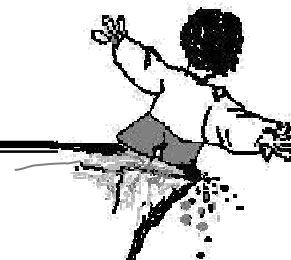


## No Turning Back



### Springboard:

Students should read “The Last Days” and answer the question.  
(Answers will vary but should spark discussion.)

**Objective:** The student will be able to explain the debate over America’s use of the atomic bomb to end World War II.

**Materials:** The Last Days (Springboard handout)  
The Decision to Use THE BOMB (two different handouts - see Procedures)  
Decisions, Decisions... (handout)

**Terms to know:** **morality** - what is right, just, fair, etc.  
**annihilate** - completely destroy

### Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that indeed two atomic bombs were dropped on Japan just before the war ended. Go on to explain that this lesson examines the decision to use of the bomb.
- **For group instruction WITHOUT LETTING THE STUDENTS KNOW**, give half the class one “The Decision to Use THE BOMB” handout and the other half the other version. (One presents arguments for use of the bomb, the other against.) The students should read their handout individually or in pairs and use what they learn and their own ideas to complete the “Decisions, Decisions...” handout. (**For individualized instruction** the student should read and respond to each version and discuss the pros, cons, and the student’s viewpoint.)
- Then divide the class into two sides for a debate (corresponding to the two handouts). Allow each group time to share their ideas from the “Decisions” handout and prepare points to make in a debate.
- Conduct the debate as follows: Each side should prepare an opening statement, at least three points to defend their position, and a closing statement. Then have each side take turns presenting their ideas and allowing responses, twice back and forth for each point. (*Arguments and justifications will vary. Points favoring use of the bomb include: saving American lives, attacking military targets only, forcing Japan to surrender when they wouldn’t before, revenge for Pearl Harbor, and discouraging future wars. Arguments against include: lack of knowledge about the effects of the weapons, the extensive damage makes the military target argument moot; it is morally wrong to kill innocent civilians, the U.S. needs to set a good example, the Japanese were defeated anyway, etc.*)
- After the debate, have the class take a final vote as to whether or not they agree with President Truman’s decision (or assign a writing assignment for homework.) Then have the student(s) explain how reading just one side of the debate might have impacted their ideas and opinions (or why it didn’t).

# The Last Days



By 1945 World War II was nearing an end. After the Allies drove the Germans out of France and the Soviet Union, German forces were on the run. Feeling the pressure, Hitler put everything on the line for one last effort. He secretly sent all available forces to the Allied line near the Ardennes Forest, a place with fewer American troops than most. He hoped to break through and take Antwerp, a port in Belgium used to supply American and British troops.

The German offensive was successful at first, catching the Americans off guard and creating a “bulge” in the Allied line. But the weakness was quickly filled in with fresh troops, who brought victory. This final German defeat became known as the Battle of the Bulge and marked the last days for the Third Reich. As the Allies closed in on Germany’s capital, Berlin, Adolf Hitler committed suicide in a bunker in April, 1945. What remained of the German government surrendered on V-E Day, May 7, 1945, marking the Allied “victory in Europe.”

Meanwhile in the Pacific, Japan was also on its last legs. Most territory had been recaptured, and the Americans were moving in on Japan itself. The tiny island of Iwo Jima off the coast was captured to use as an airbase for the assault on Japan. On February 19, over 110,000 U.S. Marines arrived there. Although the 20,000 Japanese soldiers were clearly outnumbered, they were dug into bunkers and could shoot at the Americans as they landed. Slowly, U.S. soldiers fought their way across the island. In that five-week battle over 7,000 Americans were killed and 20,000 were injured, making it one of the most deadly of the war. The bloody and battered soldiers were inspired in their fight by the sight of an American flag being raised atop Mount Suribachi on the island. The photo (shown above) has become one of the most famous images from the war.

After this victory, American leadership began to plan an all-out invasion of Japan. Even with mounting losses, scarce supplies and no hope, the Japanese refused to give up. The new President Harry Truman, who took office in April after Roosevelt’s death, warned Japan to surrender or be destroyed. Ignoring such threats, the Japanese vowed to fight to the last man. Truman, however, did have another option. American scientists had been building an atomic bomb since 1940 in the top-secret Manhattan Project. By July of 1945, the bomb had been successfully tested in New Mexico and was ready for use.

*Had you been advising President Truman, what do you think you might have told him to do? Explain your ideas, including the factors that he must consider in making the decision. Use passage information to justify your answer.* \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

---

# The Decision to Use THE BOMB

As the end of World War II drew near, President Truman had to decide whether to use the new atomic bomb on Japan. On August 6, 1945 a lone U.S. plane named the *Enola Gay* dropped one A-bomb, “Little Boy,” on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. 70,000 people were killed instantly and at least 110,000 injured, many dying later as a result of that day. The Japanese still refused to surrender so a second bomb called “Fat Man” was dropped three days later on Nagasaki, killing 80,000. Read what some people involved in the decision had to say about using the bomb:

***Excerpts from a 2000 interview with General Paul Tibbets, the pilot of the Enola Gay:***

“I fervently hoped for success in the first use of a nuclear weapon. To me it meant putting an end to World War II. I viewed my mission as one to save lives... I knew in my heart that we would convince the Japanese of the futility (*uselessness*) of continuing the fight... I thought the selection of the targets was good by reason that they were all military targets... I was not distraught. I did not lose a night’s sleep over anything to do with the mission.”

