

Hiroshima and Nagasaki: A Turning Point in History

pdf version

This lesson plan was created by Sarah Brown, outreach assistant at Carolina Asia Center.

Note: This lesson plan contains some violent images and interviews. It may not be suitable for younger audiences.

Some activities were adapted from a lesson plan by Stanford History Education Group at Stanford University.

Grade Level/Duration:

- High School World History, American History II, AP World History, and AP U.S. History
- Duration: 1-2 days

Lesson Objectives:

- Analyze both the American point of view and the Japanese point of view of World War II and the atomic bomb using primary sources
- Debate if America should have dropped the atomic bomb through evidence-based arguments
- Determine the lasting impact of this turning point in history

Standards:

World History:

WH.H.1.2, WH.H.1.3, WH.H.1.4, WH.H.7.1, WH.H.7.2, WH.H.8.2

American History II:

AH2.H.1.2, AH2.H.1.3, AH2.H.1.4, AH2.H.6.2, AH2.H.7.1, *Optional Extension: AH2.H.7.2*

Mini-Lesson:

One can begin the lesson in two ways. Teachers can do a daily question on the board. While everyone is settling in for the first 10 minutes of class, teachers can have students answer some of the following questions written on the board: What do you know about the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Do you think we should have dropped them? After ten minutes, begin a discussion on what students think on the topic. Teachers can also just begin a discussion without the daily questions depending on the morning routine. This will be a way to gauge previous knowledge and any strong viewpoints. Review what led up to the atomic bomb from previous classes. Some potential questions you could ask covering this could be: Where did the U.S. invade in Japan? When did Nazi Germany surrender? What was fire-bombing? What was the state of the Japanese empire?

Pass out the graphic organizers. Have students take brief notes on the logistics of the atomic bomb under "History of the Bomb." Some information can be found in a timeline given below. Make sure to include the New Mexico test, Robert Oppenheimer's viewpoint, and the B-29 bomber. Introduce today's activities. The atomic bomb is one of the most controversial turning points in history. It is important to have a complete historical narrative from both American and Japanese citizens. It is easy as Americans to only look at our side, but as global citizens we must look at the full picture. Students will analyze sources to evaluate this debate.

Activities:

Start by dividing the class in half with a research group for the Japanese point of view and a research group for the American point-of-view. The whole class will listen to primary accounts of what happened at Hiroshima and World War II. Introduce Raymond Albert Brittain, a fire controlman second class in unit USS Tennessee. He was in Pearl Harbor during the attack and he was in Japan immediately after the surrender. Play the clip from the Veterans History Project by the Library of Congress "Seeing preparations for invasion- knowing the atomic bombs ended the war" or 21:34-22:22. Emphasize Raymond felt he would have died without the atomic bomb because he saw the extensive preparations the Japanese did before the war to keep fighting.

Play the clip from the Southern Oral History Program. Introduce Keiko Fore. She was a twelve-year-old girl in Hiroshima when the bomb hit. She later immigrated to North Carolina. At the time of the bomb, she was in an all-girls school, while her sister was at a different school in Hiroshima. Before this clip, she tells how her school building collapsed on her, but she climbed out. Play the clip from Southern Oral History Program 27:00-28:41 for younger audiences (not as graphic) about her experiences when she first emerges from the rubble. Play the clip at 28:55-30:19 for more mature audiences about some of the suffering she saw. Emphasize the extensive destruction of Hiroshima and the lives of the civilians living in the city at the time.

Have students work in pairs from the same research group to analyze the other primary source documents. Ask them to write in their graphic organizer their thoughts on what the Japanese or American views are, but they must cite evidence for every point they make. After sufficient time has passed, have them get into groups consisting of two American point of view research group members with two Japanese point of view research group members to collaborate.

