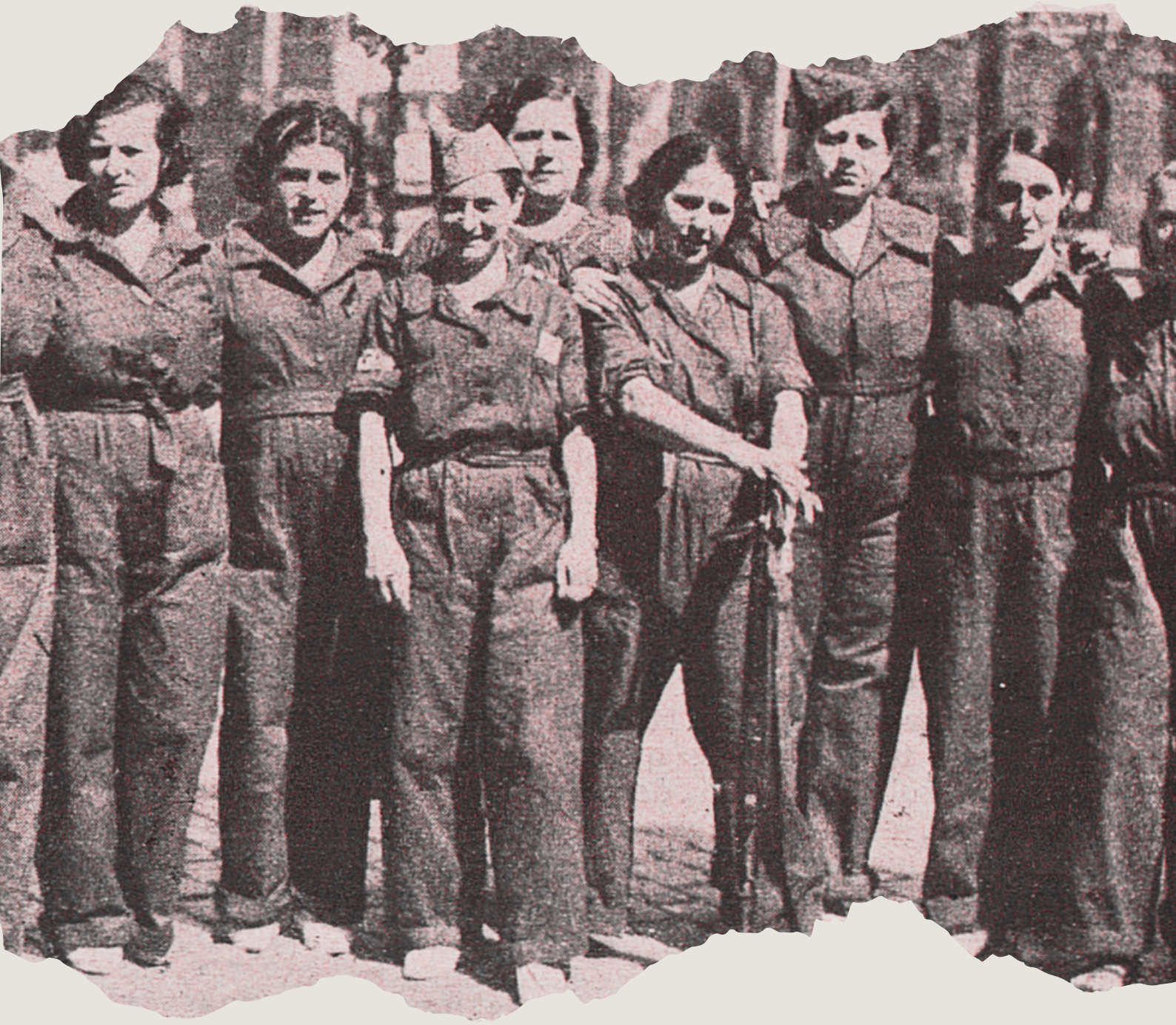


WOMEN COMBATANTS IN THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

learning unit

MUSEO VIRTUAL DE LA MUJER COMBATIENTE MVMC

Women at War Project: The Lives and Legacy of Women Combatants in the Spanish Civil War.

