



“Here for the Duration: Part 1” Reading Comprehension Questions

“Here for the Duration: Part 1” gives an overview of the development of Renton’s Highlands neighborhood during World War II, when thousands of war workers moved to Renton from across the nation to work at Boeing and the Pacific Car and Foundry. The result was a rapid increase in population and the need for housing.

This activity is designed for readers in 7th grade and above. Questions can be used for discussion or as writing prompts. You can find the original article from September 2019 on Renton History Museum’s Newsletters Page.

1. What were Mike Potoshnik’s plans when he purchased the land formerly owned by George Johnson in 1924? What did he actually do with the land between 1924 and 1941?
2. What led to the creation of the Renton Housing Authority?
3. Federal funding helped support Renton’s development during wartime. What are some of the steps the City needed to take to obtain federal grants?
4. How were Renton residents encouraged to help with the war effort?
5. In March 1942 the Renton Housing Authority’s plans underwent rapid changes. What were their plans for housing at the beginning of the month, and how had they changed by the end of the month?
6. Why were some people opposed to the idea of federally funded housing?
7. The J. C. Boespflug Construction Co. was responsible for the development of the Renton Highlands during World War II. What was the company’s previous experience? What were some of the methods they used to create housing rapidly?
8. What were some of the challenges builders faced during the construction of the new homes in the Renton Highlands in the summer of 1942?



Essay Question: How did World War II change Renton life and landscape? How did people feel about these rapid changes?

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are a reporter for the *Renton Chronicle* in October 1942. Your editor has asked you to write an article to inform the public about the opening of the Model Victory Home. Be sure to include some background about how and why new housing is being built in the Renton Highlands.



Answer Guide for Parents & Teachers

1. What were Mike Potoshnik's plans when he purchased the land formerly owned by George Johnson in 1924? What did he actually do with the land between 1924 and 1941?

Prohibition banned the production, sale, and consumption of alcoholic beverages from 1920 to 1933. People who defied this law by making and selling alcohol were known as "bootleggers." Bootlegging was fairly common in and around Renton, because of the high percentage of immigrants for whom making and drinking wine was an integral part of their cultures. Bootlegger Mike Potoshnik purchased what was left of George "Strawberry" Johnson's farm in 1924 in order to move his business out of the Renton Police's jurisdiction, as their surveillance was getting in the way of his alcohol production operation.

The end of Prohibition changed his plans slightly. Between 1924 and 1941, Potoshnik added a cabin court (the precursor to modern motels), a farmstead, a small grocery and service station, and a tavern once Prohibition ended and the sale of alcohol was legal once again. Potoshnik sold the land in the fall of 1941, just months before the U.S. joined World War II in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack.

2. What led to the creation of the Renton Housing Authority?

In August 1941, rumors circulated that the Department of the Navy had contacted Renton's Mayor, George W. Beanblossom, and encouraged him to form a housing authority. The Navy planned to award a contract to The Boeing Aircraft Co., which would require thousands of workers to implement. Renton's City Council observed the changes occurring in nearby cities, such as Seattle, Portland, Vancouver, Bremerton, and Bellingham. The Mayor formed the Renton Federal Housing Authority Board on September 8, 1941, the same day that Boeing purchased 60 acres of land for its new plant in Renton.

3. Federal funding helped support Renton's development during wartime. What are some of the steps the City needed to take to obtain federal grants?

In order to qualify for mobilization funding from the U.S. government, cities had to comply with certain federal requirements. Renton had to organize appropriate agencies and collect data to meet these requirements. The Renton Housing Authority began surveying residents about their plans for new construction and available room in their homes to house war workers, and the commissioners began to apply for infrastructure grants from the Public Works Administration for sewage disposal, water treatment, and other needs.

4. How were Renton residents encouraged to help with the war effort?

The personnel chief of Pacific Car & Foundry, Mel Perkins, also headed the Renton Housing Authority's central clearinghouse for new employees looking for places to live. He encouraged Renton residents to undertake simple remodeling projects in their homes to create new living spaces for the incoming workers. Because of shortage of building materials, contractors could apply for priority materials and permits to help homeowners make these changes. The City of Renton also blocked off streets in North



Renton near the new Boeing plant for security reasons, and Renton residents got used to new routes around the city.

