

The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima

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Prior to the dropping of the atomic bomb, President Harry Truman was faced with a major decision. With the surrender of Germany on May 8, 1945, the United States and its allies still had to bring an end to the war in the Pacific. At the same time, a four-year top-secret scientific project to develop a “super” bomb neared completion. The Manhattan Project had cost nearly \$2 billion dollars.

Truman hoped deployment of the weapon, an atomic bomb, would make it possible to avoid a planned November invasion of Japan that would involve over 750,000 troops with projected casualties of over 30,000 men. The use of the atomic bomb on Japan would save American lives, bring about a quick end to World War II, and serve as a warning to the Soviet Union about American military might. Very few moral questions were raised at the time and the decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki seems almost inevitable.

In the minds of many Americans, the atom bombing of Japanese cities served its purpose and was justified. Anti-Japanese feeling was rampant and stereotypes of the Japanese as a fanatical or sadistic people were very much a part of the American psyche.

A 1946 account of the impact of the bombing on the people of Hiroshima finally forced the American people to reconsider. Originally published in *The New Yorker* magazine, John Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, helped to penetrate the cloud of self-righteousness that had developed in the United States about the use of the atomic bomb. Before its publication, the American public was generally ignorant about just how destructive the bomb was. Photographs from Hiroshima focused on property damage and statistics about the loss of life hardly told the entire story. Many prominent military leaders had attributed the heavy loss of life in Hiroshima to faulty construction of homes or ruptured gas mains. Hersey’s work, which focused on six survivors, put a human face on the casualties and showed Americans why the atomic bomb was so devastating.

Hiroshima is an excellent book to use in the classroom as a starting point to examine and analyze the impact of the dropping of the atomic bomb. Modern warfare has significantly changed and this book, or the excerpts used in the attached activity sheets, can be used to discuss the important moral and ethical questions raised by the use of nuclear weapons.

The curriculum material with the document-based essay is designed to include a number of National Council for the Social Studies thematic strands. To fully understand the bombing of Japan and the aftermath, students should study the unique aspects of Japanese society (Culture, People, Places & Environments). The debate over the use of nuclear weapons examines the thematic strand Power, Authority & Governance. The actual development and capability of such weaponry addresses the Science, Technology and Society thematic strand.

Document Packet: Should the United States have dropped the Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Introduction: This document-based essay is based on the accompanying documents (1-9). It is designed to test your ability to work with historical documents. Some of the documents have been edited. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of each document and any point of view that may be presented in the document.

Historical Context: On August 6, 1945, a United States airplane, the Enola Gay, dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. Three days later, another bomb was dropped on the city of Nagasaki. Tens of thousands of civilians died in each attack. Following the second bomb, the Japanese government agreed to

unconditionally surrender, ending World War II.

Task: Using information from the documents and your knowledge of global history, answer the questions that follow each document in Part A. Your answers to the questions will help you write the Part B essay, in which you will be asked to:

Explain why the United States decided to use atom bombs against Japanese cities.

Describe the impact of the atomic bombings.

Explain your opinion on whether the use of atomic bombs against these cities was justified.

Note: Be sure to use specific evidence cited in the documents as well as outside knowledge about Global history.

Should the United States have dropped Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

1. Excerpt from statement by President Harry Truman, August 6, 1945.

Source: http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/small/mb10.htm

Sixteen hours ago an American airplane dropped one bomb on Hiroshima and destroyed its usefulness to the enemy. It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East. We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war. It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. Behind this air attack will follow sea and land forces in such number that and power as they have not yet seen and with the fighting skill of which they are already well aware.

1. What is the purpose of President Truman's statement?
2. Why does the President refer to the rejection of the Potsdam ultimatum in this statement?
3. What does he mean when he says the Japanese can expect a "rain of ruin from the air?"