Included in the Universities and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) project network.

SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

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Introduction

The main objective of this educational proposal is to deepen understanding of the role played by women combatants during the Second Spanish Republic and the Spanish Civil War, highlighting their participation in the conflict and helping to recover the memory of these women, who have long remained invisible in traditional historical narratives. Through a critical approach that incorporates a gender perspective, the aim is to encourage students to reflect on the relationships between history, citizenship, equality, and democratic memory, while developing skills related to the analysis of historical sources and historical research. the teaching unit is centred on the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants (Museo Virtual de la Mujer Combatiente, MVMC), whose documentary resources, testimonies, photographs, and biographical records provide insight into these women's individual and collective experiences. In this way, the proposal promotes active learning based on research, the critical analysis of sources, and the development of a more inclusive historical memory.

Learning objectives

1. To make visible the active military role played by women on the fronts of the Spanish Civil War.
2. To critically analyse the construction of traditional historical narratives and the subsequent erasure of women militiamen from historical memory.
3. To become familiar with historical research through the use of digital archives and collective mapping tools.

Block 1:
The Republic and the New Citizenship

Activity 1. The Conceptual Context of the Second Republic

To better understand the historical framework of the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants (MVMC), look up the meaning of the following key concepts and briefly explain them in your own words:

Dictatorship	
Republic	
Democracy	
Monarchy	
Repression	
Coup d'état	
Civil War	
Fascism	

Activity 2. What Was the Second Republic?

Using the definitions analysed in the previous activity and the information in the first section of the museum exhibition, write an explanation of between 10 and 15 lines answering the following question:

What was the Spanish Second Republic, and what did it mean for the citizens of the time?

Activity 3. Photographic analysis

Analysing two photographies: The Role of Women Before and During the Second Republic

Photograph 1. Textile workers in Vilassar de Dalt (Barcelona, 1919). Unknown photographer.



Photograph 2. Popular celebration of the proclamation of the Republic in Barcelona (April 1931). Photographer: Gaspar-Sagarra i Torrents



Methodological Guide: Photography as a Historical Source



A photograph is a highly significant iconographic **historical document**, particularly from the twentieth century onwards. It provides **visual evidence** of a specific moment in history, capturing landscapes, people, wartime activities or any other aspect of reality. It thus becomes an unmistakable witness to the passage of time. **Following the methodological steps outlined below, write a detailed analysis of the two accompanying photographs relating to the situation of women and the arrival of the Republic in Spain.**

1	**Source identification**	Using the photograph caption, identify the author of the image, the location where it was taken, the exact or approximate date, and the main subject it depicts.
2	**Technical description**	Analyse the formal aspects of the photograph: framing (close-up, wide shot, etc.), viewing angle (frontal, high angle, low angle, etc.), use of colour (black and white, sepia), and approximate scale or perspective.
3	**Thematic description**	Describe the image in detail, moving from the general to the specific. Pay attention to key elements such as clothing, hairstyles, attitudes, facial expressions, gestures and visible objects.
4	**Contextual analysis**	Interpret the historical significance of the elements shown. Assess the nature of the photograph: is it a spontaneous image capturing a real moment, or is it a posed scene planned by its subjects?
5	**Synthesis and critical assessment**	Explain the most relevant historical aspects that can be directly inferred from the image. Reflect on the photographer's intentions: were they seeking to inform, document a labour process, or convey a political or propagandistic message?

Photograph 1	**Photograph 1**
Identification:	Identification:
Technical description:	Technical description:
Thematic description:	Thematic description:
Contextual analysis:	Contextual analysis:
Synthesis:	Synthesis:

Questions for Historical Reflection and Synthesis

After carefully applying the five steps of the methodological guide to the two photographs, provide reasoned answers to the following questions:

a) Visual and behavioural comparison: What are the main differences between the women in the first and second photographs? Focus your answer on aspects such as clothing, their use of public or private spaces, and the collective attitude they convey.

b) Historical context and gender development: What social changes relating to gender took place between 1919 (the first photograph) and 1931 (the second photograph)? What specific historical contexts frame each image and help explain this transformation?

