

## Socratic Seminar: Atomic Bomb

### **Historical Background:**

On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, and a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. In total, the two atomic bombs resulted in as many as 200,000 casualties (deaths and injuries) and the surrender of Japan. Although the atomic bombs are credited with effectively ending World War II, the usage of the atomic bombs remains one of the most debated and controversial decisions in modern history.

### **Prompt:**

Was dropping the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified?

### **Directions:**

Read and annotate (highlight/underline and write comments in the margin) each document. Additionally, research the atomic bomb using the provided websites. Then, complete the graphic organizer to organize your points for the Socratic Seminar. You will be graded on both your graphic organizer and your participation in the Socratic Seminar.

## The Documents

### **Document 1**

Source: President Harry S. Truman

"I had then set up a committee of top men and had asked them to study with great care the implications the new weapons might have for us. It was their recommendation that the bomb be used against the enemy as soon as it could be done. They recommended further that it should be used without specific warning I had realized, of course, that an atomic bomb explosion would inflict damage and casualties beyond imagination. On the other hand, the scientific advisors of the committee reported that no technical demonstration they might propose, such as over a deserted island, would be likely to bring the war to an end. It had to be used against an enemy target.

The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never doubted it should be used."

### **Document 2**

Source: Admiral William E. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, in his memoirs titled *I Was There*

"The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan. The Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender...

"In being the first to use it, we . . . adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children."

### Document 3

Secretary of War Henry Stimson

"The face of war is the face of death; death is an inevitable part of every order that a wartime leader gives. The decision to use the atomic bomb was a decision that brought death to over a hundred thousand Japanese.

"But this deliberate, premeditated destruction was our least abhorrent alternative. The destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki put an end to the Japanese war. It stopped the fire raids, and the strangling blockade; it ended the ghastly specter of a clash of great land armies. In this last great action of the Second World War we were given final proof that war is death."

### Document 4

Source: On July 17, 1945, Leo Szilard and 69 co-signers at the Manhattan Project "Metallurgical Laboratory" in Chicago petitioned the President of the United States.

#### A PETITION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

"We feel, however, that such attacks on Japan could not be justified, at least not unless the terms which will be imposed after the war on Japan were made public in detail and Japan were given an opportunity to surrender....

...if Japan still refused to surrender our nation might then, in certain circumstances, find itself forced to resort to the use of atomic bombs. Such a step, however, ought not to be made at any time without seriously considering the moral responsibilities which are involved.

.... Thus a nation which sets the precedent of using these newly liberated forces of nature for purposes of destruction may have to bear the responsibility of opening the door to an era of devastation on an unimaginable scale

....If after this war a situation is allowed to develop in the world which permits rival powers to be in uncontrolled possession of these new means of destruction, the cities of the United States as well as the cities of other nations will be in continuous danger of sudden annihilation."

### Document 5

Source: Lester Bernstein, *New York Times*, 10/24/65

"The day was August 6, 1945. I was a G.I. who had weathered the war in Europe and now awaited my place in the storming of Japan's home islands. On Truman's orders, the first atomic bomb ever wielded in war exploded over Hiroshima. For Americans in uniform and those who waited for them to come home, outrageous as this might appear from the moral heights of hindsight, it was a sunburst of deliverance."

## Document 6

Source: Memorandum by Ralph A. Bard, Undersecretary of the Navy, to Secretary of War Stimson, June 27, 1945

“Ever since I have been in touch with this program I have had a feeling that before the bomb is actually used against Japan that Japan should have some preliminary warning for say two or three days in advance of use. The position of the United States as a great humanitarian nation and the fair play attitude of our people generally is responsible in the main for this feeling.

During recent weeks I have also had the feeling very definitely that the Japanese government may be searching for some opportunity which they could use as a medium of surrender....together with whatever assurances the President might care to make with regard to the Emperor of Japan and the treatment of the Japanese nation following unconditional surrender. It seems quite possible to me that this presents the opportunity which the Japanese are looking for.

