The Atomic Bomb Debate: Examining Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Class: AP US History

Grade Level: 11th grade

Unit: The Second World War

Teacher: Miss Kelly Wedlake

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)
- Understand historical patterns, periods of time, and the relationships among those elements.
- Understand the role of culture and cultural diffusion on the development and maintenance of societies.
- Understand the role of innovation on the development and interaction of societies.
- Understand cause and effect relationships and other historical thinking skills in order to interpret events and issues.

21st Century Skill(s)
Global Awareness
- Using 21st century skills to understand and address global issues.

Civic Literacy
- Understanding the local and global implications of civic decisions.

Critical Thinking/Problem Solving
- Use various types of reasoning (inductive, deductive, etc.) as appropriate to the situation.
- Effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims, and beliefs.
- Synthesize and make connections between information and arguments.
- Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis.
- Reflect critically on learning experiences and processes.

Information Literacy
- Access information efficiently (time) and effectively (sources).
- Evaluate information critically and competently.
- Apply a fundamental understanding of the ethical/legal issues surrounding the access and use of information.

Initiative and Self-Direction:
- Go beyond basic mastery of skills and/or curriculum to explore and expand one’s own learning and opportunities to gain expertise.

Social and Cultural Skills
- Know when it is appropriate to listen and when to speak.
- Conduct themselves in a respectable, professional manner.

Essential Question
Should the United States have dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

Objectives
1. Students will be able to explain the significance of the United States dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.
2. Students will be able to critically examine the pros and cons of dropping the atomic bomb.
Anticipatory Set
For the anticipatory set, two videos will be shown. First, the teacher will show one detailing the testing of the atomic bomb in New Mexico on July 16th, 1945. This footage helps magnify the effect of the bomb, the creators’ thoughts, and puts a visual to what students will be reading about. Secondly, a video will be shown from the BBC Worldwide channel of the American troops preparing to drop the first bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima. 7 minutes.

Video Links:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ru2PwaoGloB8
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0eHCytkcHg

Teaching: Activities
Teacher will start by a class-wide discussion establishing what students already know about the atomic bomb. (What it was, why it was used, what it’s lasting effects are) Additionally, students will be asked to decide if they are “for” or “against” the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Students will be prompted with the following questions:
- What do you know about the atomic bomb or the science behind the atomic bomb and its creation?
- What do you know about the effects of radiation, or of atomic bombs on a society?
- Do you believe that the bomb should have been dropped on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?
(5 minutes)

Students will then be given a handout with statistics from the Seattle Times and Atlantic Monthly. They will be asked to read both articles, and fill out a chart with the pros and cons of using the atomic bomb to end the Second World War. (Both articles found at the end of plan, along with handout to be completed). The handout/worksheet will be collected for assessment purposes and graded upon a completion basis. Students should use the handout to organize their ideas for the debate for the later part of the class. (25 minutes)

After reading the articles and filling out the handout, students will come together as a group to discuss each argument presented. Students will be encouraged to decide whether they think the bomb should have been dropped, and why they think that way. Teacher will be prepared to play devil’s advocate in case the students are all leaning one way. If the discussion comes to a stall, students will be asked to consider whether they think we would drop the bomb today, and what lasting effects we can see from the dropping of the bomb in 1945. (20 minutes)

Closure
To close the day, students will be asked to vote on whether or not the bomb should have been dropped. This will be done by an anonymous ballot that the teacher will then tally and announce to the class. (3 minutes)

Independent Practice

Assessment
1. Students will be able to explain the significance of the United States dropping the atomic bomb on Japan.
   a. I will assess this via the class discussion, checking to make sure that each student is participating and calling on them as necessary to ensure that everyone is participating.
2. Students will be able to critically examine the pros and cons of dropping the atomic bomb.
   a. I will assess this through the students completed Pro/Con handout, collected at the end of class.