***President Truman’s diary, August 9, 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... We have used it to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.”

***Memoirs of Harry S. Truman, Volume I, Years of Decisions:***

“In deciding to use this bomb I wanted to make sure that it would be used as a weapon of war in the manner prescribed by the laws of war. That meant that I wanted it dropped on a military target. I had told (Secretary of War) Stimson that the bomb should be dropped as nearly as possibly upon a war production center.”

***General Carl “Tooey” Spaatz, Commander of Air Force Operations in the Pacific:***

“The dropping of the atomic bomb was done by a military man under military orders. We’re supposed to carry out orders and not question them... If we were to go ahead with the plans for a conventional invasion... I believe the Japanese thought that they could inflict very heavy casualties on us and possibly as a result get better surrender terms.”

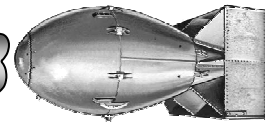
***Henry Stimson, Truman’s Secretary of War, in a Harper’s Magazine article, 1947***

“Two great nations were approaching contact in a fight to a finish that would begin on November 1, 1945. Our enemy, Japan, commanded forces of over 5,000,000 men. Men of these armies had already inflicted upon us... over 300,000 battle casualties. Enemy armies still unbeaten had the strength to cost us a million more. As long as the Japanese government refused to surrender, we should be forced to take and hold the ground, and smash the Japanese ground armies, by close-in fighting of the same desperate and costly kind that we had faced in the Pacific islands for nearly four years.”

***J. Robert Oppenheimer, American physicist, Manhattan Project***

“The atomic bomb has made the prospect of future war unendurable.”

# The Decision to Use THE BOMB



*As the end of World War II drew near, President Truman had to decide whether to use the new atomic bomb on Japan. On August 6, 1945 a lone U.S. plane named the Enola Gay dropped one A-bomb, "Little Boy," on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. 70,000 people were killed instantly and at least 110,000 injured, many dying later as a result of that day. The Japanese still refused to surrender so a second bomb called "Fat Man" was dropped three days later on Nagasaki, killing 80,000. Read what some people involved in the decision had to say about using the bomb:*

*Robert Krohn, physicist who witnessed the first test of an atomic bomb:*

"There was a great deal of speculation as to what the [explosive] yield of the bomb was going to be. Everyone wanted a guess."

*Excerpt from an article in the Nippon Times (Tokyo), August 10, 1945:*

"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?... For in their (the U.S.) noisy statements, they have always claimed to be the champions of fairness and humanitarianism..."

*Dwight Eisenhower, in his personal account Mandate for Change:*

*(While talking to Secretary of War Stimson)* "I had been conscious of a feeling of depression and so I voiced to him my grave misgivings, first on the basis of my belief that Japan was already defeated and that dropping the bomb was completely unnecessary, and secondly because I thought that our country should avoid shocking world opinion by the use of a weapon whose employment was, I thought, no longer mandatory as a measure to save American lives."

*Excerpt from an article in The Christian Century, a journal published in 1945:*

"But there was no military advantage in hurling the bomb upon Japan without warning. The least we might have done was to announce to our foe that we possessed the atomic bomb... If she doubted the good faith of our representations, it would have been a simple matter to select a demonstration target in the enemy's own country at a place where the loss of human life would be at a minimum."

*Excerpt from a letter written from Truman to a U.S. Senator who wanted to drop a second bomb right away after the first strike at Hiroshima:*

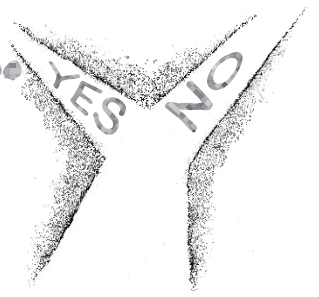
"I can't bring myself to believe that, because they are beasts, we should ourselves act in the same manner. For myself, I certainly regret the necessity of wiping out whole populations because of the 'pigheadedness' of the leaders..."

*A survivor's story adapted from the book, Hiroshima by John Hersey, 1946:*

"After the explosion, the air was filled with thick, gray dust. There were burned and blackened bodies everywhere. Survivors headed for the rivers that offered the only refuge from the fire that burned throughout the city filled with burning bodies and debris. Many people were burned so badly you could not tell men from women. People's eyebrows were burned off. Most were naked or their clothes hung in shreds from their bodies. On some, their clothing burned and left patterns on their skin of undershirts, suspenders, or the flowers from their kimonos. Many were vomiting. Some had skin hanging from them. Most were bloody and many were blinded."



# DECISIONS, DECISIONS...



**DIRECTIONS:** After reading others' views about the use of the atomic bomb, list five reasons YOU believe it should or should not have been used on Japan. Then for each, think of a counterargument someone who disagrees with you might offer. Feel free to add your own ideas as well as ones from the reading.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Counterargument:*

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Counterargument:*

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Counterargument:*

4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Counterargument:*

5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Counterargument:*