



LESSON PLAN: DEBATING THE ROUTE TO TOKYO

INTRODUCTION:

Military leaders faced countless difficult decisions during World War II where every option held its own risk and consequence. Even after carefully debating and examining all the facts and choices, there were often no clear solutions. Leaders needed to analyze the pros and cons in order to make a confident and informed decision. In this lesson, students will be faced with a difficult decision that American forces faced during the Pacific War as either the Army under General Douglas MacArthur or the Navy under Admiral Chester Nimitz. Each group will be tasked with evaluating the available information, developing a plan, and debating the pros and cons before collectively choosing a war plan as a class. They will then compare their decision to the actual outcome and explore how decisions like these helped shape the outcome of World War II in the Pacific.

OBJECTIVES:

- Identify and analyze the strategic plans devised by General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz during World War II.
- Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each military leader's approach to defeating the Japanese.
- Foster collaborative skills by actively participating in group discussions and engaging in respectful debates.
- Enhance public speaking skills by presenting arguments and counterarguments during role-playing debates.
- Deepen the understanding of World War II in the Pacific Theater, specifically focusing on strategies and decision-making.
- Cultivate empathy and perspective-taking by considering the different viewpoints and motivations of military leaders during the war.
- Develop a deeper understanding of the complexity and decision-making challenges military leaders faced during the Pacific War.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- What were the potential risks and benefits associated with MacArthur's Army plan and Nimitz's Navy plan? How did these factors influence their decision making?
- In retrospect, how successful were MacArthur's Army plan and Nimitz's Navy plan in achieving their intended goals? What were the key factors that contributed to their success or failure?
- How do the lessons from MacArthur and Nimitz's decision making in World War II apply to contemporary decision-making challenges in military strategy and leadership?

GRADE LEVEL:

7-12

TIME REQUIREMENT:

60-90 minutes

TEKS ADDRESSED WITHIN THE LESSON:

Grade 7: 19.1.A, 19.7.E, 19.20.A, 19.20.B, 19.20.C, 19.20.D, 19.20.E, 19.22.A, 19.20.C, 19.23

Grade 8: 20.29.A, 20.29.C, 20.29.A, 20.29.C, 20.31

US History Since 1877: 41.7.D, 41.7.E, 41.28. A, 41.28.C, 41.29.A, 41.29.B, 41.30.B, 41.31

World History: 42.12.C, 42.27.C, 42.28.E, 42.30.A, 42.30.C, 42.31

NATIONAL STANDARDS:

Historical Content Era 8, Standard 3B

The student will understand the United States' role in the Pacific theater through the courses of action taken by the Army and the Navy.

Historical Thinking Standard 3

Students will be able to:

- Compare and contrast the ideas and behaviors of General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz.
- Understand and explain the cause-and-effect relationships between MacArthur and Nimitz's decisions.
- Hypothesize the weaknesses and strengths of MacArthur and Nimitz.

World History Era 8, Standard 4B

The student will be able to explain the major turning points of the war in the Pacific theatre.

MATERIALS:

- Army and Navy Argument Cards
- Map of the Pacific Theater
- Whiteboard, chalkboard, or large sheet of paper with writing utensil

RELEVANT PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:

- Students should have a general understanding of the causes, major events, and key players of World War II, including the global nature of the conflict and the involvement of various nations.

- It is important for students to have a basic understanding of the geography of the Pacific region, including the locations of countries, islands, and major bodies of water involved in the conflict. This will help them grasp the strategic importance of certain locations.
- Students should be familiar with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and its impact on the United States' entry into the war. Understanding the reasons behind the attack and its consequences will help set the stage for the Pacific Theater.
- A basic understanding of the role of strategic bombing in the Second World War.

LESSON INSTRUCTION:

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. On a projector, show a map of the Pacific region for the class.
 - Ask the students what they notice about the map?
 - Now ask the students to imagine they are going back in time to World War II. They are now the military leaders and strategists tasked with creating a plan to invade the Japanese home islands and end the war.
 - Now ask them again what they notice about the map. What do they think will be their biggest obstacles?
 - Answers should include the size of the Pacific, the distance between islands, the distance from our allies, sharing resources with the European Theater, etc.
2. Divide students into two equally sized groups and assign 2-3 students to be representatives for their group.
3. Assign one group as the “Army” under General Douglas MacArthur and the other as the “Navy” under Admiral Chester Nimitz.
4. On the whiteboard/chalkboard/paper, make two large tables.
 - Each table will consist of two columns for the pros and cons of both the Army and Navy plans.
5. Read the following background information aloud to the students. Take time to point out the key geographic regions on the map.