2. Leaflet dropped on cities in Japan warning civilians about the atomic bomb, August 6, 1945.

Source: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/truman/psources/ps_leaflets.html

TO THE JAPANESE PEOPLE: America asks that you take immediate heed of what we say on this leaflet. We are in possession of the most destructive explosive ever devised by man. A single one of our newly developed atomic bombs is actually the equivalent in explosive power to what 2000 of our giant B-29s can carry on a single mission. This awful fact is for you to ponder and we solemnly assure you it is grimly accurate. We have just begun to use this weapon against your homeland. If you still have any doubt, make inquiry as to what happened to Hiroshima when just one atomic bomb fell on that city. Before using this bomb to destroy every resource of the military by which they are prolonging this useless war, we ask that you now petition the Emperor to end the war. Our president has outlined for you the thirteen consequences of an honorable surrender. We urge that you accept these consequences and begin the work of building a new, better and peace-loving Japan. You should take steps now to cease military resistance. Otherwise, we shall resolutely employ this bomb and all our other superior weapons to promptly and forcefully end the war. EVACUATE YOUR CITIES.

1. What does the leaflet warn about?
2. What is the United States demanding?
3. In your opinion, why did the United States make this direct appeal to the Japanese public?

3. Excerpt from President Truman's speech to the nation on August 9, 1945, shortly after the second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. Source: <http://www.dannen.com/decision/hst-ag09.html>

The world will note that the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, a military base. That was because we wished in this first attack to avoid, insofar as possible, the killing of civilians. But that attack is only a warning of things to come. If Japan does not surrender, bombs will have to be dropped on her war industries and, unfortunately, thousands of civilian lives will be lost. I urge Japanese civilians to leave industrial cities immediately, and save themselves from destruction. We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan's power to make war. Only a Japanese surrender will stop us.

1. Why do you think the president refers to Hiroshima as "a military base"?
2. Why would the U.S. president urge Japanese civilians to "save themselves from destruction"?



City of Hiroshima after nuclear attack



Makeshift hospital at Primary School

4. Excerpt from letter from President Truman to Sen. Richard Russell, August 9, 1945.

Source:

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/bomb/large/opinions_responses/bmd2-1.htm

I know that Japan is a terribly cruel and uncivilized nation in warfare but I can't bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should ourselves act in the same manner. For myself, I certainly regret the necessity of wiping out whole populations because of the "pigheadedness" of the leaders of a nation and, for your information, I am not going to do it unless it is absolutely necessary. It is my opinion that after the Russians enter into war the Japanese will very shortly fold up. My object is to save as many American lives as possible but I also have a humane feeling for the women and children in Japan.

1. How did President Truman describe Japan?
2. In your opinion, why did he describe Japan in this way?
3. If his assessment of Japan was accurate, did that justify the bombings? Explain.

5. Images of Nuclear Destruction. Source:

<http://www.spaceformusic.com/symposium2000/abombexhibit.html>

1. Describe the the city of Hiroshima following the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.
2. What emotions are evoked by these images?

6. From editorial in the *Nippon Times*, August 10, 1945. Source; *America in World War II*, p. 803.

How can a human being with any claim to a sense of moral responsibility deliberately let loose an instrument of destruction which can at one stroke annihilate an appalling segment of mankind? This is not war; this is not even murder; this is pure nihilism. This is a crime against God and humanity which strikes at the very basis of moral existence. The crime of the Americans stands out in ghastly repulsiveness all the more for the ironic contradiction it affords to their lying pretensions. For in their noisy statements, they have always claimed to be the champions of fairness and humanitarianism. But now beside the latest technique of total destruction which the Americans have adopted, their earlier crimes pale into relative insignificance. What more barbarous atrocity can there be than to wipe out at one stroke the population of a whole city

without distinction – men, women, and children; the aged, the weak, the infirm; those in positions of authority, and those with no power at all; all snuffed out without being given a chance of lifting even a finger in either defense or defiance!

The United States may claim, in a lame attempt to raise a pretext in justification of its latest action, that a policy of utter annihilation is necessitated by Japan's failure to heed the recent demand for unconditional surrender. But the question of surrendering or not surrendering certainly can have not the slightest relevance to the question of whether it is justifiable to use a method which under any circumstances is strictly condemned alike by the principles of international law and of morality. For this American outrage against the fundamental moral sense of mankind, Japan must proclaim to the world its protest against the United States, which has made itself the arch-enemy of humanity.

1. What is the purpose of this editorial?
2. What are the most important charges the editors are making?
3. In your opinion, is a Japanese newspaper justified in making these charges? Explain.

