

Above and Below the Mushroom Cloud: Perspectives on the Atomic Bombings

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Introduction:

In this lesson, students explore political, military, and scientific reasons, motivations, and justifications for dropping the atomic bombs and, through atomic bomb survivors' stories, perspectives of everyday Japanese citizens' encounters with total war. For high school students, an optional activity involves viewing the documentary *White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. After exploring various perspectives of this history "above and below the mushroom cloud," students develop arguments about how the history of the atomic bombings should be told and what it means.

This lesson can end a unit about World War II in middle or high school World History or U.S. History courses. Students need foundational knowledge about the period to succeed with the lesson; they should know about (1) the brutality of World War II in both the European and Pacific Theaters (e.g., the Holocaust, the Nanjing Massacre, the Bataan Death March, the fire bombings of Dresden and Japanese cities); (2) topics such as propaganda, forced labor, B-29 and other air technology, 1931 invasion of Manchuria, Battle of Iwo Jima, the Potsdam Declaration; (3) main historical figures involved in decision-making in both the U.S. and Japanese governments; and (4) basic information about the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Objectives: After completing this lesson, students will be able to:

- Articulate different perspectives as to why the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the damage caused by nuclear weapons, and the impacts on civilians at these targets.
- Explore oral history testimonies and assess point of view and perspective.
- Construct an argument that addresses a specific perspective in the controversy over the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and use evidence to support their claim.

Guiding Questions:

- "What did it really *mean* to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?" (Dower 2006, p. 18)
- How should we remember the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and why?

Standards and Guidelines:

World History Content Standards

Era 8 (1900-1945)

Standard 4: The causes and global consequences of World War II.

Standard 4B: The student understands the global scope, outcome, and human costs of the war.

9-12: Compare World Wars I and II in terms of the impact of industrial production, political goals, national mobilization, technological innovations, and scientific research on strategies, tactics, and levels of destruction.

Standard 5: Major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II.

Standard 5A: The student understands major global trends from 1900 to the end of World War II.

5-12: Explain how new technologies and scientific breakthroughs both benefited and imperiled humankind.

AP® World History Curriculum Framework

Period 6: Accelerating Global Change and Realignment, c. 1900 to the Present

Key Concept 6.1 Science and the Environment

III. Disease, scientific innovations, and conflict led to demographic shifts.

C. Improved military technology and new tactics led to increased levels of wartime casualties.

Key Concept 6.2 Global Conflicts and Their Consequences

V. Although conflict dominated much of the twentieth century, many individuals and groups—including states—opposed this trend. Some individuals and groups, however, intensified the conflicts.

A. Groups and individuals challenged the many wars of the century, and some promoted the practice of nonviolence as a way to bring about political change.

United States History Content Standards

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs.

Standard 3B: The student understands World War II and how the Allies prevailed.

7-12: Evaluate the decision to employ nuclear weapons against Japan and assess later controversies over the decision.

5-12: Explain the financial, material, and human costs of the war and analyze its economic consequences for the Allies and the Axis powers.

Standard 3C: The student understands the effects of World War II at home.

9-12: Evaluate the war's impact on science, medicine, and technology, especially in nuclear physics, weaponry, synthetic fibers, and television.

AP® U.S. History Curriculum Framework

Period 7: 1890-1945

Key Concept 7.3: Participation in a series of global conflicts propelled the United States into a position of international power while renewing domestic debates over the nation's proper role in the world.

III. U.S. participation in World War II transformed American society, while the victory of the United States and its allies over the Axis powers vaulted the U.S. into a position of global, political, and military leadership.

D) The United States and its allies achieved military victory through Allied cooperation, technological and scientific advances, the contributions of servicemen and women, and campaigns such as Pacific “island-hopping” and the D-Day invasion. The use of atomic bombs hastened the end of the war and sparked debates about the morality of using atomic weapons.

Common Core State Standards: Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies

Key Ideas and Details, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources [with additional details for grades 9-12].

Craft and Structure

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6: Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6: Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.9: Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

Common Core State Standards: Writing

Text Types and Purposes

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Plan for Assessment:

The argumentative essay assignment that concludes the lesson is intended as the assessment for the lesson. A rubric is available for teacher use or peer review.

Time Required:

Middle School: Two 50-minute class periods (Days 1 and 4 only) plus time to complete argumentative essay

High School: Two to four 50-minute class periods plus time to complete argumentative essay

Materials:

Materials Provided	Online Resources	Other Materials
Handouts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Education About Asia Interview with John Dower</i> (reading level: 12.4) • <i>Viewing Guide on Perspectives in White Light/Black Rain</i> (optional) • <i>Atomic Bomb Survivor's Testimony Analysis Worksheet</i> Assessment Tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Argumentative Essay Rubric</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki</i> (optional) • <i>Testimonies of Hibakusha (Atomic Bombing Survivors)</i> (video or text with reading level: range from 6.8 to 9.4) • <i>The National Peace Memorial Halls for the Atomic Bomb Victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Global Network</i> (video or text with reading level: range from 5.7 to 12.5) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki</i>. Stephen Okazaki. HBO Films. August 6, 2007. PG-13. (optional)

Implementation:**Pre-Lesson Activities**

For homework, assign students to read their textbook's account of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki if they have not already done so. As an alternative, students might explore one of the many websites that cover the bombings. The sites listed here are just four of many available resources:

- Hiroshima and Nagasaki Remembered, National Science Foundation Digital Library, <http://www.hiroshima-remembered.com/>.
- The Atomic Bomb: Hiroshima and Nagasaki, National History Education Clearinghouse, <http://teachinghistory.org/history-content/beyond-the-textbook/25484>.
- Hiroshima Peace Site, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, <http://hpmuseum.jp/?lang=eng>
- Nagasaki City – Peace & Atomic Bomb, Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum, <http://nagasakipeace.jp/english.html>.