Block 2:
The Military Uprising and the Popular Response

Activity 1. The Outbreak of the Conflict Through Voices

Listen carefully to the audio testimony of Aurora Molina and the historic radio speech by Dolores Ibárruri, known as *La Pasionaria*, available in the The Military Uprising section of the permanent exhibition. Then answer the following questions:

What major historical event do both audio recordings refer to?

Briefly explain what happened on those dates and describe the feelings conveyed by the speakers in their addresses.

Activity 2. Major Historical Figures: Aurora and Dolores

Conduct a brief biographical investigation into the two women you heard in the previous activity, using the museum's content as a reference.

Who were **Aurora Molina** and **Dolores Ibárruri**? What role did each of them play at the time?

Why was Ibárruri popularly known by the nickname *La Pasionaria*? Investigate the origins of her pseudonym in her early newspaper articles.

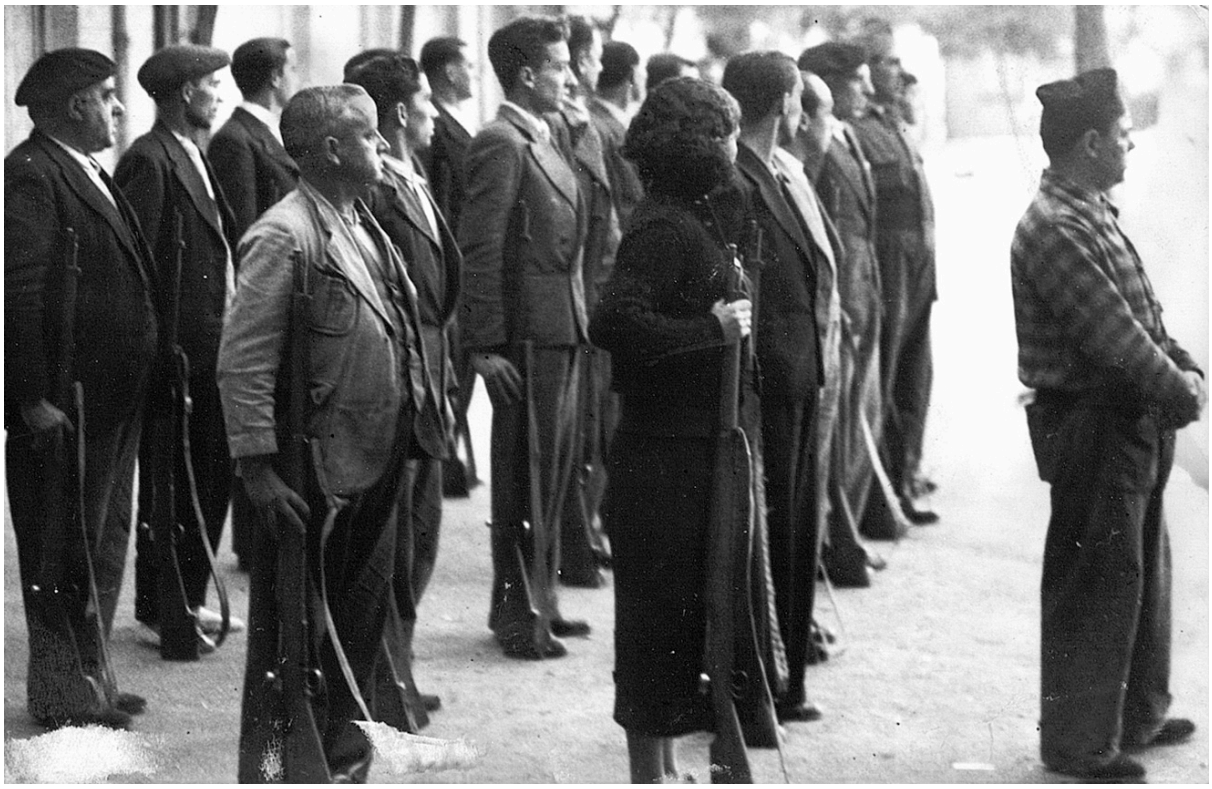
Activity 3. Historical Analysis and Argumentation

Answer the following questions by analysing the political context of the time and supporting your answers with reasoned arguments:

Who made up the insurgent side, and what were their objectives in rising against the legitimate republican government?

