

To Drop or Not to Drop?

By Kathryn Krodel

Objectives

- ~ Students will gain an understanding of the plight of military decision makers (President Truman) during the final days of World War II.
- ~ Students will understand the potency of atomic/nuclear weapons.
- ~ Students will empathize with having to make tough decisions that will impact the future.

TEKS

U.S. History #'s 1a,c,6b,h,14c,15b,19a,22a,b,24b,d,f,25a,b,d,26a,b

Time and Materials

- ~ One or Two class periods

Context

- ~ After several years of hard fighting with many casualties, American forces drove the enemy to within a few hundred miles of the Japanese mainland. This brought Japan within range of American bombers. Meanwhile in the U.S., Allied scientists completed work on the world's first atomic bomb.
- ~ President Truman had many alternatives at his disposal for ending the war: invade the Japanese mainland, hold a demonstration of the destructive power of the atomic bomb for Japanese officials, drop an atomic bomb on selected industrial Japanese cities, bomb & blockade the islands, wait for Soviet entry in to the war on August 15, or mediate a compromised peace.

The One-Day Lesson

Ask students to imagine having to make the decision to use or not to use the Atomic bomb on Japan. ~Have students look at the portrait of President Truman. Imagine yourself in his position of power with all eyes on you and how the decision you make will impact the world.

Armed with all of the knowledge that President Truman and his advisors had accumulated, how would *you* have ended the war in the Pacific?

Make a table listing the advantages and disadvantages that the atomic bomb presented to modern warfare. ~Using the picture of "dancing on the White House lawn", do you think this event would have happened in such a timely fashion had the bomb not been dropped? Do you think it is appropriate considering the loss of life caused by the atomic bomb?

One newspaper critic stated after dropping the bomb, "Yesterday we clinched victory in the Pacific, but we sowed the whirlwind." What did he mean by this? Argue for or against this statement.

Assessment: How did President Truman justify dropping the Atomic bomb on Japanese cities?

Multiple Choice: In deciding to use the atomic bomb against Japan, President Truman's main goal was to

- A. weaken Japan for a land invasion
- B. end the war quickly
- C. get revenge for Pearl Harbor
- D. save Japanese lives

Extending the Lesson

Five Reasons for Dropping the Atomic Bomb...According to J. Samuel Walker in his book, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of the Atomic Bomb Against Japan*, states that Truman justified dropping the bomb with five reasons:

(info. From the Harry Truman library)

- ~ It would end the war successfully at the earliest possible moment.
- ~ It justified the effort and expense of building the atomic bombs
- ~ It offered hope of achieving diplomatic gains in the growing rivalry with the Soviet Union
- ~ There was a lack of incentives not to use the weapons
- ~ Because of America's hatred of the Japanese and a desire for vengeance.

Divide the class into five groups, giving each group one of the reasons. Ask them to explain them in their own words. Do they agree or disagree with President Truman's thinking? Why or why not? Can they come up with more reasons to justify dropping the bomb? What reasons are there to not drop the bomb? Be sure they use facts and figures to support their answers.



"Victory in Japan" dance, Washington, D.C.?

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Harry Truman, half-length portrait, seated at desk, facing front, holding pencil]. CALL NUMBER
Item in PRES FILE - Truman, Harry--Seated at desk <P&P>

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“Little Denise Davidson, 5 months old, sleeps peacefully while her mother, Mrs. Donald Davidson, of 278 Clinton St., Bklyn., marches with ban-the-bomb group outside the United Nations. . . .” Dick DeMarsico. Photograph, 1962. New York World-Telegram and Sun Collection. Prints and Photographs Division. LC-USZ62-126854.