

JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB: TASK INSTRUCTIONS

The key question: Was Hiroshima the biggest event of World War 2?

Your task: You must argue the case that dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945 was the most important event of WW2.

Click on the **starter source** for more details then open the source box.

Use this table to help plan your report.

Download a PDF of this whole investigation.

WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?

This web resource has featured many of the significant events, developments and individuals of World War 2.

Your task

You have been asked to contribute to a TV programme that debates the significance of important events in History. You have been chosen to argue that the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945 was the most important event of WW2. Other people will argue that other events, developments or individuals were more important.

Prepare a set of notes (or some other format) to help you in your programme. You should think about the tests historians use when they look at the significance of an historical event:

- Was it important to people at the time?
- Did it have a deep impact on at least some people?
- How many people were affected in a big way?
- How long lasting were the effects?
- Are there any lessons that help us understand life today?

You could look more closely at the decision to drop the bomb that US [President Truman](#) took in 1945

Use this [table](#) to help you plan your work.

**FILM CLIP FROM A DOCUMENTARY CALLED DATE WITH HISTORY ABOUT
THE DROPPING OF THE ATOM BOMB ON HIROSHIMA IN AUGUST 1945**

Catalogue ref: BP190242131817
Courtesy of [ITN/Source](#), London.

32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43

[Sound of a huge explosion]

In a fraction of a second the explosion of the bomb became a ball of fire 1800 feet across with a temperature at its centre of 100 million degrees.

This was the bomb that killed outright some 72,000 people, many of them innocent inhabitants far remote from the decisions which led to the holocaust in which they were suddenly burned alive.

This was the bomb that many had said should never have been dropped and many have said so since.

This was the bomb nevertheless that foreshortened the war and prevented the further killing of hundreds of thousands.

This was the bomb that showed mankind the awful truth of a weapon to end all weapons. A weapon that could perhaps end mankind itself.

The flash of the bomb was followed by an immense heat. It lasted only an instant but it was so intense it melted roof tiles and charred the exposed side of telegraph poles for two miles and cremated human beings so thoroughly that the only remaining trace of them was their shadows.

[Word indistinct] and families were vaporised. Acres on acres were completely raised.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

What is this source?

This clip comes from a documentary made in 1965 covering the decisions surrounding the dropping of the first Atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The documentary uses archive newsreel footage from British Pathe shown here.

What's the background to this source?

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders were faced with a terrible decision. Should they carry on invading Japan's many islands and suffer thousands of casualties? Or should they use the terrible power of the new weapon, the Atom Bomb, which they had just developed?

US President Truman consulted his commanders, scientists and also his allies, particularly British leader Winston Churchill. Churchill felt the bomb should be used to shorten the war. The military leaders were divided and many of the scientists who developed the bomb also felt that it was wrong to use it. In the end, Truman did decide to use it, and even said later in his life that the decision was easy.

It's worth knowing that..

As well as the 72 000 killed directly by the bomb at Hiroshima many thousands more died from radiation poisoning in the period after the attack.

The USA dropped another atom bomb on the city of Nagasaki on August 9th 1945. The results were just as devastating.

How will you use this source?

1. Were the people of Hiroshima ready for the attack?
2. What were the effects of the attack on the city and its people?
3. Do you find the images shocking?
4. How would you describe the tone of the commentary in this programme?
5. Which parts of the film or the commentary do you think will be useful in preparing for the TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.

PACIFIC 1939-1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?

Extracts from an American report on the impact of the bomb on the people of Hiroshima

Catalogue ref: FO 371/59640

The accentuated effect of these bombs came not only from the surprise and their crushing power, but also from the feeling of security among the inhabitants of the two cities before the attacks. Though Nagasaki had undergone five raids in the previous year, they had not been heavy, and Hiroshima had gone almost untouched until the morning of 6 August 1945. In both cities many people felt that they would be spared, and the various rumors in circulation supporting such feeling covered a wide range of wishful thoughts. There were so many Christians

Typical comments of survivors were:

"If the enemy has this type of bomb, everyone is going to die, and we wish the war would hurry and finish."

Of greater significance are the reaction of the Japanese people as a whole. The two raids were all-Japan events and were intended so: the Allied powers were trying to break the fighting spirit of the Japanese people and their leaders, not just of the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Virtually all the Japanese people had a chance to react to the bomb, though the news had not reached to full spread at the time of the surrender. By the time the interviewing was done, only about two per cent of the population in rural areas and one per cent in the cities had not heard of the bomb.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

What is this source?

This extract comes from an American report looking at the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. It was very long and detailed and looked at the damage caused to buildings and people. It also looked at the lessons that could be learned from the dropping of the bomb.

This particular extract came from a section that looked at the psychological impact of the bomb on people in Hiroshima.

What's the background to this source?

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders decided to use the new weapon that they had just developed, the Atom Bomb.

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It's worth knowing that...

Hiroshima had not been heavily bombed during the war and as a result the population was less familiar with air raid protection than other Japanese cities.

Before Hiroshima, US bombers had attacked Japanese cities with firebomb raids that were devastatingly effective. Raids on the Japanese capital Tokyo actually killed more people than the Hiroshima bomb, but obviously not with just one weapon.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

How will you use this source?

