

Lesson Plan for Preparation and Lesson Delivery: WWII and the Atomic Bomb

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Background

The class has been studying a unit on World War II. Previously, the students have talked about the causes of the World War II and the reasons why the United States entered the war.

English proficiency level: Advanced

Grades: 7 and 8

Standards: Virginia Standards Of Learning. US History II:1877 to the present. 6b) Describe the major events and turning points of the war in Europe and the Pacific.

Preparation

Content Objectives: Students will explore three decisions about the atomic bomb faced by the U.S. during WWII, take a position on each, and defend their position orally:

- Decision A: Should the U.S. government build an atomic bomb?
- Decision B: Should the U.S. government drop the bomb on Japan to end the war?
- Decision C: In hindsight, did President Truman make the right decision?

Language Objectives: Students will:

- Read information for each decision in a small group and reach consensus on a position (by listening and discussing).
- State their position and orally defend it in a class dialogue.
- Disagree with prior speakers in a respectful manner.
- Defend a position in writing on whether or not it was justifiable to use the bomb on Japan.

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Materials:

- *History Alive*, (Teacher’s Curriculum Institute, 1997) slides of Albert Einstein answering questions, President Truman’s swearing in, a victim of Hiroshima, and images of the city before and after, and slide projector.
- Social studies interactive notebooks.
- Readings for each group, with text adapted from *History Alive* student handouts.
- Timeline on overhead for background information. Graphic organizer for each group to record their position and reasons for each decision. Transparency of warm-up assignment and homework writing assignment.

Motivation

Seat students in groups of three (pre-selected for complementary skills) and assign the warm-up topic. On the overhead, write the following situation:

A good friend of yours has told you that she or he has been very depressed lately and is thinking about committing suicide. He or she was very specific about the method and time, and so you know that this person is serious. You’re asked to swear that you will not tell anyone.

Is it OK to break your vow of secrecy if it means saving your friend’s life? In other words, is it OK to do something “bad” to achieve something good?” Do the ENDS justify the MEANS?

Give students 3 minutes to write in their social studies notebooks, then have them share their responses in their small group. Ask for a sampling of opinions from each group.

Draw a continuum on the overhead from “Always” to “Never.” Have the students copy and place an “X” on the continuum showing their answer to the question, “How often do the ends justify the means?”

Always

Sometimes

Never

Presentation

Briefly introduce the developments in atomic physics in the years leading up to and during WWII. Use a timeline graphic. Tell students that they will be discussing three important decisions facing the U.S. government and people concerning the atomic bomb.

Tell the groups to choose a reader, recorder, and a presenter and explain that these jobs will rotate for each decision. Using place cards that list these roles, students can place the correct place card in front of the person doing that job, and switch for each new decision. Describe the task to students. They will discuss the prompt, agree on an option, write their reasons, and prepare their presenter. Distribute the first set of handouts for students to read and discuss along with the graphic organizer to record their decision and reasons. Have groups begin.

Practice

After 5 minutes, tell the students that they will now have an “academic dialogue” among the groups. Choose one group to begin and tell them to prepare their presenter to state their position as outlined in the graphic organizer:

“Our group thinks that President Roosevelt should ... because ... Does anyone have another opinion?”

Have the presenter stand, face the class, and begin the discussion. Coach student regarding body language, tone and voice. Next, find a group with a different position, and coach their presenter through responding respectfully:

“Your position is that ... but my group disagrees. We think that President Roosevelt should ... because ...”

Continue to coach the dialogue until each group has shared its decision. Mark the group responses on a continuum on the board to record and consider each group’s position.

Yes

Maybe

No

Then, reveal the actual decision that President Roosevelt made. Explain to the class that they will continue the same process with the next two decisions. At this point have students rotate roles. Then show slide #2 (Truman’s swearing in) and pass out student handouts. Instruct the groups to read the material, discuss the options, adopt a position, and write a response. When all groups are ready, choose one to begin the dialogue. Conduct the dialogue until all groups have

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shared, and record decisions on the continuum. Then reveal the decision that Truman made. Repeat the process, starting with slide #3 (victim of Hiroshima with the pattern of her kimono burned into her skin, and a before and after picture of the city). Distribute the student handouts and instruct the groups to read the material, discuss the options, adopt a position, and write a response. When all groups are ready, choose one to begin the dialogue. Conduct the dialogue until all groups have spoken and responses recorded. Reveal facts on public opinion after the war.

Review

As a wrap-up, have students write briefly in their notebooks on the same page as their warm-up, addressing the following:

“In your opinion, did the ends justify the means in the case of Truman’s decision to use the bomb to end WWII? Defend your position with specific reasons.”

Review the objectives on the board and ask the class if they were met.

Finally, encourage students to state outcome sentences : “I learned...” , “I was surprised...” , “I think...”.

Homework

Assign a written paragraph for homework allowing students to choose one of the following questions: “Why do you think that atomic weapons have not been used since WWII?” “Do you think all existing nuclear weapons should be destroyed?” “Should any country be allowed to develop and test a nuclear weapon?” “What is the likelihood that nuclear weapons will be used in the future?”