

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

## The Decision to Drop the Bomb

By USHistory.org

*On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States used nuclear weapons against two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While the bombings effectively ended World War II, the costs were great and people continue to debate whether or not the bombings were necessary. As you read, take notes on the long-lasting effects of the United States' decision to drop the bombs.*

[1] America had the bomb. Now what?

When Harry Truman learned of the success of the Manhattan Project,<sup>1</sup> he knew he was faced with a decision of unprecedented<sup>2</sup> gravity. The capacity to end the war with Japan was in his hands, but it would involve unleashing the most terrible weapon ever known.

American soldiers and civilians were weary from four years of war, yet the Japanese military was refusing to give up their fight. American forces occupied Okinawa and Iwo Jima and were intensely fire bombing Japanese cities. But Japan had an army of 2 million strong stationed in the home islands guarding against invasion.

For Truman, the choice whether or not to use the atomic bomb was the most difficult decision of his life.



*"Boeing B-29A-45-BN Superfortress 44-61784 6 BG 24 BS - Incendiary Journey" by United States Army Air Force is in the public domain.*

[5] First, an Allied demand for an immediate unconditional surrender<sup>3</sup> was made to the leadership in Japan. Although the demand stated that refusal would result in total destruction, no mention of any new weapons of mass destruction was made. The Japanese military command rejected the request for unconditional surrender, but there were indications that a conditional surrender was possible.

Regardless, on August 6, 1945, a plane called the Enola Gay dropped an atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima. Instantly, 70,000 Japanese citizens were vaporized.<sup>4</sup> In the months and years that followed, an additional 100,000 perished from burns and radiation sickness.

Two days later, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan. On August 9, a second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, where 80,000 Japanese people perished.<sup>5</sup>

- 
1. the code name for the United States' efforts to develop atomic bombs during World War II
  2. **Unprecedented (adjective):** never done or known before
  3. a surrender in which no guarantees are given to the surrendering party
  4. exposed to the poisonous chemicals released by the bomb
  5. **Perish (verb):** to die

On August 14, 1945, the Japanese surrendered. Critics have charged that Truman's decision was a barbaric<sup>6</sup> act that brought negative long-term consequences to the United States. A new age of nuclear terror led to a dangerous arms race.

Some military analysts insist that Japan was on its knees and the bombings were simply unnecessary. The American government was accused of racism on the grounds that such a device would never have been used against white civilians.

- [10] Other critics argued that American diplomats had ulterior<sup>7</sup> motives. The Soviet Union had entered the war against Japan, and the atomic bomb could be read as a strong message for the Soviets to tread lightly. In this respect, Hiroshima and Nagasaki may have been the first shots of the Cold War as well as the final shots of World War II. Regardless, the United States remains the only nation in the world to have used a nuclear weapon on another nation.

Truman stated that his decision to drop the bomb was purely military. A Normandy-type amphibious<sup>8</sup> landing would have cost an estimated million casualties. Truman believed that the bombs saved Japanese lives as well. Prolonging the war was not an option for the President. Over 3,500 Japanese kamikaze raids<sup>9</sup> had already wrought great destruction and loss of American lives.

The President rejected a demonstration of the atomic bomb to the Japanese leadership. He knew there was no guarantee the Japanese would surrender if the test succeeded, and he felt that a failed demonstration would be worse than none at all. Even the scientific community failed to foresee the awful effects of radiation sickness. Truman saw little difference between atomic bombing Hiroshima and fire bombing Dresden or Tokyo.

The ethical debate over the decision to drop the atomic bomb will never be resolved. The bombs did, however, bring an end to the most destructive war in history. The Manhattan Project that produced it demonstrated the possibility of how a nation's resources could be mobilized.

Pandora's box<sup>10</sup> was now open. The question that came flying out was, "How will the world use its nuclear capability?" It is a question still being addressed on a daily basis.

*"The Decision to Drop the Bomb" by USHistory.org is in the public domain.*

- 
6. cruel and inhumane
  7. **Ulterior (adjective):** intentionally hidden
  8. a military operation involving forces attacking from the sea
  9. air raid attacks in which planes loaded with explosives crash into targets
  10. refers to source of many problems, released upon the world

## Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which word is a synonym for “ethical” as it is used in paragraph 13 of “The Decision to Drop the Bomb”?
  - A. historic
  - B. moral
  - C. political
  - D. scientific
  
2. PART B: Which phrase from an earlier paragraph helps the reader understand the meaning of the word “ethical”?
  - A. “capacity to end the war, but it would involve unleashing the most terrible weapon ever known.” (Paragraph 2)
  - B. “weary from four years of war... military was refusing to give up their fight.” (Paragraph 3)
  - C. “no mention of any new weapons of mass destruction was made.” (Paragraph 5)
  - D. “only nation in the world to have used a nuclear weapon on another nation.” (Paragraph 10)
  
3. PART A: One of the direct results of the decision to drop the atomic bomb was the fact that Japan surrendered, and the war ended. What was an indirect result of the decision to drop the bomb?
  - A. President Truman learned of the success of the Manhattan Project.
  - B. The Japanese were not told of the power of the atomic bomb.
  - C. Tension between the United States and the Soviet Union increased.
  - D. Japanese kamikaze raids caused the loss of many American lives.
  
4. PART B: Which sentence from the passage supports the answer to Part A?
  - A. “The capacity to end the war with Japan was in his hands, but it would involve unleashing the most terrible weapon ever known.” (Paragraph 2)
  - B. “The Japanese military command rejected the request for unconditional surrender, but there were indications that a conditional surrender was possible.” (Paragraph 5)
  - C. “Critics have charged that Truman’s decision was a barbaric act that brought negative long-term consequences to the United States.” (Paragraph 8)
  - D. “The Soviet Union had entered the war against Japan, and the atomic bomb could be read as a strong message for the Soviets to tread lightly.” (Paragraph 10)