BACKGROUND: As American Forces began their long road to Tokyo, Army and Navy planners began to have differing ideas about the route.

The Army, under General Douglas MacArthur, advocated a drive through The Philippines before landing American troops in China. From airbases in China, the Army believed that their bombers would be able to pummel Japan into submission.

The Navy and Admiral Chester Nimitz, on the other hand, favored an assault through the Central Pacific that would culminate in the capture of the Marianas Islands. In range of Japan, airbases in the Marianas would also allow American bombers to strike the Japanese home islands.

Despite similarities in these plans, there was considerable disagreement between Army and Navy as to the “correct” strategy to pursue...

PART TWO: THE DEBATE

1. Pass out the Army Argument Card to General MacArthur's group and pass out the Navy Argument Card to Admiral Nimitz's group.
2. Give each group 10-20 minutes to discuss the strategy and develop a plan. Remind each group that their spokespeople will present their arguments to the class.
3. When the timer expires, give each group's spokespeople three minutes to present their arguments to the class.

NAVY PLAN ARGUMENTS:

- Taking the Philippines will take too much manpower! There are over 7,000 islands there with jungles and mountains. Plus, the size of the islands will allow the Japanese to construct numerous defensive lines that will take long campaigns to defeat.
- The Central Pacific route to Tokyo will take less time. We will only need to conquer a handful of strategic islands from the Japanese before we can begin bombing runs over Japan.
- The islands in the Central Pacific, like Guam, Saipan, and Kwajalein are tiny in comparison to those in the Philippines. The campaigns to clear these islands, which have only small areas of defensible terrain, should result in fewer casualties.
- The Central Pacific Islands have only small civilian populations, while the Philippines has millions of people living there. We can fight more easily if we aren't worried about the safety of civilians on the battlefield.
- The Philippines is a tight group of islands, allowing Japanese aircraft from one island to attack our ships while we invade another. The amount of time it would take to defeat the Japanese in the Philippines would expose our ships to danger from Japanese counterattacks while they guard the beachheads.

ARMY PLAN ARGUMENTS:

- We owe it to the Filipino people to liberate them from the Japanese occupation. The people of the Philippines were an American protectorate and relied on us for their safety—we failed them when the Japanese defeated us there in 1942. We must prioritize their liberation.
- The Chinese have been fighting the Japanese since 1937 and need our help. Their people have suffered under ferocious Japanese attacks and have the majority of Japanese forces tied down in their country. We must help them!
- We have tens of thousands of American Prisoners, both civilian and military being held by the Japanese in camps under horrible conditions. How can we bypass them and allow them to continue suffering?
- The Central Pacific plan leaves only small opportunities for the Army to play a large role in the fighting. The Navy should not have an outsized share of the victory in the Pacific.
- Taking the Philippines would cut Japan off from key industrial supplies like oil, rubber, and iron that are gathered in the Dutch East Indies. If we cut off those supplies, the war will end more quickly.

PART THREE: THE VOTE

- Once each group has presented their arguments and strategy, have the students collectively fill out the Pro and Con tables on the board or paper.
- Give students approximately 15 minutes to complete the debate and fill out the tables.
- Discuss their final tables with the students to review the information before it goes to a vote.
- Have students vote on which plan to follow. Tally the votes and announce the winning plan. Use this time to encourage discussion. Are the students happy with their decision? Do they think they chose the same plan as Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur?

PART FOUR: CONCLUSION

- Reveal the actual plan followed by the United States Forces in the Pacific War below.
- Wrap up the activity by having the students reflect on the leadership and decision-making process. Were they surprised at the historic outcome vs their own?
- Look at the map once more. Encourage the students to discuss what they see post-debate that they didn't notice in the beginning.

THE WINNING PLAN:

In the end, neither plan won out entirely. The United States pursued the Japanese across the Central Pacific, making landings in the Marshalls and Marianas before eventually setting up bases for B-29 Bombers to begin regular raids on Japan. However, the Army planners also succeeded in rallying support for an invasion of the Philippines. While costly, this long campaign liberated millions from Japanese occupation nearly six months before the end of the war. Ultimately though, the bases in the Marianas islands played the starring role in ending the fighting. In August 1945, the Enola Gay, a B-29 bomber embarked from Tinian, carrying an atomic bomb. The detonation of this weapon over Hiroshima, and a second over Nagasaki days later, drove the Japanese to surrender—ending the Second World War.

ADMIRAL NIMITZ: NAVY ARGUMENT PLAN

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GENERAL MACARTHUR: ARMY ARGUMENT PLAN

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