Have the class share and discuss their findings. Ask them to debate these competing historical narratives. Should America have dropped the bomb? Ask them what evidence in their packets are historical interpretations versus historical fact. Does this weigh in the debate? John W. Dower in "Three Narratives of our Humanity" explains there are two predominant historical narratives about the atomic bomb- "Hiroshima as Victimization" and "Hiroshima as Triumph." Do you think this is true and why? Finish the graphic organizer together discussing both sides of the argument.

Transition into the next segment. Ask them if the atomic bomb has affected modern life? If so, how? Pass out the article on North Korea. Explain how North Korea just performed their fifth nuclear test. The international community is enraged. What evidence does North Korea's nuclear tests lend to the effects of the atomic bomb? Use this to transition into their next assignment.

Tell students that they are going to determine what were some of the effects of the atomic bomb using the handout to guide their research. This handout explores the short-term effects on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and Soviet Union's increase military competition with the U.S. It analyzes different events from the next few decades to give students an idea of the long-term effects. Students will evaluate how this turning point affected contemporary issues using the handout to guide research. Teachers can vary the difficulty of the handout by deciding whether to include web links. Some of the questions serve as an introduction into future units.

Come together and discuss the impact of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki on history. What are some of the historical data for the short-term effects of the atomic bombs? Make sure to emphasize the effects of atomic fallout. When discussing the effects of the atomic bombs today, show kids Carlos Labs simulation of targeting a city with an atomic bomb and the resulting amount of fallout. For number 2 on the handout, ask students follow-up questions on if they think Japan would have surrendered without the atomic bomb. What do they think of the quote by Henry Stimson "... the Japanese became so subdued that the great undertaking of occupation and disarmament was completed with unprecedented ease"? How does this quote reflect on other U.S. foreign policies they have studied? Do they think the short-term effects of the aftermath of the atomic bombs outweigh the effects of Japanese surrender? For number 3 on the handout, how did nationalism play a role in the aftermath of the atomic bomb with regards to the relationship with Russia? What does

David Holloway think of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki? For number 4, review what happened at the Marshall Islands and the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ask them if they think the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty came about it. Can they think of other policies that came as a result of the atomic bomb?

Assessment:

One can grade the fifth question in the handout on the Effects of the Atomic Bomb or their graphic organizers.

Extensions:

Ask students to write a letter to Harry Truman describing whether they agree or disagree with his decision to drop the atomic bomb. Ask them to cite at least three pieces of evidence to support their viewpoint.

Have students pretend they are at the Nuclear Security Summit. Ask them to work in teams of two to put on a presentation to all the attending countries on the impact of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in history, particularly today's politics.

Have students research Japanese-American Internment Camps. Ask them to write an essay comparing America's reaction to the atomic bomb to America's reaction to Japanese-American Internment camps. Ask them to cite at least three pieces of evidence to support their viewpoint.

One can give their students practice DBQ for either World or American History. Provided below.

Resources:

-[Atomic Bomb Graphic Organizer](#)

-[Timeline: The Road to Hiroshima](#): Timeline to teach about the Atomic Bomb
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4785786>

-[American Oral History](#): Interview with Raymond Albert Brittain from the Veterans History Project by the Library of Congress

<http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.09596/>

-[Japanese Oral History](#): Interview with Keiko Fore from the Southern Oral History Project

<http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/sohp/id/15985/rec/1>

-[Primary Source Documents - American POV](#)

-[Primary Source Documents - Japanese POV](#)

-[Article on Nuclear Tests in North Korea](#)

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/08/asia/north-korea-seismic-activity/>

-[Carlos Lab Simulation Ground Zero II: Targeting a City with an Atomic Bomb](#)

<http://www.carloslabs.com/node/20>

-[Handout on the Effects of the Atomic Bomb](#)

-[Practice DBQ from Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility](#)

<http://www.morningsidecenter.org/teachable-moment/lessons/practice-dbq-decision-drop-atomic-bomb-hiroshima-nagasaki>

[-Bibliography](#)