7. Statement by Emperor Hirohito, accepting the Potsdam Declaration, August 14, 1945.

Source: <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/hirohito.htm>

After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in our empire today, we have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure. We have ordered our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that our empire accepts the provisions of their joint declaration. We declared war on America and Britain out of our sincere desire to insure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement. But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone, the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest. Moreover, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization.

1. What is the purpose of this statement by the Emperor?
2. What reason does he give for the declaration of war on America and Britain?
3. In your opinion, what is the main reason for the Japanese issuing this statement?

8. Excerpt from petition to the President of the United States signed by 67 atomic scientists, signed in July 1945 and released to the public on August 17, 1945. Source: <http://www.dannen.com/decision/45-07-17.html>

This war has to be brought speedily to a successful conclusion and attacks by atomic bombs may very well be an effective method of warfare. We feel, however, that such attacks on Japan could not be justified. The development of atomic power will provide the nations with new means of destruction. Thus a nation which sets the precedent of using these newly liberated forces of nature for purpose of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale.

1. What is the position of the atomic scientists on the use of a nuclear weapon?
 2. Why do you think scientists who developed this capability would take this position?
9. Comparing the Destruction. Source: <http://www.w2guide.com/atombomb.shtml>

	Hiroshima	Nagasaki	Tokyo
Estimated Dead/Missing	70,000-80,000	35,000-40,000	83,000
Wounded	70,000	40,000	102,000
Total Casualties	140,000-150,000	75,000-80,000	185,000
Area Destroyed	4.7 sq. miles	1.8 sq. miles	15,8 sq. miles
Weapons	"Little Boy," 1 atomic bomb	"Fat Man," 1 atomic bomb	1,667 tons of TNT

1. What were the combined total casualties from the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
2. Why is the atomic bomb such a powerful weapon?

The Impact of the Atomic Bomb on the People of Japan – A First Hand Account

John Hersey's book, *Hiroshima* (NY: Knopf, 1956), was first published in November, 1946 in the magazine *The New Yorker*. It told the stories of six survivors of the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. It is a testament to the social and personal devastation caused by the bombing. These excerpts are from the story of Mrs. Nakamura and her children. As you read these excerpts, picture what is happening in your mind and then answer the questions. As follow-up activities: (a) illustrate these selections; (b) write a poem expressing your feelings about what you have read; (c) write a manifesto explaining your views on attacks on civilian populations during times of war and the use of nuclear weapons.

1. August 6, 1945. 8:15 AM, Hiroshima, Japan (*Hiroshima*, p. 13-14). Mrs. Nakamura went back to the kitchen, looked at the rice, and began watching the man next door. . . . As Mrs. Nakamura stood watching her neighbor, everything flashed whiter than any white she had ever seen. She did not notice what happened to the man next door; the reflex of a mother set her in motion toward her children. She had taken a single step (the house was 1,350 yards, or three-quarters of a mile, from the center of the explosion) when something picked her up and she seemed to fly into the next room over the raised sleeping platform, pursued by parts of her house. Timbers fell around her as she landed, and a shower of tiles pummeled her; everything became dark, for she was buried. The debris did not cover her deeply. She rose up and freed herself. She heard a child cry, "Mother, help me!" and saw her youngest — Myeko, the five year old — buried up to her breast and unable to move. As Mrs. Nakamura started frantically to claw her way toward the baby, she could see or hear nothing of her other children.

1. How far away was Mrs. Nakamura and her children from the center of the explosion?
2. Describe what happened to Mrs. Nakamura as a result of the explosion.
3. What do you think Mrs. Nakamura was feeling at this moment? Why?

Source for picture on right: <http://www.spaceformusic.com/symposium2000/abombexhibit.html>



A mother and child wait for treatment the day after the bombing. The 4 month-old did not have the strength to suckle. It died ten days later.