**Materials**
Copies of *Atlantic Monthly* and *Seattle Times* Articles. (one for every student)
Pro/Con Handout (one for every student)
Projector (for anticipatory set)

**Duration**
Anticipatory Set—7 minutes
Opening Discussion—5 minutes
Reading/Pro-Con Handout work time—25 minutes
Class Discussion/Debate—20 minutes
Closure—3 minutes
TOTAL: 60 minutes

*Modified from Madeline Hunters Lesson Plan Design*
If the Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used

by Karl T. Compton

About a week after V-J Day I was one of a small group of scientists and engineers interrogating an intelligent, well-informed Japanese Army officer in Yokohama. We asked him what, in his opinion, would have been the next major move if the war had continued. He replied: "You would probably have tried to invade our homeland with a landing operation on Kyushu about November 1. I think the attack would have been made on such and such beaches."

"Could you have repelled this landing?" we asked, and he answered: "It would have been a very desperate fight, but I do not think we could have stopped you."

"What would have happened then?" we asked.

He replied: "We would have kept on fighting until all Japanese were killed, but we would not have been defeated," by which he meant that they would not have been disgraced by surrender.

It is easy now, after the event, to look back and say that Japan was already a beaten nation, and to ask what therefore was the justification for the use of the atomic bomb to kill so many thousands of helpless Japanese in this inhuman way; furthermore, should we not better have kept it to ourselves as a secret weapon for future use, if necessary? This argument has been advanced often, but it seems to me utterly fallacious.

I had, perhaps, an unusual opportunity to know the pertinent facts from several angles, yet I was without responsibility for any of the decisions. I can therefore speak without doing so defensively. While my role in the atomic bomb development was a very minor one, I was a member of the group called together by Secretary of War Stimson to assist him in plans for its test, use, and subsequent handling. Then, shortly before Hiroshima, I became attached to General MacArthur in Manila, and lived for two months with his staff. In this way I learned something of the invasion plans and of the sincere conviction of these best-informed officers that a desperate and costly struggle was still ahead. Finally, I spent the first month after V-J Day in Japan, where I could ascertain at first hand both the physical and the psychological state of that country. Some of the Japanese whom I consulted were my scientific and personal friends of long standing.

From this background I believe, with complete conviction, that the use of the atomic bomb saved hundreds of thousands—perhaps several millions—of lives, both American and Japanese; that without its use the war would have continued for many months; that no one of good conscience knowing, as Secretary Stimson and the Chiefs of Staff did, what was probably ahead and what the atomic bomb might accomplish could have made any different decision. Let some of the facts speak for themselves.

Was the use of the atomic bomb inhuman? All war is inhuman. Here are some comparisons of the atomic bombing with conventional bombing. At Hiroshima the
atomic bomb killed about 80,000 people, pulverized about five square miles, and
wrecked an additional ten square miles of the city, with decreasing damage out to seven
or eight miles from the center. At Nagasaki the fatal casualties were 45,000 and the area
wrecked was considerably smaller than at Hiroshima because of the configuration of the
city.

Compare this with the results of two B-29 incendiary raids over Tokyo. One of these
raids killed about 125,000 people, the other nearly 100,000.

Of the 210 square miles of greater Tokyo, 85 square miles of the densest part was
destroyed as completely, for all practical purposes, as were the centers of Hiroshima and
Nagasaki; about half the buildings were destroyed in the remaining 125 square miles; the
number of people driven homeless out of Tokyo was considerably larger than the
population of greater Chicago. These figures are based on information given us in Tokyo
and on a detailed study of the air reconnaissance maps. They may be somewhat in error
but are certainly of the right order of magnitude.

Was Japan already beaten before the atomic bomb? The answer is certainly "yes" in the
sense that the fortunes of war had turned against her. The answer is "no" in the sense that
she was still fighting desperately and there was every reason to believe that she would
continue to do so; and this is the only answer that has any practical significance.

