World War II Rationing
Appropriate for Grades 3 through 10
Some adult assistance may be necessary to complete the activity

Background Information

World War II was a worldwide war that lasted from 1939 through 1945. The United States’ involvement in the war lasted from 1941 through 1945. The war was fought overseas, which means American soldiers were sent to Europe and Asia to fight the war. But that doesn’t mean Americans at home in the U.S. had an easy time. There were many hardships on the “home front.”

One challenge that Americans at home confronted was rationing. During the war, there was not as much food in stores and at farm stands as there had been before the war. This was because food was no longer being imported from other countries. Food grown on American farms was sent to soldiers instead of grocery stores. It was also very hard to get enough rubber and tires during the war, so cars and trucks couldn’t drive as much to get food to stores.

To make sure everyone had access to the same amount of food, the government distributed ration stamps to every household.

Here’s what a book of ration stamps looked like:
582741 CN
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
OFFICE OF PRICE ADMINISTRATION

WAR RATION BOOK FOUR

Issued to ________________________________
(Print first, middle, and last names)

Complete address ________________________________

Princeton, N.J.

READ BEFORE SIGNING

In accepting this book, I recognize that it remains the property of the United States Government. I will use it only in the manner and for the purposes authorized by the Office of Price Administration.

Void if Altered ________________________________

Signature ________________________________

It is a criminal offense to violate rationing regulations.

OPA Form R-145

NEVER BUY RATIONED GOODS

WITHOUT RATION STAMPS

NEVER PAY MORE THAN THE LEGAL PRICE

United States Office of Price Administration

IMPORTANT: When you have used your ration, salvage the Tin Cans and Waste Fats. They are needed to make munitions for our fighting men. Cooperate with your local Salvage Committee.
These are pages from a real ration book that belonged to Charles H. Rogers, who lived in Princeton during World War II.

The numbers on the stamps indicate how many points they are worth. The letters on the stamps let people know when they were allowed to use them. At any given time, only a few letters would be valid. For example, in January 1944, Americans could use V and W stamps. The next month, in February 1944, V and W stamps had expired, and Americans could then use only X, Y, and Z stamps.
Each food item had a point value. You would trade the correct number of stamps in at the store in exchange for the food item. Ration stamps did not replace money – you also still had to pay for your food items.

**Point charts** showed how many points certain products cost.

This point chart was published in a newspaper in Washington, D.C. on March 28, 1943.
Activity: Shopping with Ration Stamps

Here’s a simplified point chart for our activity:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM</th>
<th>POINTS PER POUND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FRUITS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apples</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applesauce</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apricots</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berries – all varieties</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cherries</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fruits for salad and fruit cocktail</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grapefruit</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peaches</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pineapple</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FROZEN FRUIT AND JUICE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen strawberries</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other frozen fruits</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All frozen fruit juices</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VEGETABLES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans, fresh lima</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beans, green and wax</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beets</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sauerkraut</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinach</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomatoes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FROZEN VEGETABLES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen peas</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen asparagus</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER PROCESSED FOODS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tomato Soup (Canned and Bottled)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All other canned and bottled soups</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby foods</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dried beans, peas, and lentils</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn on the cob (canned, bottled, or frozen)</td>
<td>2 points per ear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DAIRY PRODUCTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butter</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaporated or condensed milk</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortening</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cottage cheese</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEAT</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sirloin steak</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hamburger ground beef</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacon</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Here’s a shopping list for groceries.

**Shopping List:**

1 pound of applesauce
4 ears of corn
1 pound of canned tomato soup
1 pound of ground hamburger beef
2 pounds of sauerkraut
1 pound of frozen peas
1. How many total ration points is this shopping list? (Hint: use the point chart on page 5 to write down how many points each item is and then add them together.)

_____________________

2. Let’s pretend that the local newspaper has recently announced that the N, P, and Q stamps are now valid. How many total points does Mr. Rogers have in N, P, and Q stamps? (Look at Mr. Rogers’ ration stamp book on page 3).

_____________________

*This is about how many stamps an American resident would be permitted to use in one week during World War II.*

3. Does Mr. Rogers have enough stamps to buy everything on the shopping list? If not, what would you remove? (circle one)

Yes  No

I would remove ____________________________________________________

4. Compare pineapples and apples in their point values. Why do you think certain food items cost more ration points than other food items?

_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
Answers

1. The shopping list adds up to **54 points**.

2. Mr. Rogers has **48 points** in N, P, and Q stamps.

3. Mr. Rogers does **not** have enough points to buy his full list.

4. Pineapples are an exotic fruit that only grew in certain places. It was hard to transport pineapples to stores, and there were not that many of them. On the other hand, apples were much easier to come by. When an item was more easily available, it cost fewer ration points. Economists call this effect supply and demand.