

Sample Social Studies Learning Plan

Big Idea/ Topic

Debate: Should Truman Have Used Nuclear Weapons on Japan?

Connecting Theme/Enduring Understanding:

Conflict and Change: The student will understand that when there is conflict between or within societies, change is the result.

Conflict Resolution: The students will understand that societies resolve conflicts through legal procedures, force, and/or compromise.

Essential Questions:

- What reasons did the United States (and President Truman) give for using nuclear weapons against Japan at the end of WWII?
- How can we use writing and speech to persuade others to see our point of view?
- How does the source of information affect its accuracy?
- How do we use evidence from resources to support our writing / speaking?

Standard Alignment

SS5H4 Explain America's involvement in World War II.

b. Describe major events in the war in both Europe and the Pacific; include Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, D-Day, VE and VJ Days, and the Holocaust.

c. Discuss President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Connection to Literacy Standards for Social Studies and Social Studies Matrices

ELAGSE5RI1 Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

ELAGSE5W1 Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons. a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose. b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details. c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses (e.g., consequently, specifically). d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

ELAGSE5W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in Standards 1–3 above.)

Map and Globe Skills –

- use graphic scales to determine distances on a map
- use map key/legend to acquire information from historical, physical, political, resource, product, and economic maps
- use a map to explain impact of geography on historical and current events
- draw conclusions and make generalizations based on information from maps
- compare maps with data sets (charts, tables, graphs) and /or readings to draw conclusions and make generalizations
- use geographic technology and software to determine changes, identify trends, and generalize about human activities

Information Processing Skills –

3. identify issues and/or problems and alternative solutions
4. distinguish between fact and opinion
5. identify main idea, detail, sequence of events, and cause and effect in a social studies context
6. identify and use primary and secondary sources
8. identify social studies reference resources to use for a specific purpose
10. analyze artifacts
- 11 draw conclusions and make generalizations
15. determine adequacy and/or relevancy of information



Instructional Design

***This lesson has a flexible timeline and will cross over several days.**

This lesson is intended to reach students in a virtual setting, whether plugged or unplugged. See bottom of lesson for list of unplugged supplies.

In this lesson, students will combine their knowledge of WWII, research, and resources with their knowledge of opinion / persuasive writing to debate the question of Truman's use of nuclear weapons to end WWII.

This lesson picks up with the island hopping campaign the US was undertaking in the Pacific and assumes students have already learned why the US entered the war and about Japan's aggressive moves towards other Asian countries and the fascism of Hirohito.

Part 1: In this section, students learn what led up to Truman's decision to use nuclear weapons against Japan. Students will choose a side for their debate (free choice is preferable, but there must be enough students who have chosen opposing points of view in order to have an opposing team to debate):

1. Truman was justified in his use of nuclear weapons against Japan. OR
2. Truman was not justified in his use of nuclear weapons against Japan.

Students will gather research and organize facts and supporting evidence for their arguments and counter arguments.

Teacher led

The teacher will explain the difference between primary and secondary sources and demonstrate how one is not better or more accurate than the other. Primary sources are from someone who was there when it happened and are often mistakenly considered "better", but primary sources have emotions and a limited point of view than can distort their information, whereas secondary sources do not have first-hand experience, but have the benefit of hindsight and being able to bring together multiple sources to construct their viewpoint.

It is assumed students have already learned the significance of Iwo Jima and the Island Hopping Campaign the US military was engaging in to give us bases in the Pacific in order to prepare for a land invasion of Japan and end the war. If not, this material will need to be covered and some resources are provided below to assist with that. The teacher should also explain to students that it had been forecasted that a land invasion of Japan and their eventual surrender would take about six months to complete. Many of the estimates for US casualties are based on this information.

The teacher will share the attached primary and secondary source documents with students and front-load any necessary vocabulary or other knowledge that could make these documents inaccessible to your specific students.

Activity

Students break into small virtual groups to analyze each artifact (provided below) and answer the analysis questions that accompany each document. It may be necessary to remind students that there can be many ways to interpret these documents and they should listen to and be accepting of each person's point of view.

*Unplugged variation –

The teacher can print out the resources and questions below and allow students to answer them independently.



Part 2: Students use research gathered in Part 1 to prepare opening speeches or presentations for use during their debate. Debates are preferable as that format utilizes speaking and listening skills as well as provides for a more engaging experience, but if technology does not allow, students can prepare PowerPoints or some other format of presentation instead.