General MacArthur's staff anticipated about 50,000 American casualties and several
times that number of Japanese casualties in the November 1 operation to establish the
initial beachheads on Kyushu. After that they expected a far more costly struggle before
the Japanese homeland was subdued. There was every reason to think that the Japanese
would defend their homeland with even greater fanaticism than when they fought to the
death on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. No American soldier who survived the bloody struggles
on these islands has much sympathy with the view that battle with the Japanese was over
as soon as it was clear that their ultimate situation was hopeless. No, there was every
reason to expect a terrible struggle long after the point at which some people can now
look back and say, "Japan was already beaten."

A month after our occupation I heard General MacArthur say that even then, if the
Japanese government lost control over its people and the millions of former Japanese
soldiers took to guerrilla warfare in the mountains, it could take a million American
troops ten years to master the situation.

That this was not an impossibility is shown by the following fact, which I have not seen
reported. We recall the long period of nearly three weeks between the Japanese offer to
surrender and the actual surrender on September 2. This was needed in order to arrange
details: of the surrender and occupation and to permit the Japanese government to prepare
its people to accept the capitulation. It is not generally realized that there was threat of a
revolt against the government, led by an Army group supported by the peasants, to seize
control and continue the war. For several days it was touch and go as to whether the
people would follow their government in surrender.

The bulk of the Japanese people did not consider themselves beaten; in fact they believed
they were winning in spite of the terrible punishment they had taken. They watched the
paper balloons take off and float eastward in the wind, confident that these were carrying
a terrible retribution to the United States in revenge for our air raids.
We gained a vivid insight into the state of knowledge and morale of the ordinary Japanese soldier from a young private who had served through the war in the Japanese Army. He had lived since babyhood in America, and had graduated in 1940 from Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This lad, thoroughly American in outlook, had gone with his family to visit relatives shortly after his graduation. They were caught in the mobilization and he was drafted into the Army.

This young Japanese told us that all his fellow soldiers believed that Japan was winning the war. To them the losses of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were parts of a grand strategy to lure the American forces closer and closer to the homeland, until they could be pounced upon and utterly annihilated. He himself had come to have some doubts as a result of various inconsistencies in official reports. Also he had seen the Ford assembly line in operation and knew that Japan could not match America in war production. But none of the soldiers had any inkling of the true situation until one night, at ten-thirty, his regiment was called to hear the reading of the surrender proclamation.

*Did the atomic bomb bring about the end of the war?* That it would do so was the calculated gamble and hope of Mr. Stimson, General Marshall, and their associates. The facts are these. On July 26, 1945, the Potsdam Ultimatum called on Japan to surrender unconditionally. On July 29 Premier Suzuki issued a statement, purportedly at a cabinet press conference, scorning as unworthy of official notice the surrender ultimatum, and emphasizing the increasing rate of Japanese aircraft production. Eight days later, on August 6, the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima; the second was dropped on August 9 on Nagasaki; on the following day, August 10, Japan declared its intention to surrender, and on August 14 accepted the Potsdam terms.

On the basis of these facts, I cannot believe that, without the atomic bomb, the surrender would have come without a great deal more of costly struggle and bloodshed.

Exactly what role the atomic bomb played will always allow some scope for conjecture. A survey has shown that it did not have much immediate effect on the common people far from the two bombed cities; they knew little or nothing of it. The even more disastrous conventional bombing of Tokyo and other cities had not brought the people into the mood to surrender.

The evidence points to a combination of factors. (1) Some of the more informed and intelligent elements in Japanese official circles realized that they were fighting a losing battle and that complete destruction lay ahead if the war continued. These elements, however, were not powerful enough to sway the situation against the dominating Army organization, backed by the profiteering industrialists, the peasants, and the ignorant masses. (2) The atomic bomb introduced a dramatic new element into the situation, which strengthened the hands of those who sought peace and provided a face-saving argument for those who had hitherto advocated continued war. (3) When the second atomic bomb was dropped, it became clear that this was not an isolated weapon, but that there were others to follow. With dread prospect of a deluge of these terrible bombs and no possibility of preventing them, the argument for surrender was made convincing. This I believe to be the true picture of the effect of the atomic bomb in bringing the war to a sudden end, with Japan's unconditional surrender.