1. Why did the bombs come as such a shock to the two cities?
2. What psychological impact did the bomb have on people in Hiroshima?
3. How widely did news of the bomb spread? Was this surprising in wartime?
4. Do you think people in Britain or the USA would have had much sympathy for the people of Hiroshima?
5. Which parts of the source do you think will be useful in preparing for your TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.

WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?

Extracts from an American report on the possible impact of atomic weapons on US cities

Catalogue ref: FO 371/59640

The overwhelming bulk of the buildings in American cities could not stand up against an atomic bomb bursting a mile or a mile and a half from them.

And the people? We must not too readily discount the casualty rate because of the teeming populations of congested Japanese cities. American cities too have their crowded slums, and in addition tend to build vertically so that the density of the population is high in a given area even though each apartment dweller may have more living space than his Japanese equivalent.

The casualty rates at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, applied to the massed inhabitants of Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx, yield a grim conclusion. These casualty rates, it must never be forgotten, result from the first atomic bombs to be used and from bombs burst at considerable distances above the ground. Improved bombs, perhaps detonated more effectively, may well prove still more deadly.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

What is this source?

This extract comes from an American report looking at the dropping of the bomb on Hiroshima in 1945. It was very long and detailed and looked at the damage caused to buildings and people. It also looked at the lessons that could be learned from the dropping of the bomb.

This particular extract comments on the possible effects of a Hiroshima type bomb on an American city such as New York.

What's the background to this source?

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders decided to use the new weapon that they had just developed, the Atom Bomb.

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It's worth knowing that...

The aim of this section of the report was to analyse how US cities would be affected by atomic attack. This was soon to become a serious threat. Once WW2 ended relations between the USA and the Soviet Union quickly became tense. They intensified in 1949 when the USSR developed its own atom bomb. One key factor that allowed the Soviet Union to develop this technology so quickly was the work of spies who passed on nuclear secrets.

The tensions between the USA and USSR became known as the Cold War.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

How will you use this source?

1. What would you say are the three main points that emerge from this source?
2. Is it surprising that this report was not made public?
3. How do you think readers would have reacted to the last sentence of this extract?
4. Does this source support the view of some commentators that the Hiroshima bomb changed history?
5. Which parts of the source do you think will be useful in preparing for the TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.

PACIFIC 1939-1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

WAS HIROSHIMA THE BIGGEST EVENT OF WORLD WAR 2?

Extracts from a memorandum on the Atom Bomb from Prime Minister Clement Attlee, 28th August 1945

Catalogue ref: CAB 126/257

8 Scientists agree that we cannot stop the march of discovery. We can assume that any attempt to keep this as a secret in the hands of the U.S.A. and U.K. is useless. Scientists in other countries are certain in time to hit upon the secret.

12 The only course which seems to me to be feasible and to offer a reasonable hope of staving off imminent disaster for the world is joint action by the U.S.A., U.K. and Russia based upon stark reality.

13 We should declare that this invention has made it essential to end wars. The new World Order must start now.

All nations must give up their dreams of realising some historic expansion at the expense of their neighbours. They must look to a peaceful future instead of to a warlike past. (3)

15 This sort of thing has in the past been considered a utopian dream. It has become today the essential condition of the survival of civilisation and possibly of life in this planet.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

What is this source?

These extracts come from a memorandum on the Atomic Bomb from Prime Minister Clement Attlee, 28th August 1945.

Attlee became Prime Minister in July 1945 after defeating Winston Churchill in the General Election. This meant that Attlee took office during the final conference of the Allies in World War 2 at Potsdam in Germany (July 17–August 2, 1945).

What's the background to this source?

The war in the Pacific was fought mostly (but not solely) between US forces and the forces of Japan. It began in December 1941 and cost many thousands of lives. By early 1945 US forces were beginning to invade the islands that made up the Japanese homelands. In February–March 1945 the Allied forces suffered huge casualties when they invaded the tiny island of Iwo Jima. Soon afterwards they suffered heavy casualties again when they invaded Okinawa. After assessing the situation US military and political leaders decided to use the new weapon that they had just developed, the Atom Bomb.

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It's worth knowing that...

After the war the United States suggested passing the responsibility for controlling nuclear technology to the newly formed United Nations and offered to get rid of its atomic weapons. However Russia did not trust America to keep its word and refused, going on to test its own atomic bomb in 1949.

Clement Attlee expected the United States to share its nuclear discoveries. Britain had supplied technical information and scientists to the Manhattan Project to build the bomb. But the US government passed the McMahon Act forbidding the transfer of atomic secrets to other countries. Attlee's government then decided to develop its own nuclear weapons and Britain became the third nuclear power in October 1952.

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/>

How will you use this source?

1. Why do you think the Prime Minister felt that it was "useless" to try and keep the scientific knowledge of the Atom Bomb secret from other countries?
2. Why do you think the Prime Minister said: "this invention has made it essential to end wars"?
3. Do you agree or disagree with any of the ideas in this source? Explain your views
4. Which parts of the source do you think will be useful in preparing for your TV debate?

Use this table to help you plan your work.

PACIFIC 1939–1945: JAPAN AND THE ATOM BOMB

You have been chosen to argue that the dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima in August 1945 was the most important event of WW2.

Use this table to record your notes for the debate.

What makes this event historically significant?	Arguments to support your case
Was it important to people at the time?	
Did it have a deep impact on at least some people?	
How many people were affected in a big way?	
How long lasting were the effects?	
Are there any lessons that help us understand life today?	