Teacher led

If students are unfamiliar with persuasive writing, you may wish to share an example that draws on background knowledge they already have of advertisements as well as the sample outline provided below for organizing their ideas. Students may find it easier to follow the example below if you provide them with the outline beforehand.

Example ad:

Come on down to Ms. Smith's Car Dealership for your new car (*Topic and opinion clearly stated*).

We have a lot of cars (*Main reason 1*).

We have red cars, blue cars, even purple cars; whatever color you want, we have. (*supporting detail 1*).

Need a truck? We have those! A van? No problem. Sports car? We've got those too (*supporting details*).

We've got the best prices in town! (*Main reason 2*)

No one else can match our prices. (*supporting detail*).

We can save you a ton of money over the competition (*supporting detail and / or counter argument*)

Our sales staff is friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable (*Main reason 3*).

If you've got questions, we've got answers! (*supporting details*)

So come on down to Ms. Smith's Car Dealership today to get your brand new car! (*Restatement – call for action*).

The teacher will explain that persuasive writing is different from other types of writing in that you are trying to persuade someone to do something or to believe something. In the case of debates, you are trying to persuade people to see your side of a specific issue. Their debate will consist of 2 parts – 1: An opening speech or presentation 2: A question and answer period.

Activity

Students will then work in small groups to take the facts that they gathered in step one to complete an outline for their opening speeches. They will use the outline format below, and then use their outlines to create a speech or presentation. Students may work together to create one speech per group or if you are doing the unplugged variation you may wish to have students work independently.



***Unplugged variation to parts 2 AND 3–** Students use research gathered in Part 1 to prepare a speech or presentation explaining their opinion as to whether Truman was justified in using atomic weapons or not. Because students are not able to debate live, they could either record their debate portion or write up their debate. Make sure there is an opportunity to share their debates with classmates to have their opinions heard and validated. Share their debates and communicate classmates' feedback with unplugged students if possible.

Part 3: Students will participate in an online debate to argue whether Truman's use of nuclear weapons on Japan was justified.

The teacher will explain the format of the debate and the expectations for the group. Each group will be responsible for one opening speech, several questions to ask the other team, and to prepare for possible answers to questions they may be asked. It is important to explain to students that questions in a debate are different from questions when we don't understand something. The questions should be designed more as ways to point out flaws in the other team's arguments or to point out counter-arguments, but must still be in the form of an answerable question.

Teams will be paired with an opposing team (1 team that is pro Truman's decision and one anti). Each team will give their opening speech (flip a coin to choose who goes first), then each team takes a turn asking the opposing team a question and that team answers) You may need to limit the question part to 1-2 minutes per team.

Students can be allowed to choose how to share responsibilities for the debate among all team members or the teacher may choose to do this for them. Roles will depend on group size, but all children should at least have some "speaking" part (for example, each child on the team handles one big idea / reason with its supporting details each and two take turns answering and asking questions of the opposing team...)

Activity

Students prepare, practice and complete their debates.

Opportunities for Extension:

- This lesson is already quite differentiated and complex, however there are a few ways to extend it.
- Students can complete a likert scale type survey (there are many online survey tools) to indicate how much a team changed their point of view as a result of their speech and questions.
- Students can write a reflective journal entry after the debates to explain what they learned and how their point of view may have been changed by what they heard in the debates.
- Teams can follow up their debates with a group reflection of what worked and what didn't and how they could have improved their speeches.
- The teacher can share more artifacts that deal with Truman's decision.



Opinion Writing Outline Formatting Guide

Example ad:

Come on down to Ms. Smith's Car Dealership for your new car (*Topic and opinion clearly stated*).

We have a lot of cars (*Main reason 1*).

We have red cars, blue cars, even purple cars; whatever color you want, we have. (*supporting detail 1*).

Need a truck? We have those! A van? No problem. Sports car? We've got those too (*supporting details*).

We've got the best prices in town! (*Main reason 2*)

No one else can match our prices. (*supporting detail*).

We can save you a ton of money over the competition (*supporting detail and / or counter argument*)

Our sales staff is friendly, helpful, and knowledgeable (*Main reason 3*).

If you've got questions, we've got answers! (*supporting details*)

So come on down to Ms. Smith's Car Dealership today to get your brand new car! (*Restatement – call for action*).

