



Debating the Decision of the Atomic Bomb

<https://www.loc.gov/item/2017658392/>

Overview/Prior Knowledge

We have been doing an extensive unit on World War II. The students have done research on famous battles and people, examined maps of the war time period, and examined propaganda posters. The students have also taken a field trip to visit the National World War II museum, where they saw the movie, *Beyond All Boundaries*. This movie showed the devastation of the bombing done during the war as well as presented the viewpoint that it ended the war quickly. As the students researched during this unit, there was some conversation among a few of the students about whether or not the bomb was a good solution. This lesson will help them think through those thoughts and give them some reasons/evidence to support their viewpoints.

Objectives

- TSW examine evidence to determine different viewpoints about the bombing of Japan.
- TSW evaluate the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan.

Time Required

1 class period (1 hour)

Recommended Grade Range

5th grade (gifted)

Subject/Sub-Subject

Social Studies (gifted)

Standards

Social Studies

WORLD HISTORY FROM THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE PRESENT- Global Affairs:

3. Understand causes and consequences of contact, cooperation, and conflict (e.g., diplomatic,

economic, political, cultural/ethnic, military, biological) between various societies, nations, and groups of people.

US History: 1877 – Present - 7: WWII at home: Examine the nation’s role in World War II and the impacts on domestic affairs. (Strands: Civics, Civil Rights, Geography, History, Economics)

5. Analyze the reasons for and results of dropping atomic bombs on Japan.

English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.1.D

Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.

Library of Congress - Teaching with Primary Sources Skills:

- Identify details when observing a primary source(s)
- Identify points of view with primary sources
- Consider issues of cause and effect, context, and/or continuity change
- Articulate ideas or beliefs formed by observing primary sources
- Use primary sources that connect to the subject/topic under study

Highlighted Strategies:

- Circle of Viewpoints

Credits

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Materials

- Primary Sources – See Resource Guide at the end of this document.
- Pictures taken at the National World War II museum of the Atomic Bomb exhibit
- National War World II Museum Resources
 - Audio of Harry S. Truman making his Atomic Bomb Address
- Circle of Viewpoint recording sheet
- Summative assessment prompt

Procedures

Introduction

- First, the class will talk about what the word “perspective” means. The class will discuss it is like to have a different perspective from someone else and why someone might have a different perspective on the same situation/event. Then, the teacher will ask the students what event finally ended the war in the Pacific (the students have this background knowledge). The teacher will ask the students what they remember about the bombing, from information they have

learned in previous experiences. The teacher will ask the students if they remember who made the decision to bomb Japan (President Truman). The teacher will tell the students that they are going to examine several primary sources to analyze various perspectives on the bombing.

During

- The teacher will present some information about the war, the Manhattan Project, and the bombing without discussing the perspectives too much at this time:
 - In 1939, Einstein told FDR that the Axis powers may be working on a nuclear bomb. FDR decided to start a project – the Manhattan Project – for the U.S. to begin researching about and creating an own atomic bomb.
 - The teacher will show the students a primary source picture of a bombing that took place in Osaka (not atomic bombs). The class will discuss the impact of that bomb on the buildings/structures close by, based on the picture.
 - Then the students will look at the primary sources of the pictures of the bomb dropping (the mushroom cloud, the destruction of Nagasaki, and the destruction of Hiroshima). With the picture of Hiroshima, the class will discuss how far away this was from the place where the bomb dropped. The teacher will relate it to the distance from our school to Chick-fil-A (about 1 mile in distance).
 - The teacher will show them the primary source picture of the meeting in Guam discussing the bombing plans. They will discuss their body language.
 - The students will also listen to a portion of President Truman’s address to the country about the atomic bombing.
 - They will read together a few quotes about the bomb (from soldiers, generals, the president, etc.)
- After they have looked at/listen to all of those pieces of evidence, the teacher will ask the students to think about different people or groups of people who would have been affected by the atomic bomb or the decision to drop the atomic bomb.
 - Expected responses: President Truman, American soldiers, Japanese soldiers, Japanese civilians, Americans at home, other generals making decisions, Japanese leaders like Emperor Hirohito, other Allied Powers.
 - If students do not think of each of these people/groups, the teacher will guide them to think of them.
 - The teacher will write the list on the board, with the names in two columns (one for Allied perspectives and one for Axis perspectives):

President Truman	Japanese soldiers
American soldiers	Japanese civilians
Americans at home	Emperor Hirohito
Generals making decisions	
Scientists	
 - The teacher will pass out the recording sheet and discuss the Circle of Viewpoints Strategy. The students will put the event name in the middle (Atomic Bombing of Japan).
 - The teacher will ask the students why they think the names on the board are in two different columns. The teacher will guide them with questioning until someone realizes that one is centered around the Allied Powers and one around the Axis Powers.