Day 1

1. Ask if students have any questions about what they read about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and answer their questions to ensure they understand basic information about the bombings as context for this lesson.
2. Distribute the *Education About Asia Interview with John Dower* handout, assigning students to read and annotate this secondary resource, which is an interview with historian John Dower conducted by educator Lynn Parisi. Through this reading and the follow-up discussion, set the tone and analytic-thinking process in preparation for the essay assignment.

3. Lead a discussion using the following questions and asking students to provide evidence to support their answers:
 - According to Professor Dower, what are the reasons the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima? Why does he say it was again used on Nagasaki?
 - Was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima necessary to end the Pacific War? Was the bombing of Nagasaki necessary to end the war?
 - Why did the Japanese finally submit to “unconditional surrender” (as outlined in the Potsdam Declaration) on August 15, 1945?
 - World War II was a “total world war.” What does this mean?
 - Where is “Ground Zero”? (*The hypocenter of an explosion, as in New Mexico, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, New York City, the Pentagon*)
 - How/why is “official” wartime different in terms of targeting civilians?

Days 2-3 (Optional for High School Classes Only)

4. In preparation for viewing the documentary, have students read the Wikipedia entry on the film, [White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), to familiarize themselves with the interviewees.
5. Introduce the **Viewing Guide on Perspectives in White Light/Black Rain**, which describes the students’ task: to note different perspectives of those involved in the atomic bombings. Begin showing *White Light/Black Rain: The Destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (83 minutes).
6. Complete viewing the documentary and the **Viewing Guide on Perspectives in White Light/Black Rain**.

Day 4

7. Tell students that they will be reading and/or viewing recollections by people affected by the bombings, recorded some years after they occurred. All of the recollections are from *hibakusha*—the name given to survivors of the atomic bombings (*hibakusha* literally translates to “people exposed to the bomb”). As homework or in-class assignment, give each student a testimony by an atomic bomb survivor to read and/or listen to (you may choose specific survivors for specific students based on comprehension skills). Recollections can be selected from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan—Testimonies of *Hibakusha* (Atomic Bombing Survivors) webpage (http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/arms/testimony_of_hibakusha/index.html) and/or The National Peace Memorial Halls for the Atomic Bomb Victims in Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Global Network website (http://www.global-peace.go.jp/en/en_index.php).
8. Have students view and/or read the testimony, assessing point of view and perspective in preparation for sharing with classmates. Distribute the **Atomic Bomb Survivor’s Testimony Analysis Worksheet** for students to use to organize their analysis.
9. *For middle school:* Offer guided practice in analyzing the testimonies for bias, point of view, audience, purpose, author, date, etc.
10. When students have completed their analysis, place students into pairs or small groups to share the testimonies they viewed and/or read. They should use categories from the **Atomic Bomb Survivor’s Testimony Analysis Worksheet** to structure the discussions.

11. Debrief as a class to ensure students understand all of the damages and effects of the atomic explosions on the victims, the social and economic implications, and survivors' thoughts about nuclear proliferation and peace.
12. Introduce the final assignment, in which students are to write a persuasive or argumentative essay answering the following question: Should the history of the atomic bombings be told and remembered from above or beneath the mushroom cloud? That is, should this history be told from the perspective of the government officials whose decisions led to the bombing or from the perspective of the people on the ground in Hiroshima and Nagasaki? Students must use evidence from the resources they have examined in the lesson to support their answer. Distribute the **Argumentative Essay Rubric** and go over it with students, explaining that it identifies what you will be looking for in grading the essays.
13. Depending on level (middle school or high school AP, honors, or regular classes), give a week to two weeks to write and turn in the essay. You may wish to provide class time for working on the essay or the work can be done out of class; you may also choose to have students do the work independently or in pairs/small groups.

Extensions:

1. Supplement the reading of the John Dower interview with Peter Jennings' report, "Hiroshima: Why the Bomb Was Dropped" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9-WnLNLe3sk>). This documentary was produced in the wake of the controversy surrounding the 1995 Smithsonian Air and Space Museum's 50th Anniversary exhibition on the use of the atom bombs in Japan. Specifically, it addresses the official U.S. government narrative versus what historical evidence of the period indicates about reasons behind the use of the atom bombs in Japan.
2. In addition to analyzing survivor testimony, students could view survivors' illustrated testimonies from the book, *A-bomb Drawings by Survivors*. The "Ground Zero 1945" unit on the MIT *Visualizing Cultures* website presents many of these images (<http://ocw.mit.edu/ans7870/21f/21f.027/groundzero1945/index.html>).
3. Use an excerpt from the manga *Barefoot Gen*, by atomic bomb survivor Keiji Nakazawa, to introduce the impact of the atomic bombing on the ground or as a supplement to students' readings of survivor testimonies.

Resources and References:

City of Hiroshima. *A-bomb Drawings by Survivors*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2007.

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