Topic and opinion:

I. Main reason 1

- A. Supporting detail or fact
- B. Supporting detail or fact
- C. Counter argument or supporting fact

II. Main reason 2

- A. Supporting detail or fact
- B. Supporting detail or fact
- C. Counter argument or supporting fact

III. Main reason 2

- A. Supporting detail or fact
- B. Supporting detail or fact
- C. Counter argument or supporting fact

Restatement / Call for action



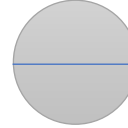
Artifact 1: [Map of the destruction for Hiroshima](#)

Analysis Questions for Hiroshima Map

Open the map "[Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima](#)" or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. The diameter of a circle is the measurement across its widest part.



Using the mileage on the key or legend on the map, determine how miles across the city (the diameter) all structures destroyed.

_____ miles across

2. President Truman was told that Hiroshima was a military target – not a civilian one. What structures were destroyed that were military structures?

3. What structures were civilian (not military) structures?

4. Look at text box 1 on the map: What was the date Japan refused to surrender at the Potsdam Conference?

_____.

On what date can you infer Truman authorized the use of atomic weapons on Japan? _____

Why do you think this is important? _____

5. How would the bombing have affected the railroads noted on the map? How would this have impacted the people still living after the bombing? How would it have affected the military targets?



Artifact 2: [Szilard Petition](#) – letter to the president arguing against the use of atomic weapons against Japan: [Text of letter](#) in case the image is too hard for students to see.

July 3, 1945

A PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

[The creation of the atomic bomb] places in your hands, as Commander-in-Chief, the fateful decision whether or not to sanction the use of such bombs in the present phase of the war against Japan.

We, the undersigned scientists, have been working in the field of atomic power for a number of years. Until recently we have had to reckon with the possibility that the United States might be attacked by atomic bombs during this war and that her only defense might lie in a counterattack by the same means. Today with this danger averted we feel impelled to say what follows:

The war has to be brought speedily to a successful conclusion and the destruction of Japanese cities by means of atomic bombs may very well be an effective method of warfare. We feel, however, that such an attack on Japan could not be justified in the present circumstances. We believe that the United States ought not to resort to the use of atomic bombs in the present phase of the war, at least not unless the terms which will be imposed upon Japan after the war are publicly announced and subsequently Japan is given an opportunity to surrender....

Atomic bombs are primarily a means for the ruthless annihilation of cities. Once they were introduced as an instrument of war it would be difficult to resist for long the temptation of putting them to such use.

....

Atomic power will provide the nations with new means of destruction. The atomic bombs at our disposal represent only the first step in this direction and there is almost no limit to the destructive power which will become available in the course of this development. Thus a nation which sets the precedent of using these newly liberated forces of nature for purposes of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale.

In view of the foregoing, we, the undersigned, respectfully petition that you exercise your power as Commander-in-Chief to rule that the United States shall not, in the present phase of the war, resort to the use of atomic bombs.

Leo Szilard and 58 co-signers



Analysis Questions for Szilard Petition (Artifact 2):

Analysis Questions for Szilard Petition

Open the ["Szilard Petition"](#) or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. Who is the "Commander-in-Chief" this letter is addressed to?

2. Who (what group of people) is this letter from or written by?

3. In the second paragraph the scientists explain why they thought building the atomic bomb was necessary. What reason do they give (in your own words)?

4. In the third paragraph, what reasons do they give for the US using an atomic bomb on a Japanese city?

5. In the third paragraph, what do they say should happen before we even consider bombing Japan with an atomic bomb?

6. In the fourth and fifth paragraph, what are they worried will happen once the first atomic bomb gets used?



Artifact 3: [Truman diary entry](#) (minor edits to remove language that may be offensive).

We have discovered the most terrible bomb in the history of the world.

This weapon is to be used against Japan between now and August 10th. **I have told the Sec. of War, Mr. Stimson, to use it so that military objectives and soldiers and sailors are the target and not women and children.** Even if the [Japanese are ...] ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop that terrible bomb on the old capital or the new.

He and I are in accord. The **target will be a purely military one** and we will issue a warning statement asking the [Japanese] to surrender and save lives. I'm sure they will not do that, but we will have given them the chance. It is certainly a good thing for the world that Hitler's crowd or Stalin's did not discover this atomic bomb. It seems to be the most terrible thing ever discovered, but it can be made the most useful...

Truman quoted in Robert H. Ferrell, *Off the Record: The Private Papers of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980) pp. 55-56. Truman's writings are in the public domain.