- The teacher will tell the students that they must pick one person/group from each column for this activity. The teacher will explain to the students that they will look at the bombing event from the perspective of these people/groups.
- The students will put one of their people/groups at the top of the circle and one at the bottom.
- The teacher will review the various primary sources available to students to determine perspectives.
- The students will read at least four primary sources before writing their perspective and will be prepared to cite them.
- The students will “become” each person/group and talk about what that person’s/group’s perspective would have been on the bombing. They will write that from a 1st person point of view in the semi-circle. They will use examples from the evidence that we examined.
- After the students have had time to take the perspective of their two assigned people, we will discuss some of them together. The students will share what they wrote.
 - As they are sharing, the teacher will tell the students to have an open mind and think critically about each perspective because they will need to develop their own perspective on the event.

Assessment

Formative: TTW observe the students as they are writing their Circle of Viewpoints to ensure they are taking the perspective of someone else and not only focusing on their own opinions.

Summative: After the lesson, the students will write a short paragraph responding to this prompt:

After examining the issue from multiple perspectives, I believe that the decision to drop the atomic bombs on Japan was.....

TSW use examples from the evidence we talked about as their reasons for their decision.

Differentiation

- If needed, the teacher will question the students to guide them in taking the perspective of someone else. (Ex. How would they have felt? What would they have seen? What challenges would they have faced?)
- If needed, the quotes and pictures will be printed for the students to use if they need to look back on them as they are giving their reasons.
- The students will be allowed to draw an illustration to go with their viewpoint if they want to.

Supplementary Materials

- Recording sheet for Circle of Viewpoints
- Summative Assessment prompt
- National World War II Museum links:
 - <http://ww2classroom.org/?q=search&myCollection=true> – Truman’s address
 - <http://ww2classroom.org/?q=node/166> - Lawrence Johnson’s Oral History

- <http://ww2classroom.org/?q=node/110> - Video of Bomb preparation
- PowerPoint with Quotes from National World War II Museum archives:
 - http://ww2classroom.org/system/files/wip034_web.pdf
 -

Additional resources to help determine various points of view about the decision of the atomic bomb

- CIA website with documents related to the decision
 - Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum detailing plan to invade Japan including casualty estimates and length of war estimates. Also includes White House Memorandum detailing President Truman's questions about the invasion and indicates his priorities on ending the war.
 - <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/the-final-months-of-the-war-with-japan-signals-intelligence-u-s-invasion-planning-and-the-a-bomb-decision/final.pdf>

- Website with documents related to dropping the atomic bomb
 - <http://www.atomicarchive.com/History/mp/index.shtml>
- Estimates of casualties at Hiroshima and Nagasaki from dropping the atomic bombs.
 - http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/MED/med_chp10.shtml
- Manhattan Project Scientists poll results on how to use the bombs, July 1945
 - <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/ManhattanProject/Poll.shtml>
- Letter from the Undersecretary of the Navy to the Secretary of War about how to use the atomic bomb, June 1945
 - <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/ManhattanProject/Bardmemo.shtml>
- Petition to President Truman from metal workers involved in the Manhattan Project, July 1945
 - <http://www.atomicarchive.com/Docs/ManhattanProject/Petition.shtml>
- Japanese response to dropping atomic bombs
 - <http://www.atomicarchive.com/History/twocities/nagasaki/page6.shtml>
- Newspaper article that includes Emperor Hirohito on the bombing
 - <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/09/09/national/emperor-hirohito-notified-about-hiroshima-a-bomb-half-day-after/#.XLSL8-hKg2w>
- Website from George Washington University with primary sources detailing scientist, military, political points of view regarding the atomic bombs including documents about Japanese efforts to prolong the war or end the war on their terms through Soviet mediation.
 - <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB162/>

Teaching with Primary Sources Resource Guide

Title: Atomic Bombing of Japan

Historical Background:

The atomic bombing of Japan was a significant event in WWII because it ultimately ended WWII. However, there are varying viewpoints on this bombing. Not everyone agrees that it was the right thing to do because so many Japanese civilians died. During this unit, many of our students expressed some confusion about this event – confused about how it was a “good thing” if so many people died. This lesson will allow them to examine the event from many different perspectives and come to their own conclusion about whether they believe it was right or not.

Source 1:



Title: Nagasaki, Japan after Atomic Bombing

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3c04725/>

Purpose: This picture will allow the students to see the destruction caused by the bomb.

Source 2:



Title: Briefing before dropping of first atomic bomb, Guam, 5 August, 1945

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2017658392/>

Purpose: We will examine the body language of these men to try to determine how they must have been feeling about making the plans to drop the bomb on Japan.

Source 3:



Title: View of a Hiroshima bridge 4,400 feet east of X

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/ds.10870/>

Purpose: This picture shows the destruction of the atomic bomb – and how the destruction covered such a large area.

Source 4:



Title: Nagasaki, Japan under atomic bomb attack

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2002722137/>

Purpose: This helps the students picture how big the bomb actually was.

Source 5:



Title: Bomb damage in Osaka, Japan

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/resource/cph.3b39707/>

Purpose: We will use this picture to compare to the atomic bomb pictures. This will help the students see how destructive the atomic bombs were.