How did working-class women react to the news of the military uprising in cities such as Barcelona and Madrid? What immediate actions did they take on the home front and in the streets?

Block 3:
The Armed Conflict and Women Combatants



Photograph 3. Formation of the Popular Militias in Madrid (August 1936). Photographer: Manzano.

Activity 1. Popular Militias and the Front Line

The photograph accompanying this section shows a group of male and female popular militiamen taking part in a military formation. By examining the image and the exhibition texts, investigate and answer the following questions:

What were the popular militias? Explain how they emerged during the first days of the conflict, who joined them and what their main objective was in opposing the military uprising.

What role did women play in these formations? Analyse whether their initial participation was limited to support duties or whether they actively took part in frontline combat on equal terms with men.

Activity 2. Complete the Text. Read the content of this section of the museum and fill in the blanks:

"Whether during the period of the popular militias or that of the _____, in frontline units or in auxiliary or medical services, _____ fought on every front of the conflict, not only in Aragon or Madrid. They also took part in the Balearic Islands campaign, on the Northern Front, in the fighting in Andalusia and Extremadura and, during the final stages of the conflict, in Valencian and Catalan territory. At least _____ of them died fighting, and _____ were listed as missing in _____. The ages of these women ranged from 14 to 67. The most extensively documented age group was between _____ and _____ years old. In relation to age, it should be remembered that compulsory _____ military service for men began at the age of 21. The social backgrounds of the _____ represented every social stratum: some were _____, while others had _____ education; they were divorced, married or single; they might have been exclusively involved in domestic work, qualified professionals, factory workers, peasants or people undertaking temporary unskilled jobs."

Activity 3. Research and Data Extraction from the Census of Women Combatants

Women fought on the front line both in the initial popular militias and, later, as members of the People's Army of the Republic. One of the greatest scientific contributions of the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants (MVMC) is its extensive biographical database, a living census that is continually updated and rescues thousands of women from across Spain from historical oblivion.

To complete this activity, access the museum's Women Combatants section and explore **Room 1 (Collective Data)** and **Room 2 (Individual Data)**. Freely select five women combatants using whichever search criteria you prefer (for example, women who share your place of origin, political affiliation or the front on which they fought) and complete the following data-extraction tables.

Name		**Military organisation**	
Date of birth		**Role**	
Occupation		**Front**	
Marital status		**Enlistment date**	
Political affiliation		**Discharge date**	
Bibliography		**Reasons**	

Name		**Military organisation**	
Date of birth		**Role**	
Occupation		**Front**	
Marital status		**Enlistment date**	
Political affiliation		**Discharge date**	
Bibliography		**Reasons**	

Name		**Military organisation**	
Date of birth		**Role**	
Occupation		**Front**	
Marital status		**Enlistment date**	
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Bibliography		**Reasons**	

Name		**Military organisation**	
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Bibliography		**Reasons**	

Name		**Military organisation**	
Date of birth		**Role**	
Occupation		**Front**	
Marital status		**Enlistment date**	
Political affiliation		**Discharge date**	
Bibliography		**Reasons**	

Historical Reflection and Synthesis Question

After completing the individual research table for the five selected combatants, carry out a comparative analysis of their biographical profiles. **What experiences, characteristics or life trajectories do these five women have in common?** Support your answer by analysing factors such as their motivations, their challenge to traditional gender roles of the time, and the fate or consequences they faced at the end of the war.

Block 4:
Milicianas: Volunteers in the Anti-Fascist Militias

Activity 1. Historical Empathy: The Voice from the Trenches

Listen carefully to the excerpt from the letter written by **Georgette Kokoczinski** in Barcelona on 22 September 1936. Georgette was captured shortly afterwards in Perdiguera by insurgent troops and executed by firing squad on 15 October of the same year.

Next, carefully examine the images of volunteer milicianas available in this section of the museum.