5. In March 1942 the Renton Housing Authority's plans underwent rapid changes. What were their plans for housing at the beginning of the month, and how had they changed by the end of the month?

At the beginning of March 1942, the city received word from Rep. John M. Coffee's office that funds for 1000 new family units had been approved, with 500 of those being the "demountable," or temporary, kind. But by the end of the month, at the urging of Army and Navy officials, the Renton Housing Authority planned 5000 housing units on 400 acres secured east of Hillcrest in the Renton Highlands.

6. Why were some people opposed to the idea of federally funded housing?

Before Renton became a center of wartime production, its population was estimated to be around 2400 - 2500. Some Renton residents saw the thousands of new workers moving into the Highlands from around the country as a threat; they were suspicious of the newcomers and overwhelmed by the pace of change. In addition, some disagreed with President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision to create federally funded wartime housing, as they believed that public housing was a form of socialism. They argued that individuals and local building companies should be responsible for building houses, and newcomers should find their own housing.

7. The J. C. Boespflug Construction Co. was responsible for the development of the Renton Highlands during World War II. What was the company's previous experience? What were some of the methods they used to rapidly create housing?

The Boespflug Co. had already completed numerous projects in the West, including Yesler Terrace and Highpoint, and the company had developed a system for working on large-scale building projects. In a sort of "house factory," piles of lumber were delivered to the site and turned into stacks of frames for houses, while other carpenters put together the walls, floors, and roofs. The Housing Authority encouraged local men to apply for jobs as building, mechanical, and electrical inspectors.

8. What were some of the challenges builders faced during the construction of the new homes in the Renton Highlands in the summer of 1942?

In the summer of 1942, the nationwide building boom was slowing progress in the Highlands. Sewer extensions and delivery of electrical wiring and plumbing fittings were delayed, as factories struggled to keep up with demand. An editorial in the *Renton Chronicle* also cited "scarcities, priorities, delays in shipments, red tape, labor and materials shortage" as the causes of delays.

Essay Question: How did World War II change Renton life and landscape? How did people feel about these rapid changes?

Sample Answer: In September 1941 the Boeing Company bought 60 acres of land in Renton from Dr. Charles L. Dixon for a new plant, and began construction as soon as the sale was completed. Boeing anticipated that they would need 15,000 new workers, many of whom would come from out of town. This led to an intense and immediate need for additional housing. Existing rental spaces quickly filled up.



Some Rentonites, like Timothy and Anna Morgan, used empty land to create new housing; Morgan's Auto Court at 2nd and Rainier had 15 cabins for short-term rental. Others were given a short time to vacate their homes; Attilio and Emma Pistoresi had to leave their dairy farm off Dixon land they had been renting. In early 1942, Renton officially became a defense district, and other accommodations for wartime production were made, such as a \$700,000 upgrade to the Pacific Car and Foundry plant. Streets in North Renton adjacent to the Boeing factory had to be closed off for security reasons, to ensure that no one could interfere with plan production. In March, the Renton Housing Authority began putting together their plans for over 5,000 housing units on over 400 acres into motion. The J. C. Boespflug Construction Co. converted the hillside 1 ½ miles outside Renton from a wooded area into a housing development. Sewer extensions, electrical wiring and plumbing fittings, though delayed by the nationwide housing boom, were eventually installed. By October of 1942, the first homes in the Renton Highlands were ready for occupancy.

Many Renton residents were apprehensive about the pace of change; they were concerned that the newcomers would overwhelm the town, as so many new people showed up at their churches and schools, and they thought that locals should get the new jobs in construction and at Boeing and Pacific Car & Foundry.

Creative Essay Question: Imagine that you are a reporter for the *Renton Chronicle* in October 1942. Your editor has asked you to write an article to inform the public about the opening of the Model Victory Home. Be sure to include some background about how and why new housing is being built in the Highlands.

For this creative essay, encourage students to think like reporters, going back through the article to answer the key questions of "who, what, when, where, why, and how" as they pertain to the Highlands' Model Victory House. After noting down the answers to each basic question, students can then reformat them into a "newspaper" style, using their creativity to present the facts in an interesting way. They might use quotes from the article or make up their own. You may want to point out that the map on the bottom of Page 6 and the photos on pages 7 and 10 are primary source documents, which may be used to provide students with additional information for their articles.

