



Going for the Win

Springboard:

Students should read “Island Hopping” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to explain how island hopping and use of the atomic bomb brought an end to World War II.

Materials: Island Hopping (Springboard handout)
All Things Considered (handout)
The Buck Stopped There (handout)
In the Blink of an Eye (teacher’s script)

Terms to know: **Manhattan Project** - codename for America’s top-secret project to build an atomic bomb
V-J Day - victory over Japan, ending the war

Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that the Allied victory at Okinawa in June essentially defeated Japan but its emperor would not surrender. With the war over in Europe, the Allies were anxious to end the Pacific war as well and bring peace to the world. The question facing America’s new president, Harry Truman, who had taken over when Roosevelt died in May, was “How?”
- Distribute “All Things Considered” and have the student(s) work alone or in pairs to complete the decision-making form.
- Have them share what their advice would have been to President Truman.
- Then distribute “The Buck Stopped There” and explain that Truman was known for using the expression “The buck stops here” to take responsibility for his decisions. Have the student(s) read the primary sources and list Truman’s reasons for his decision to use the bomb on Japan.
- Have them share their ideas and discuss. (*Truman’s reasons included: revenge for Pearl Harbor and war crimes; to end the war quickly; and to save American lives. Student viewpoints may vary.*)
- Now, ask the student(s) to close their eyes and read “In the Blink of an Eye” aloud in a serious tone. After reading the script, again have the student(s) tell whether or not their opinions have changed from the beginning of the lesson. Explain that the debate over Truman’s decision to use that terrible weapon continues to this day.



Island Hopping



After the U.S. victory at the Battle of Midway, the American-led Allies took the offensive in the Pacific. The general strategy for this offensive was known as “island hopping.” Rather than battle Japanese troops for control of each and every Pacific island, the Allies bypassed well-defended ones to strike at weaker islands in a seemingly random order.

Typically aircraft were sent in first to “soften up” the islands. The planes bombed bases, airstrips, bridges, and other strategic targets. Then ships and amphibious assault vehicles would land troops on the island to battle enemy forces there. Time and again this strategy found success against an ever-weakening Japanese military, as the Allies moved within easier striking distance of Japan.

Some Key Allied Victories

1942:

June – Midway

November – Guadalcanal

1943:

August – Aleutian Islands

November – Gilbert Islands

1944:

February – Marshall Islands

June – New Guinea

August – Marianas Islands

October – Leyte Gulf,
Philippines

1945:

March – Iwo Jima

June – Okinawa

According to the passage, it can be concluded that one important goal of the island hopping strategy was to

- A. tour the Pacific islands.
- B. battle Japanese troops.
- C. defend weaker islands.
- D. minimize Allied losses.

Aleutian Islands : Marianas Islands ::

- A. Midway : Guadalcanal
- B. Gilbert Islands : Marshall Islands
- C. New Guinea : Okinawa
- D. Iwo Jima : Leyte Gulf, Philippines

Based on information in the passage and timeline, what prediction could you make regarding the Allies’ island hopping?

- A. U.S. Marines played a greater role at Midway than at other battles.
- B. Iwo Jima is nearer to the Japan’s mainland than the Aleutians are.
- C. An amphibious assault was unnecessary in the attack on Okinawa.
- D. The Marianas Islands are very near to Leyte Gulf in the Philippines.

When the military “softened up” the islands, they

- A. fought battles on the ocean.
- B. prepared them for invasions.
- C. fired on civilian populations.
- D. defended against enemy fire.



Island Hopping Answers & Explanations



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(By attacking “weaker islands” the Allies encountered less resistance and most likely sustained fewer casualties than they would have at “well-defended ones.”)

Aleutian Islands : Marianas Islands ::

- A. Midway : Guadalcanal
- B. Gilbert Islands : Marshall Islands
- C. New Guinea : Okinawa *
- D. Iwo Jima : Leyte Gulf, Philippines

(Though in different years, the victories at the Aleutian Islands and the Marianas were achieved in August. The Allied victories at New Guinea and Okinawa occurred in June.)

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(Since the Allies were moving “within easier striking distance of Japan” this would be a logical prediction.)

When the military “softened up” the islands, they

- A. fought battles on the ocean.
- B. prepared them for invasions. *
- C. fired on civilian populations.
- D. defended against enemy fire.