Your task: Imagine that you are one of those young women militiamen during the first months of the war. Write a letter to a loved one (your mother, a sibling, a partner or a friend) explaining your experience. The letter must include the following aspects and be at least 15 lines long:

- **Motivations:** What has driven you to volunteer for military service and leave your everyday life behind?
- **Identity and clothing:** What are you wearing? Describe the use of the blue militia overalls, weapons and ammunition belts.
- **Life at the front and duties:** Which front are you at? What is everyday life in the trenches like, and what tasks do you perform (combat, medical care, supplies, etc.)?
- **Feelings:** How do you feel emotionally about the dangers of war and the hope of defending your ideals?



Block 5:
Women Soldiers — The People's Army of the Republic

Activity 1. From Volunteer Militias to the Regular Army

As the war progressed, the Republican military structures underwent a profound transformation. Answer the following questions to understand this change:

What organisational, disciplinary and status differences existed between a miliciana during the first months of the war and a woman soldier?

What did the militarisation decree issued by the Republican government entail, and how did it directly affect women's continued presence on the front line?

Activity 2. The Campaign to Discredit Women on the Home Front

From October 1936 onwards, a strong media and political campaign was launched to discredit women combatants. Analyse this phenomenon using the content of the museum's Women Soldiers section:

What exactly did this campaign involve, and what arguments or stereotypes were used in the press and posters of the time to remove women from the front?

Why do you think the Republican side itself promoted this change in discourse regarding the milicianas, for political and military reasons?

Activity 3. Historical Empathy in the Face of Social Pressure

Listen to the audio testimonies of women combatants who experienced this campaign to discredit them firsthand, and try to put yourself in their position:

How would you have felt emotionally if the very society you had voluntarily gone to defend now singled you out, criticised you or belittled you on the home front?

Faced with this pressure, what attitude would you have adopted? Would you have obeyed the order to return to domestic and medical duties, or would you have tried to remain at the front? Justify your position.

Activity 4. Resistance at the Front: Stories with Names

Despite the pressure and the adverse legal framework, women's presence did not disappear. Museum data document the resistance of **1,849 women soldiers** in the People's Army of the Republic from early 1937 until the end of the conflict in 1939. They fought in extremely bloody battles such as Brunete, Guadalajara, Belchite, Teruel and the Ebro.

Access Room 2 of the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants, find the individual profiles of María Teresa Remedios Jover Cánovas and Encarnación Luna, and provide reasoned answers to the following question:

Which aspects or experiences in the military biographies of these two women did you find most surprising or striking? Support your answer by analysing their courage and the information recorded in their service records.

Block 6:
Women's Militias and Organisation on the Home Front

During the Spanish Civil War, women's mobilisation also led to the creation of units made up exclusively of female combatants, organised mainly in Madrid and Barcelona. One of the key figures in this development was **Gavina Viana**, who took responsibility for the military organisation of these militias in Barcelona.

Activity 1. Requirements and Political Affiliation

Using the information available in the museum's Women's Militias section, investigate and answer the following questions with reasoned arguments:

What **requirements and compulsory conditions** did women at the time have to meet in order to join the officially regulated women's militias?

Which **political organisations** or trade unions did most of the women who joined these women's battalions belong to?

Activity 2. The Legal Framework Behind the End of the Militias (Multiple-Choice Test)

Select the specific event or legal framework that facilitated the formal demilitarisation of women's militias on the Republican side. **Mark the correct answer with an "X":**

- ☐ The Non-Intervention Committee.
- ☐ The Militarisation Decree and the restructuring of the People's Army.
- ☐ The Law for the Repression of Freemasonry and Communism.

Block 7:
The End of the War: Exile, Repression and Resistance

The end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 marked the beginning of a tragic period for thousands of women combatants. Those who were unable to flee into exile faced the military courts of Franco's dictatorship and suffered prison sentences, forced labour or execution. Both in Spain and in exile in France, many kept the anti-fascist resistance alive.

Activity 1. Digital Timeline of Women Combatants

Create a digital timeline that provides a concise overview of the development of the Spanish Civil War, specifically **highlighting the milestones and events most important to women combatants**, such as the creation of women's militias, militarisation decrees, key battles and subsequent exile.

To design your timeline, you may use current interactive online tools such as:

TimeGraphics or Timetoast (platforms specialising in timelines).
Canva (using timeline infographic templates).
Genially (for dynamic presentations and chronological concept maps).

