

# Mock Trial of Harry Truman for Crimes Against Humanity

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With the winds of war swirling in Iraq, Afghanistan and in North Korea, it is quite obvious the role the United States plays as police officer of the world. If peace is to be achieved on a global level, the United States is sure to play an important and critical role. No war has changed the complexion of the global landscape like World War II. Its history is still central to the way global politics are played today. This unit addresses an important issue: The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The atomic bomb introduced a new age and developed a unique perspective on military issues. No longer do conventional weapons decide wars; now nuclear weapons must be considered. The unit focuses on Harry Truman and his decision to use the atomic bomb to end the war with Japan. Students must think critically about why it was used and consider alternatives. Was this the only way to end the war in Japan? Would Japanese soldiers fight to their death and cause tremendous Allied casualties? Was dropping the bomb payback for Japan's bombing of Pearl Harbor? And finally, did Truman drop the bomb to demonstrate U.S. military power to the rest of the world? The unit also looks at how World War II played out on the local home front. My mother was a "Rosie the Riveter" at the Curtiss Wright Airplane factory in Buffalo, New York and my father was a cook aboard the destroyer USS Pavlic. The unit encourages students to seek out their family members to discover what role they played in the war effort.

These activities were taught at Hutchinson-Technical High School in Buffalo, New York. They require a lot of structure on the part of the teacher and hard work by students. Many of the students at this school have reading problems and are not quite sure what it means to think critically. They did enjoy the part where they interviewed a family member and work on the internet.

**Unit Topic:** United States President Harry Truman stands on trial for crimes against humanity for his decision to drop the atomic bomb on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II.

**Connections:** How did the need to wage "total war" alter the nature of American society? How did United States domestic policies during World War II compare with those of World War I? Students should compare the role of the United States in World War I and World War II in terms of (1) the arsenal of democracy, (2) United States military leadership and strategy, and (3) role of the President in planning the peace. Students should understand that there were several moral issues that grew out of the war experience. These include: (1) rights of Japanese-Americans, (2) Integration of African-Americans, (3) United States reactions to the Nazi Holocaust, (4) The morality of nuclear warfare, and (5) The treatment of war criminals. Students should study the origins of these concerns and the ways in which they have been addressed in the post-war period.

**Unit Assessment:** Students will be evaluated on their ability to role-play each part assigned to them. They will be graded on the research of the role and the authenticity of each part in which they are to empathize with their assigned role. Each student will write a two-page document, which identifies their perspective and understanding of the implications of dropping the atomic bomb. The military leaders will give specific facts which explain why the bomb needed to be dropped. The family members and citizens will make arguments as to why the bomb should or should not have been dropped.

**The participants:** Harry Truman, Douglas Macarthur, Secretary Marshall, Robert Oppenheimer, President of the American Legion, American Army private in Okinawa, American Sailor on a

destroyer in Okinawa, parent of American soldier, wife of American sailor, Emperor Hirohito, Tojo, three different citizens of Japan (past and current), citizen of Switzerland and India, three members of an International Tribunal, a lawyer representing Harry Truman and a prosecutor.

**Project:** All students will also be given an assignment to interview a family member who served in the war effort during World War II. That individual may have served in the Asian theater or served in a local plant aiding the war effort. The student will ask various questions in an open-ended interview format. Some of the questions may include the role the individual played and may be asked to share artifacts with the class.

### **Day 1: Outlining the Mock Trial**

**Instructional Objective:** Introduce students to the idea of a Mock Trial of Harry Truman because of his decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan at the end of World War II.

**Materials:** Web sites. If computers are not available, students will be given a topic to research in the library or the teacher will download the pages of these web sites and make them available to students. World War II Preservation Society ([www.cybercreek.com/cybercity/WWIIps](http://www.cybercreek.com/cybercity/WWIIps)); World War 2 Veterans ([ww2.vet.org](http://ww2.vet.org)); Children of the Camp ([www.pbs.org/childofcamp](http://www.pbs.org/childofcamp)); Manzanar Relocation camp ([www.manzanar.com](http://www.manzanar.com)); Songs of Survival ([www.whitecloudpress.com/books/song.html](http://www.whitecloudpress.com/books/song.html)); Douglas MacArthur ([www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur)); Tojo Hideki ([www.isd.net/aswanson/ww2his/tojo.htm](http://www.isd.net/aswanson/ww2his/tojo.htm)); Marshall ([www.isd.net/aswanson/ww2his/marshall.htm](http://www.isd.net/aswanson/ww2his/marshall.htm)); Japan's War Crimes ([vikingphoenix.com/public/JapanIncorporated/1895-1945/jpwcrnz.htm](http://vikingphoenix.com/public/JapanIncorporated/1895-1945/jpwcrnz.htm)); Hiroshima, Nagasaki and Truman ([users.erols.com/goodmank](http://users.erols.com/goodmank)); Men and ships of World War 2 ([www.usmm.org/men\\_ships.html](http://www.usmm.org/men_ships.html)); Robert Oppenheimer ([www.ceptualinstitute.com/genre/oppenheimer.htm](http://www.ceptualinstitute.com/genre/oppenheimer.htm)).