*If the atomic bomb had not been used*, evidence like that I have cited points to the practical certainty that there would have been many more months of death and destruction on an enormous scale. Also the early timing of its use was fortunate for a
reason which could not have been anticipated. If the invasion plans had proceeded as
scheduled, October, 1945, would have seen Okinawa covered with airplanes and its
harbors crowded with landing craft poised for the attack. The typhoon which struck
Okinawa in that month would have wrecked the invasion plans with a military disaster
comparable to Pearl Harbor.

These are some of the facts which lead those who know them, and especially those who
had to base decisions on them, to feel that there is much delusion and wishful thinking
among those after-the-event strategists who now deplore the use of the atomic bomb on
the ground that its use was inhuman or that it was unnecessary because Japan was already
beaten. And it was not one atomic bomb, or two, which brought surrender; it was the
experience of what an atomic bomb will actually do to a community, plus the dread of
many more, that was effective.

If 500 bombers could wreak such destruction on Tokyo, what will 500 bombers, each
carrying an atomic bomb, do to the City of Tomorrow? It is this deadly prospect which
now lends such force to the two basic policies of our nation on this subject: (1) We must
strive generously and with all our ability to promote the United Nations’ effort to assure
future peace between nations; but we must not lightly surrender the atomic bomb as a
means for our own defense. (2) We should surrender or share it only when there is
adopted an international plan to enforce peace in which we can have great confidence.

Source: The Atlantic Monthly Group. The Atlantic Monthly; December 1946; If the
Atomic Bomb Had Not Been Used; Volume 178, No. 6; page 54.
http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/46dec/compton.htm
PRO AND CON OF DROPPING THE BOMB

BY BILL DIETRICH
Seattle Times staff reporter

Historians are still divided over whether it was necessary to drop the atomic bomb on Japan to end World War II. Here is a summary of arguments on both sides:

Why the bomb was needed or justified:

- The Japanese had demonstrated near-fanatical resistance, fighting to almost the last man on Pacific islands, committing mass suicide on Saipan and unleashing kamikaze attacks at Okinawa. Fire bombing had killed 100,000 in Tokyo with no discernible political effect. Only the atomic bomb could jolt Japan's leadership to surrender.
- With only two bombs ready (and a third on the way by late August 1945) it was too risky to "waste" one in a demonstration over an unpopulated area.
- An invasion of Japan would have caused casualties on both sides that could easily have exceeded the toll at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- The two targeted cities would have been firebombed anyway.
- Immediate use of the bomb convinced the world of its horror and prevented future use when nuclear stockpiles were far larger.
- The bomb's use impressed the Soviet Union and halted the war quickly enough that the USSR did not demand joint occupation of Japan.

Why the bomb was not needed, or unjustified:

- Japan was ready to call it quits anyway. More than 60 of its cities had been destroyed by conventional bombing, the home islands were being blockaded by the American Navy, and the Soviet Union entered the war by attacking Japanese troops in Manchuria.
- American refusal to modify its "unconditional surrender" demand to allow the Japanese to keep their emperor needlessly prolonged Japan's resistance.
- A demonstration explosion over Tokyo harbor would have convinced Japan's leaders to quit without killing many people.
- Even if Hiroshima was necessary, the U.S. did not give enough time for word to filter out of its devastation before bombing Nagasaki.
- The bomb was used partly to justify the $2 billion spent on its development.
- The two cities were of limited military value. Civilians outnumbered troops in Hiroshima five or six to one.
- Japanese lives were sacrificed simply for power politics between the U.S. and the Soviet Union.
- Conventional firebombing would have caused as much significant damage without making the U.S. the first nation to use nuclear weapons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROS:</th>
<th>CONS:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>