Activity 2. Final Reflection: Critical Reflection Essay

To conclude the teaching unit, **write a personal reflective essay of at least 20 lines** summarising what you have learned through your research into the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants (MVMC). Structure your text around the following points:

- **Starting point:** What did you know, or what had you been taught, about the role of women on the battlefront before visiting the museum?

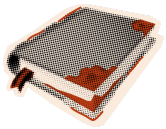
- **Historical discoveries:** What aspects of the census and the lives of the milicianas have you discovered through the platform? Which fact or piece of information caught your attention most?
- **Learning assessment:** What do you consider to have learned about the Spanish Civil War from a gender perspective?

- **Emotional dimension:** What emotions or moral reflections were prompted by the audio testimonies and letters written by the women combatants?

- **Commitment to memory:** Would you recommend this virtual museum to other students or family members? Justify your answer by discussing the importance of recovering democratic memory.

Block 8:
Restoring Them to Historical Memory — Collaboration and Research

Would you like to take an active role and contribute to the research project of the Virtual Museum of Women Combatants (MVMC)? To conclude this teaching unit, we propose three ways to participate collectively in recovering and making their legacy visible:

	**Option 1: Biographical Research (Written Format)** Select a woman combatant (a woman from your municipality, a family member, or someone chosen at random from the census). Research her life and career, cross-check the historical data and write a biographical profile following the museum's formal model. Once completed, send the file in Word format to the official email address mujeresenguerra@upf.edu, clearly indicating the authors, the year of writing and the educational institution.
	**Option 2: The Memory Podcast (Audio Format)** Select a woman combatant and record an audio piece or podcast. You may narrate her biography aloud, if it is already available on the platform, or create an audio essay explaining what discovering who this miliciana was and what role she played in history has meant to you. Remember to state your name, the year and the educational institution you belong to. Audio recordings may be produced collectively.
	**Option 3: A Visual Chronicle of the Classroom (Photographic Exhibition)** If you carry out these activities in class or undertake other initiatives related to the MVMC or democratic memory, take photographs of your work and email them to us. In time, we will prepare a digital exhibition featuring all your projects, in which you and your classrooms will be the true protagonists.

Assessment Rubric for the Teaching Portfolio

This analytical rubric enables the qualitative and quantitative assessment of the skills and knowledge acquired by students throughout the **seven activity blocks.**

Assessment Criterion	Advanced (Excellent / 9–10)	Intermediate (Acceptable / 7–8)	Beginner (In Progress / 5–6)	Insufficient (Not Achieved / 1–4)
Iconographic Analysis and Sources **(Block 1)**	Applies all five steps of photographic analysis with complete rigour and technical precision. Draws outstanding historical conclusions.	Follows all five steps of photographic analysis, although some technical or contextual aspects are not fully developed.	Merely describes the images superficially without correctly applying the methodological steps.	Does not analyse the photographs or lacks basic historical rigour.
Information and Data Processing **(Blocks 2, 3, 5 and 6)**	Answers all historical questions accurately. Completes the data-extraction table and text flawlessly.	Completes the requested information and table, although some details are missing from the biographical arguments.	Has difficulty locating data in the museum; answers are excessively brief or disjointed.	Leaves activities unanswered or presents serious conceptual errors about the armed conflict.
Use of Digital Tools **(Block 7 — Timeline)**	Creates an excellent, interactive digital timeline with a clean design that integrates the key milestones relating to women combatants perfectly.	Uses a digital tool correctly. The timeline includes the basic milestones, but its design could be improved.	Creates a very simple timeline or experiences significant technical difficulties using the digital platform.	Does not submit the timeline, or it completely lacks chronological order and historical information.
Critical Thinking and Empathy **(Blocks 4, 5 and 7 — Reflection)**	Writes highly insightful letters and essays. Demonstrates exceptional historical empathy and strong gender-critical judgement.	Completes the reflective writing tasks within the minimum length requirements, demonstrating a good understanding of gender bias and exile.	Produces short texts that barely meet the minimum requirements. Personal and moral arguments lack depth.	Does not complete the reflective essay, or the writing lacks argumentation and critical thinking.