**Activity:** Teacher will give an overview of the topic and discuss the goals of the unit. Teacher will then place students into cooperative groups of four or five, depending on class size and distribute the students' assignment. Teacher will sit with each cooperative group and give instructions for the assignment and assign the specific task of giving everyone a role. Students will write a brief paragraph in their notebooks paraphrasing the role they will play in the overall assignment.

**Evaluation:** In a brief paragraph, students will describe their participation in the overall unit assignment.

### **Day 2: Identify Reasons And Supporting Facts.**

**Instructional Objective:** Given material for their specific role in a skit judging Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb, the student will list three historical facts and three supporting reasons.

**Materials:** Web pages from previous day or information from textbooks contained in class on World War 2.

**Activity:** Teacher will state the purpose of the day's class for the students to assimilate into their roles and decide whether they believe Truman should have dropped the bomb. The students will huddle into small groups and discuss each other's information sheet. After the discussion, they will read their material and identify three facts and three supporting reasons for their decision.

**Evaluation:** A list that was generated in their notes of the three facts and supporting reasons.

### **Day 3: Develop A Rough Draft Of Their Paper.**

**Instructional Objective:** Students will compose a rough draft of approximately 150 words stating their position on Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb.

**Materials:** Notes from previous day and information sheet on World War 2.

**Activity:** Teacher will explain the concept of “rough draft,” which is the process of converting ideas and facts into the essay form. The teacher will also describe the basic parts of the writing process. The students will work in cooperative groups spending the majority of the class composing the paper. The teacher will assist individuals and rely on group members to help one another.

**Evaluation:** The students will draft a 150-word paper on their decision regarding Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb.

#### **Day 4: Writing Paper.**

**Instructional Objective:** Given the previous day’s rough draft, the students will edit their paper into a final form of approximately 150 words which is to include at least three historical facts and three supporting reasons on their decision regarding Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb.

**Materials:** Students will use the previous day’s rough draft, a dictionary, thesaurus, and their information sheet.

**Activity:** Teacher will place the students into cooperative groups where they will edit a rough draft and convert it into a final paper. The students will pair off and read each other’s paper and give suggestions for improvement. The students will spend the rest of the class finalizing their paper.

**Evaluation:** The students will compose a 150 word final draft of their decision regarding Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb.

#### **Day 5: Group Meetings**

**Instructional Objective:** In a class brainstorming session, students will list at least 10 reasons whether Harry Truman was justified in dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In meetings with members of the prosecution or defense. Each student will compose one reason to support his or her side.

**Materials:** Students will refer to their notes and final paper.

**Activity:** Teacher will place students in groups of either supporting or renouncing Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb. From their final drafts, students will rank the order of their decision. Teacher will place the students who will act as defender or prosecutor of Harry Truman in the appropriate group. The individual will call on each member of the group, have them identify who they are and identify their position. A list will be composed by the lawyers stating 10 specific reasons for their client’s innocence or guilt.

**Evaluation:** After a brainstorming session, a list will be compiled of at least 10 reasons for and against Harry Truman’s decision to drop the atomic bomb.

#### **Day 6: First Day Of The Trial**

**Instructional Objective:** In a mock court trial determining whether President Harry S. Truman is guilty of war crimes for dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two class representatives will state their arguments for guilt or innocence.

**Materials:** Student notes, information sheets and textbooks from World War 2.

**Activity:** The teacher will state that the purpose of today’s class is to have a mock trial of Harry S. Truman.

The lawyers for the prosecution and the defense will call these individuals to the stand and ask them to state their testimony. The class will be divided into their appropriate roles: Harry Truman, Douglas MacArthur, Secretary Marshall, Robert Oppenheimer, President of the American Legion, American Army private in Okinawa, American Sailor on a destroyer in Okinawa, parent of American soldier, wife of American sailor, Emperor Hirohito, Tojo, three different citizens of Japan (past and current), citizen of Switzerland and India, three members of an International Tribunal, a lawyer representing Harry Truman and a prosecutor.

**Evaluation:** Given various facts and supporting reasons, a class representative will state the most important reason for Truman's innocence or guilt.

**Day 7: Verdict and Assessment**

**Instructional Objective:** Given various sources for information and individual accounts, three members of the class acting as a jury, will compose a one page decision determining whether President Harry Truman's decision to drop the atomic bomb was a war crime.

**Materials:** Student notes, information sheets and textbooks from World War 2.

**Activity:** The teacher will call on various students and ask them to state the class activities of the past week.

The teacher will ask each member of the jury to read his or her "verdict" to the class.

**Evaluation:** Individual students will write a one-paragraph reflection identifying three ideas they learned participating in this trial.