Supplemental Resources (all available at no cost)

U.S. Public Housing during Wartime

[HistoryLink.org: Seattle House Authority – Part One](https://www.historylink.org/SeattleHouseAuthority-PartOne) – This article is accompanied by photos, an oral history, and promotional materials for the Seattle Housing Authority. It covers the time period from 1937, when the Housing Act of 1937 was signed as part of the New Deal, through the 1950s, when support for public housing declined after the war. It includes the fascinating history of Yesler Terrace, the United States' first racially integrated public housing community, also a Boespflug construction project.

<https://www.historylink.org/file/10760>

[Defense Housing: 1942](#) – This is the transcript of a speech delivered by C. F. Palmer, Coordinator of Defense Housing, to social workers and housing experts who attended the National Public Housing Conference in 1942. It stresses the need to create housing for war workers, the importance and



methods of surveying possible locations for new housing, and the anticipated scope of public housing projects during the War.

<https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/housing/defense-housing-1942/>

[Wartime Housing: Museum of Modern Art](#) – This entry in the Museum of Modern Art’s 1942 bulletin contains photos and copy relating to their exhibit *Wartime Housing: An Exhibit Presented in 10 Scenes*. The exhibit ran from April 22 – June 21, 1942. It was sponsored by the National Committee on the Housing Emergency and prepared in cooperation with the National Housing Agency.

https://assets.moma.org/documents/moma_catalogue_3034_300086537.pdf

Critical Thinking Questions: What led to the creation of Seattle’s first public housing communities? Who were the key people involved? How did the U.S. federal government spread awareness about the need for housing during wartime? In what ways was the Museum of Modern Art exhibit meant to inform or persuade the general population? Do you think it was art or advertising?

Wartime Industry in the Pacific Northwest

[“Seattle’s Working Women of World War II: An Oral History”](#) – This *Crosscut* article by oral historian Lorraine McConaghy tells the stories of women who worked in factories in Seattle during the war through excerpts from their oral histories. It includes posters, photos, and advertisements as visuals.

<http://features.crosscut.com/seattles-working-women-of-world-war-ii-an-oral-history>

[HistoryLink.org: World War II Home Front on Puget Sound](#) – This article discusses industry in Washington during wartime, including the production of machinery such as aircrafts and minesweepers and raw materials such as lumber and fish. It also explains the movement of families in the state during this time—military families moved in, while Japanese Americans lost their land and businesses due to internment.

<https://www.historylink.org/File/1664>

[The Oregon History Project: African Americans and Women Workers in World War II](#) – This article notes the important contributions of African Americans and women in Oregon during the war. It also discusses the challenges of racism and sexism that these workers had to face in their communities and at work. It includes photographs and links to related records and documents.

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/african-american-and-women-workers-in-world-war-ii/>

Critical Thinking Questions: How did war needs change industries in the Pacific Northwest? How did wartime industries change opportunities for women and people of color in the Pacific Northwest? What lasting changes did this period make, for women, African Americans, Japanese, and others?

Wartime Industry throughout the United States

[Library of Congress: Farm Security Administration/Office of War Information Black-and-White Negatives](#)

– This collection contains 175,000 photos taken between 1935 and 1944 to extensively document rural poverty, New Deal programs, and wartime industry. Many can be viewed for free online. A search for “Boeing” or “Seattle” will yield over ten pages of photos of B-17s in production and the people who worked on them, while terms such as “rations,” “housing,” or “school” will give you a glimpse into everyday life during the Great Depression and the Second World War.

<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/fsa/>



[Mexican Labor and World War II: The Bracero Program](#) – In 1942 the U.S. and Mexico signed the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement. Under the Agreement, laborers from Mexico were contracted to work on farms in the United States in order to address the shortage of agricultural workers in the U.S. during WWII. This website contains lesson plans and primary sources to introduce students to the history of the program. It also uses primary sources and discussion questions to introduce the topics of prejudices and discrimination against migrant workers.

<https://dp.la/primary-source-sets/mexican-labor-and-world-war-ii-the-bracero-program#tabs>

Critical Thinking Questions: What role did the U.S. federal government play in shaping industry during the war? How do you think the war changed the demographics of the U.S. workforce? Did WWII have a lasting impact on the U.S. workforce? How would you compare working conditions in factories to working conditions in the fields? What lasting impact did the Bracero Program have?