Analysis Questions for Truman Diary Entry

Open the "Truman Diary Entry" or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. What type of target did Truman say the bomb was to be used on? How do you know that?

2. What does Truman say must happen before our military uses the bomb on Japan?

3. Is Truman conflicted (unsure) about how he feels about using the bomb? What does he say that supports your answer? _____



Artifact 4: [Oak Ridge Petition](#) – Scientists that worked on the bomb wrote this petition that its power be demonstrated to the world and Japan before it would actually be used in order to get them to surrender so it would not have to be used.

To the President of the United States:

We, the undersigned scientific personnel of the Clinton Laboratories, believe that the world-wide social and political consequences of the power of the weapon now being developed on this Project impose a special moral obligation on the government and people of the United States in introducing the weapon in warfare.

It is further believed that the power of this weapon should be made known by demonstration to the peoples of the world, irrespective of the course of the present conflict, for in this way the body of world opinion may be made the determining factor in the absolute preservation of peace.

Therefore we recommend that before this weapon be used without restriction in the present conflict, its powers should be adequately described and demonstrated, and the Japanese nation should be given the opportunity to consider the consequences of further refusal to surrender. We feel that this course of action will heighten the effectiveness of the weapon in this war and will be of tremendous effect in the prevention of future wars.



Analysis Questions for The Oak Ridge Petition (Artifact 4):

Analysis Questions for The Oak Ridge Petition

Open the [“Oak Ridge Petition”](#) or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. Who is this letter is addressed to?

2. Who (what group of people) is this letter from or written by?

3. What do the scientists believe the US should do with the bomb before using it against Japan as a weapon of war?

4. What do they think a demonstration of the bomb might cause Japan to do?

5. What do they think such a demonstration would do for the future?



Artifact 5: [From Admiral Leahy](#)

(Chief of Staff to Presidents Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman) "It is my opinion that the use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons. "The lethal possibilities of atomic warfare in the future are frightening. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children." - William Leahy, I Was There, pg. 441.

Analysis Questions for Admiral Leahy Letter (Artifact 5):

Analysis Questions for Admiral Leahy Letter

Open the "[Admiral Leahy Letter](#)" or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. Who is this letter is addressed to?

2. Who is this letter from or written by and what is his job?

3. Using a dictionary (online or physical), look up the word barbarous. Look up "[material](#)" using the [Oxford online dictionary](#) (look at the 2nd meaning when used as an **adjective**). How does Admiral Leahy feel about using the bomb on Japan? Use the text of his letter to support your opinion.

4. Does he feel it will be of any use? What reason does he give for his opinion?

5. What weapons or war strategies does he feel were better than using the bomb or were making it so Japan would surrender?



Artifact 6: From President Truman's reflection - Below is a letter written by Harry Truman on January 12, 1953 to Prof. James L. Cate which seems to clearly present his understanding of the necessity of using the atomic bombs to end World War II.

THE WHITE HOUSE
Washington
January 12, 1953

My Dear Professor Cate;

...

I asked General Marshall what it would cost in lives to land on the Tokyo plain and other places in Japan. It was his opinion that such an invasion would cost at a minimum one quarter of a million casualties, and might cost as much as a million, on the American side alone, with an equal number of the enemy. The other military and naval men present agreed. I asked Secretary Stimson which sites in Japan were devoted to war production. He promptly named Hiroshima and Nagasaki, among others. We sent an ultimatum to Japan. It was rejected.

Analysis Questions for President Truman's Reflection (Artifact 6):

Analysis Questions for President Truman's Reflection

Open "[President Truman's Reflection letter](#)" or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. When was this letter written? How much time had passed since the bombing of Japan?

2. How many people did General Marshall tell President Truman would die if the US had to invade Japan to force them to surrender? How many of those losses would have been Americans?



3. Why did Truman choose Nagasaki and Hiroshima?

4. Do you think he regrets his decision to drop the bomb? Why or why not (use evidence from his letter to support your opinion)?



Artifact 7: From the [Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

With the United States planning a two-stage invasion of Japan in the fall of 1945 and spring of 1946, the outlook was grim. The military expected American casualties of 250,000 to one million. The government ordered up about 50,000 extra Purple Hearts for the campaign.

It was against this backdrop that Truman ordered the use of the atomic bomb. He did it to end the war - not to intimidate the Russians or wreak vengeance on the Japanese.

It is often forgotten that even after Hiroshima, the Japanese military was unwilling to surrender unconditionally. It was seeking to keep the emperor and the right to disarm itself, while rejecting any American occupation. It took a second atomic bomb and the Russian declaration of war to persuade the Japanese to give up.