(The passage states that the aircraft “softened up” the islands and THEN “the amphibious assault vehicles would land troops on the island to battle enemy forces.”)

All Things Considered



Imagine that it is August 1945, and you are an advisor to President Truman. You have been asked to help him decide whether or not to use a devastating new weapon, the atomic bomb, on Japan. Consider the following list of factors in formulating your advice. Use a scale of 1 (least) to 10 (most) to rate the importance of each in terms of the decision, and explain your rating in the space provided.

Factor	Rating	Explanation
Death of Japanese civilians		
Death of Japanese soldiers		
Death of American civilians		
Death of American soldiers		
Damage to the land/environment		
Loss of economic production		
Reputation of the United States		
Ending the war quickly		
Sending a “message”		
Impact on the Japanese people		
Impact on the American people		

What would your advice to President Truman have been and why? _____

The Buck Stopped There



"The 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 Japs are savages, ruthless, merciless and fanatic, we as the leader of the world for the common welfare cannot drop this 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 Japs 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."

Diary entry July 25, 1945

"The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. 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."

Excerpt from a public statement, August 6, 1945

"Having found the bomb, we have used it. We have used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans."

Excerpt from a public statement, August 9, 1945

"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 until it is absolutely necessary..."

Excerpt from a letter to Senator Richard Russell who had asked that Japan be bombed again after the initial strike.

? Explain Truman's reasons for using the bomb.

? Did his explanations of his decision change your view about using the bomb? Explain.

IN THE BLINK an eye

In 1942, the U.S. government began the Manhattan Project, an ultra-secret program to build an atomic bomb. In several sites across the country, almost 200,000 American scientists and engineers worked to build the new weapon before the enemy could complete their own.

Finally, it's July 1945, a bomb was dropped from a hundred-foot steel tower in the New Mexico desert. A brilliant flash filled the sky and a mushroom cloud billowed upward. Instruments showed the explosion was equal to almost 20,000 tons of dynamite. The Manhattan Project was a success; America had an atomic bomb.

President Truman just received notification that the bomb has been successfully tested. He and his advisors decide upon a target, the Japanese city of Hiroshima. It's a good choice for many reasons; it contains a huge army depot; it's surrounded by hills which will help contain the damage they all know the bomb will cause; and most importantly, Hiroshima is such a large city, all agree that the bomb will have a tremendous psychological impact on Japan. The President sends Japan a message that unconditional surrender is the only option, but he receives no reply.

The night of August 6, 1945 arrives, and the Enola Gay leaves an airbase on the South Pacific island of Tinian. The plane named after the pilot's mother has a six-hour flight to Japan. The weather is good and all equipment is functioning properly.

At approximately 8:15 a.m. Japanese time, the atomic bomb named "Little Boy" is dropped over Hiroshima. In a flash, 70,000 people, mostly civilians, are killed instantly. Within the next five years, at least 70,000 more will die from the radiation.

Everything within a mile of the target is completely leveled. Sixty thousand of the ninety thousand homes, businesses, and other buildings are destroyed, leaving 2/3rds of the city completely in ruins.

Now, picture a huge stadium during the Super Bowl. It holds about 70,000 people, roughly the same number killed instantly on August 6, 1945. Imagine that every seat is filled with a man, woman or child. Everyone is cheering and shouting. You can see the excitement on their faces as the game is about to begin. Everyone is clapping and smiling as they anticipate kickoff. Then *(snap your fingers)* ... in a blink of an eye they are all gone. Now, imagine that every seat is filled again with men, women and children. Now *(snap your fingers)* ... in a blink of an eye, every one of them is seriously injured. Now, envision every seat filled with men, women and children once more. *(snap your fingers)* In just five years they, too, will all be gone, having suffered the effects of radiation exposure. They will die from a wide range of cancers and other diseases.

Now it is three days later, August 9th. Another atomic bomb is dropped on another Japanese city; this time Nagasaki. Again, in a flash *(snap your fingers)* ... thousands more die, are seriously injured, and die later from radiation exposure. August 15, 1945, Japan's ruler, Emperor Hirohito, surrendered, saying "Japan would have to bear the unbearable," but many Japanese say he surrendered too late.

Two weeks later, September 2, 1945: today the official end of World War II came with the signing of the surrender. Everyone is in the streets, dancing, singing, celebrating V-J Day! The long and terrible war is FINALLY over!!!