenant Colonel?
 - ii. What role do they (and officers, more generally) play in the army?

Teachers' Notes:

- The description of Lieutenant Colonel is found in the “[Officer Ranks](#)” section of the website by clicking the title under the LTC insignia.
- Highlight how LTCs usually command battalion-sized units of 300-1000 soldiers.
- Discuss the role of an officer in the military. According to the site above, “Officers are the senior leaders of the U.S. Army. Commissioned officers are the managers, problem solvers, key influencers and planners who lead enlisted Soldiers in all situations. They plan missions, give orders and assign Soldiers tasks.”

While Viewing (30 minutes)

What qualities does Hortense display in this documentary that may have contributed to her being awarded the Congressional Gold Medal? Direct students to take bullet point style notes to the two prompts in section C of the student worksheet.

1. *Who is Hortense? List specific examples of her personality and values.*

Teachers' Notes: The following are examples of qualities from the documentary and can be used to enrich final discussion.

- **Capable & Independent**—As a child, Hortense helped keep care of the house while her mother took a 2 month “girls” road trip out west. Hortense may have been inspired by her.
- **Adventurous**—She loved the freedom of living on a farm as a child.
- **Caregiving**—She enjoyed playing nurse and caregiver when her family contracted influenza.
- **Highly Motivated**—Hortense went to college to become a teacher. Later she trained to become a nurse.
- **Ambitious**—She chose to join the military as a nurse because there she felt there was an opportunity to be promoted in her role.
- **Career Oriented**—Her choice of pursuing a job meant she could support herself as a single woman
- **Loyal**—She resisted being evacuated from combat areas for her safety, even though she would have likely become a prisoner of war.
- **Responsible**—She felt guilty for abandoning the Filipino nurses she worked alongside during WWII.

2. *How did Hortense display bravery and leadership in her life (be specific)?*

Teachers' Notes: The following are examples of moments from the documentary and can be used to enrich final discussion.

- Hortense stayed in the Philippines when the situation became a highly volatile combat situation.
- She persevered when nurses on these islands didn't have proper materials for the job (doc mentions using post-it notes instead of charts).
- She nursed in the Malinta Tunnel, a fortress where they were stuck in the dark for long periods of time, all while hearing bombs going off outside.
- In Manila she worked in an outdoor hospital without access to water or food.
- She continued to work without enough food for herself and while she was frail and weak from disease.
- She volunteered to go back to serve in the army after WWII because she recognized the need for her expertise and dedication.
- After WWII, she continued to serve in the Army Nurses Corps for fifteen more years, working in leadership and teaching roles across the US.

After Viewing (15 minutes)

1. As a class, discuss the following: ***Why was LTC Hortense McKay awarded the Congressional Gold Medal?***
 - a. Ask students to refer to their “While Viewing” notes and cite specific examples from the documentary to back up their arguments.
 - Use the “Teachers’ Notes” above to spark or enrich discussion as needed.
2. When Hortense joined the Army there were 1700 nurses. By the end of WWII, there were 54,000 nurses. Discuss the question, ***How do you think she “paved the way for women in the military”?***

Taking It Further [optional extended learning activity]

Duration: Approximately 15 minutes

Instruct students to read [this short profile](#) on LTC McKay from the *University of Minnesota School of Nursing*.

1. Allow students 5 minutes to go back and add any additional notes to their “While Viewing Notes” questions.
2. Discuss as a class: ***Does this article teach us anything new about Hortense?***

Resources for Further Engagement

Visit <https://bataanproject.com/> to access additional primary source documents, contextual information and soldiers’ personal testimonies from the Philippines during WWII.