2. August 6, 1945, Directly after the dropping of the bomb, Hiroshima, Japan (*Hiroshima*, p. 27-29). Mrs. Hatsuyo Nakamura . . . crawled across the debris, hauled at timbers, and flung tiles aside, in a hurried effort to free the child. Then, from what seemed to be caverns far below, she heard two small voices crying, "Tasukete! Tasukete! Help! Help!" She called the names of her ten-year-old son and eight-year-old daughter: "Teshio! Yaeko!" The voices from below answered. Mrs. Nakamura abandoned Myeko, who at least could breathe, and in a frenzy made the wreckage fly above the crying voices. The children had been sleeping nearly ten feet apart, but now their voices seemed to come from the same place. Toshio, the boy, apparently had some freedom to move, because she could feel him undermining the pile of wood and tiles as she worked from above. At last she saw his head and she hastily pulled him out by it. A mosquito net

was wound intricately, as if it had been carefully wrapped, around his feet. He said he had been blown right across the room and had been on top of his sister Yaeko under the wreckage. She now said, from underneath, that she could not move, because there was something on her legs. With a bit more digging, Mrs. Nakamura cleared a hole above the child and began to pull her arm. "Itai! It hurts!" Yaeko cried. Mrs. Nakamura shouted, "There's no time now to say whether it hurts or not," and yanked her whimpering daughter up. Then she freed Myeko. The children were filthy and bruised, but none of them had a single cut or scratch. Mrs. Nakamura took the children out into the street. . . . The children were silent, except for the five-year-old. Myeko, who kept asking questions: "Why is it night already? Why did our house fall down? What happened?"

1. How was Mrs. Nakamura able to free her children?
2. What do you think the children were feeling when they left their house and observed the wreckage?

3. August 6, 1945. Mid-day. Hiroshima, Japan. (Hiroshima, p. 47-48). Mrs. Hataya, called to Mrs. Nakamura to run away with her to the woods in Asano Park-an estate, by the Kyo River not far off. . . . All day people poured into Asano Park. This private estate was far enough away from the explosion so that its bamboos, pines, laurel, and maples were still alive. . . . Mrs. Nakamura and her children were among the first to arrive, and they settled in the bamboo grove near the river. They all felt terribly thirsty, and they drank from the river. At once they were nauseated and began vomiting, and they retched the whole day.

1. Why did Mrs. Nakamura and her children head for Asano Park?
2. What happened when Mrs. Nakamura and her children drank the water from the river?

4. August 6, 1945. Early Evening. Hiroshima, Japan. (Hiroshima, p. 50-53). It began to rain. . . . The wind grew stronger and stronger, and suddenly . . . a whirlwind ripped through the park. Huge trees crashed down; small ones were uprooted and flew into the air. Higher, a wild array of flat things revolved in the twisting funnel. . . . The vortex moved out onto the river, where it sucked up a waterspout and eventually spent itself.

1. What happened that evening?
2. What would you have thought if you were in Asano park?

5. August 20- 26, 1945. Kabe, Japan (Hiroshima, p. 88-90). As she dressed on the morning of August 20th, in the home of her sister-in-law in Kabe, . . . Mrs. Nakamura, who had suffered no cuts or burns at all, though she had been rather nauseated all through the week, . . . began fixing her hair and noticed, after one stroke, that her comb carried with it a whole handful of hair; the second time, the same thing happened, so she stopped combing at once. But in the next three or four days, her hair kept falling out of its own accord, until she was quite bald.

1. Where did Mrs. Nakamura stay after leaving Asano Park?
2. Describe what was happening to Mrs. Nakamura physically. What do you think was causing this to happen?
3. What would you be thinking if you were Mrs. Nakamura or one of her children?

6. August, 1946. One year after the dropping of the atomic bomb. Hiroshima, Japan (Hiroshima, p. 118). Toshio Nakamura, who was ten at the time of the bombing, . . . wrote the following matter-of-fact essay for his teacher at Noboricho Primary School: "The day before the bomb, I went for a swim. In the morning, I was eating peanuts. I saw a light. I was knocked to little sister's sleeping place. When we were saved, I could only see as far as the tram. My mother and I

started to pack our things. The neighbors were walking around burned and bleeding. Hataya-san told me to run away with her. I said I wanted to wait for my mother. We went to the park. A whirlwind came. At night a gas tank burned and I saw the reflection in the river. We stayed in the park one night. Next day I went to Taiko Bridge and met my girl friends Kikuki and Murakami. They were looking for their mothers. But Kikuki's mother was wounded and Murakami's mother, alas, was dead.”

1. Describe the tone of Toshio Nakamura's essay.
2. Do you think your essay have been similar if you lived through the atomic blast on Hiroshima? Explain.
3. What would you include in your essay that Toshio did not include? Why?