For those who argue that the Japanese would have surrendered in a matter of weeks or months regardless of the nuclear bombs, it should be noted that Allied (mostly American) losses were running at 7,000 a week. There were also more than 100,000 Allied prisoners of war in Japanese camps where their treatment was horrific. Japanese military authorities in some camps were even planning to kill all the prisoners if American landings in Japan took place.



Analysis Questions for The Philadelphia Inquirer Article

Open the [“Philadelphia Inquirer Article”](#) or use the paper copy supplied by your teacher to answer the following questions. Discuss the answers with your group and come to an agreement as to what the answer is, or if you cannot agree, write both opinions.

Group Member Names: _____

1. Is this article a primary source or a secondary source – how do you know?

2. Does the author of this article believe Truman was justified in using the atomic bomb on Japan?

3. What does the author say it took to get Japan to surrender?

4. What can you infer he felt would happen during the added weeks it would have taken Japan to surrender if we had not bombed them?



Student Learning Supports

Ideas for Differentiation:

Our goal is for all students to be actively engaged using speaking, writing, illustrating, reading, and listening. Below are changes to the lesson to help achieve that goal for students who need additional support. Note: Be careful using these lessons for all students. If students are able to complete the activities on their own, it would be best to let them do this independently.

- Allow students to record their debate stating their opinion and supporting it with evidence.
- Lessen the number of artifacts or questions as appropriate.
- Use a document reader such as the read aloud feature in Word, Announcify, or Natural Reader to read texts for students.
- Allow students to use the dictate feature in Word or a talk to text feature to record their responses.

Unplugged Supplies: resource packet, interactive notebook/journal, highlighter, writing utensils, recording device (if possible)

Engaging Families

Materials included to support unplugged learners:

See resources above

Optional materials to support learning not included: blank paper, texts, trade books, etc.

Evidence of Student Success

Information for diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments are described within the Instructional Design.



Debate Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Ideas	3 solid main reasons were given with several clear and relevant supporting details for each.	3 main reasons were given with several clear and relevant supporting details for each.	2 main reasons were given with some supporting details for each.	Main reasons were inappropriate or unclear and not enough supporting detail was included. – reasons were like a list
Writing	The opening speech was well written with few or no mechanical errors; complete sentences; strong, descriptive language; and varied sentence structure.	The opening speech was well written with some mechanical errors; with some varied sentence structure. Errors did not interfere with meaning.	The opening speech had some mechanical errors that rarely interfered with meaning.	Speech had numerous errors that interfered with meaning significantly.
Teamwork	Team members shared tasks fairly and utilized the strengths of each person.	Team members shared tasks fairly and tried to utilize the strengths of each person.	Team members mostly shared tasks fairly.	Team members did not share tasks fairly or did not work well with each other.
Questions	The team prepared many thought provoking questions. Questions were appropriate and designed to help further show the team's point of view.	The team prepared some thought provoking questions. Questions were mostly appropriate and designed to help further show the team's point of view.	The team prepared a few questions that were mostly appropriate.	The team did not prepare a sufficient number of questions or questions were not appropriate.



WWII Debate Lesson Checklist

SS5H4 Explain America's involvement in World War II.

- b. Describe major events in the war in both Europe and the Pacific; include Pearl Harbor, Iwo Jima, D-Day, VE and VJ Days, and the Holocaust.
- c. Discuss President Truman's decision to drop the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Part 1:

- 1. Read the "Deciding to Drop the Bomb" section of the Duckster's article on WWII to get background information.
- 2. Read each artifact and answer the analysis questions for that artifact.

Part 2:

- 3. Reflecting on what you have read so far and the artifacts you have analyzed, how would you answer the question: Should Truman Have Used Nuclear Weapons on Japan?
- 4. Write down the main reasons you feel this way and the facts or supporting evidence you found for your reasons in your packet of artifacts. You should find at least 2 or 3 pieces of evidence to support each reason that you have for your opinion.

Remember, your opinion cannot be "wrong", but you do need to have the facts or details to justify it.

- 5. Organize your reasons and details into an outline using the sample format provided in your resources.
- 6. Use your outline to write a speech or create a presentation that clearly explains your opinion as to whether Truman should have used the atomic bomb or not.

Part 3:

- 7. Record or write your speech or presentation from part 2 for the class and submit it to your teacher.