I do not believe under present circumstances existing that there is anyone in this country whose evaluation of the chances of the success of such a program is worth a great deal. The only way to find out is to try it out.”

## Document 7

Source: American History Textbook, *American Vision*, pg. 615

“Even before the bomb was tested, American officials began to debate how to use it. Admiral William Leahy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, opposed using the bomb because it killed civilians indiscriminately. He believed that an economic blockade and conventional bombing would convince Japan to surrender.

“Secretary of War Henry Stimson wanted to warn the Japanese about the bomb while at the same time telling them that they could keep the emperor if they surrendered. Secretary of State James Byrnes, however, wanted to drop the bomb without any warning to shock Japan into surrendering.

“President Truman later wrote that he ‘regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubts that it should be used.’ His advisers had warned him to expect massive casualties if the United States invaded Japan. Truman believed it was his duty as president to use every weapon available to save American lives.”

## Document 8

Source: Paul Fussell, a World War II soldier in an excerpt of *Thank You God for the Atom Bomb*, 1990

“My division, like most of the ones transferred from Europe was going to take part in the invasion at Honshu (an island of Japan). The people who preferred invasion to A-bombing seemed to have no intention of proceeding to the Japanese front themselves. I have already noted what a few more days would mean to the luckless troops and sailors on the spot.... On Okinawa, only a few weeks before Hiroshima, 123,000 Japanese and Americans killed each other. War is immoral. War is cruel.”

### Document 9

Source: James Byrnes was one of Truman's advisors. In addition to defeating Japan, he wanted to keep the Soviet Union from expanding its influence in Asia and to limit its influence in Europe. Manhattan Project scientist Leo Szilard met with Byrnes on May 28, 1945 and wrote about it in 1980.

"[Byrnes] was concerned about Russia's postwar behavior. Russian troops had moved into Hungary and Romania, and Byrnes thought it would be very difficult to persuade Russia to withdraw her troops from these countries, that Russia might be more manageable if impressed by American military might, and that a demonstration of the bomb might impress Russia."

### Document 10

Source: Atomic Bomb survivor Yoshitaka Kawamoto was thirteen years old. He was in the classroom at Zakoba-cho, 0.8 kilometers away from the hypocenter.

"One of my classmates, I think his name is Fujimoto, he muttered something and pointed outside the window, saying, 'A B-29 is coming.' He pointed outside with his finger. So I began to get up from my chair and asked him, 'Where is it?' Looking in the direction that he was pointing towards, I got up on my feet, but I was not yet in an upright position when it happened. All I can remember was a pale lightning flash for two or three seconds. Then, I collapsed. I don't know much time passed before I came to. It was awful, awful. The smoke was coming in from somewhere above the debris. Sandy dust was flying around. . .

I crawled over the debris, trying to find someone who were still alive. Then, I found one of my classmates lying alive. I held him up in my arms. It is hard to tell, his skull was cracked open, his flesh was dangling out from his head. He had only one eye left, and it was looking right at me. . . . he told me to go away.

I, so, was running, hands were trying to grab my ankles, they were asking me to take them along. I was only a child then. And I was horrified at so many hands trying to grab me. I was in pain, too. So all I could do was to get rid of them, it's terrible to say, but I kicked their hands away. I still feel bad about that. I went to Miyuki Bridge to get some water. At the river bank, I saw so many people collapsed there. . . I was small, so I pushed on the river along the small steps. The water was dead people. I had to push the bodies aside to drink the muddy water. We didn't know anything about radioactivity that time. I stood up in the water and so many bodies were floating away along the stream."

### Document 11

Source: Compiled from statistical evidence

Estimates of Casualties		
	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Pre-Raid Population	255,000	195,000
Dead	66,000	39,000
Injured	69,000	25,000
<b>Total Casualties</b>	<b>135,000</b>	<b>64,000</b>