

Atomic Bomb Writing Prompts

Two Historical Narratives

Source: Excerpts from “Three Narratives of our Humanity” by John W. Dower, 1996. The following is from a book written by a historian about how people remember wars. John W. Dower explains the two different ways that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is remembered.

Hiroshima as Victimization

Japanese still recall the war experience primarily in terms of their own victimization. For them, World War II calls to mind the deaths of family and acquaintances on distant battlefields, and, more vividly, the prolonged, systematic bombings of their cities.

If it is argued that the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima was necessary to shock the Japanese to surrender, how does one justify the hasty bombing of Nagasaki only three days later, before the Japanese had time to investigate Hiroshima and formulate a response?

Hiroshima as Triumph

To most Americans, Hiroshima—the shattered, atomized, irradiated city – remains largely a symbol of triumph – marking the end of a horrendous global conflict and the effective demonstration of a weapon that has prevented another world war.

It is hard to imagine that the Japanese would have surrendered without the atomic bomb. Japanese battle plans that were in place when the bombs were dropped called for a massive, suicidal defense of the home islands, in which the imperial government would mobilize not only several million fighting men but also millions of ordinary citizens who had been trained and indoctrinated to resist to the end with primitive makeshift weapons. For Japanese to even discuss capitulation (surrender) was seditious (against the law).

1. In 1-2 sentences each, explain the two narratives (stories) about Hiroshima.
2. Which narrative do you agree with more? Why?

Directions: You will be reviewing the documents below and filling out a graphic organizer. Once this is completed, you will be writing a 7-10 sentence response about if you were Harry Truman in 1945, if you would have dropped the atomic bomb or not. In your answer, you must take a position and cite at least two (2) pieces of evidence.

Pro

- ◊ Save American and Japanese lives
- ◊ Prevented invasion on Japanese mainland
- ◊ Act as a warning to Stalin
- ◊ The United States rained pamphlets warning the Japanese people of the attack
- ◊ Multiple asks for surrender
- ◊ Ended the war in the Pacific
- ◊ A solution to Japan's "Never Surrender" Policy

Con

- ◊ High loss of casualties
- ◊ Un-necessary
- ◊ Immoral
- ◊ The Americans could have dropped the bomb on a deserted island as a demonstration
- ◊ Japan was already losing the war
- ◊ General Eisenhower was against dropping the Bomb

Document A: Pearl Harbor (USS Arizona) Photo



Document B: Bataan Death March Summary (History.com)

After the April 9, 1942, U.S. surrender of the Bataan Peninsula on the main Philippine island of Luzon to the Japanese during World War II (1939-45), the approximately 75,000 Filipino and American troops on Bataan were forced to make an arduous 65-mile march to prison camps. The men were divided into groups of approximately 100, and what became known as the Bataan Death March typically took each group around five days to complete. The exact figures are unknown, but it is believed that thousands of troops died because of the brutality of their captors, who starved and beat the marchers, and bayoneted those too weak to walk. Survivors were taken by rail from San Fernando to prisoner-of-war camps, where thousands more died from disease, mistreatment and starvation.

Document C: Japanese Kamikaze Photo

The Japanese pilots who in World War II made deliberate suicidal crashes into enemy targets, usually ships. The term also denotes the aircraft used in such attacks. Kamikaze attacks sank 34 ships and damaged hundreds of others during the war. At Okinawa they inflicted the greatest losses ever suffered by the U.S. Navy in a single battle, killing almost 5,000 men. Usually the most successful defense against kamikaze attack was to station picket destroyers around capital ships and direct the destroyers' anti-aircraft batteries against the kamikazes as they approached the larger vessels.



Document D: Japanese Defenses of Iwo Jima, 660 miles south of Tokyo

“...seeing that it was impossible to conduct our air, sea, and ground operations on Iwo Jima toward ultimate victory, it was decided that in order to gain time necessary for the preparation of the Homeland defense, our forces should rely solely upon the established defensive equipment in that area, checking the enemy by delaying tactics. Even the suicidal attacks by small groups of our Army and Navy airplanes, the surprise attacks by our submarines, and the actions of parachute units, although effective, could be regarded only as a strategic ruse on our part. It was a most depressing thought that we had no available means left for the exploitation of the strategic opportunities which might from time to time occur in the course of these operations.”

Document E: Hiroshima after the Atomic Bomb Image



Document F: Paul Fussell, U.S. Infantryman in Europe, upon Receiving Word of the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima & Nagasaki

“When the atom bombs were dropped and the news began to circulate that we would not be obligated in a few months to rush up the beaches near Tokyo assault-firing while being machine-gunned, mortared and shelled we broke down and cried with relief and joy. We were going to live. We were going to grow to adulthood after all.”

– “Thank God for the Atom Bomb” by Prof. Paul Fussell

Document G: President Harry S. Truman’s Press Release Announcing the Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945 and Statement Defending the Use of Atomic Weapons

“...The Japanese began the war from the air at Pearl Harbor. They have been repaid many fold. And the end is not yet. With this bomb we have now added a new and revolutionary increase in destruction to supplement the growing power of our armed forces. In their present form these bombs are now in production and even more powerful forms are in development... We are now prepared to obliterate more rapidly and completely every productive enterprise the Japanese have above ground in any city. We shall destroy their docks, their factories, and their communications. Let there be no mistake; we shall completely destroy Japan's power to make war... It was to spare the Japanese people from utter destruction that the ultimatum of July 26 was issued at Potsdam. Their leaders promptly rejected that ultimatum. If they do not now accept our terms they may expect a rain of ruin from the air, the like of which has never been seen on this earth. We have used it against those who attacked without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have abandoned the pretense of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans.”

Document H: Critics of Truman's Decision to Use Atomic Weapons

"...It is the Survey's opinion that certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945 (well before the date of the [proposed] invasion) Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not been dropped."

-United States Army Air Force Strategy Bombing Survey, 1946

"It is my opinion that 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 because of the effective sea blockade and the successful bombing with conventional weapons...My own feeling was that being the first to use [the atomic bomb], we adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make wars in that fashion, and that wars cannot be won by destroying women and children"

-Admiral William D. Leahy, President Truman's Chief of Staff, in his memoir "I Was There" (Whittlesey, 1950)

Document I: Colonel Paul Tibbets, Jr., and His Thoughts on the Use of Atomic Weapons on Japan

Colonel Tibbets was the pilot of the Enola Gay, the B29 Superfortress that dropped the world's first atomic weapon on Hiroshima. In 1995, on the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing, Tibbets was asked how he felt about his role in the world-altering events of August 1945:

"I was anxious to do it... I wanted to do everything that I could to subdue Japan. I wanted to kill the bastards. That was the attitude of the United States in those years...I have been convinced that we saved more lives than we took. It would have been morally wrong if we'd have had that weapon and not used it and let a million more people die."

-"The Men Who Brought the Dawn: The Atomic Missions of Enola Gay and Bock's Car", Smithsonian Channel (1995)

Document J: Operation Downfall (Planned Invasion for Japan) Estimated Statistics

Personnel at the Navy Department estimated that the total losses to America would be between 1.7 and 4 million with 400,000 to 800,000 deaths. The same department estimated that there would be up to 10 million Japanese casualties.

Source: Excerpts from "Three Narratives of our Humanity" by John W. Dower, 1996. The following is from a book written by a historian about how people remember wars. John W. Dower explains the two different ways that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is remembered

Document K: Hiroshima & Nagasaki Death Statistics

TABLE A: Estimates of Casualties

	Hiroshima	Nagasaki
Pre-raid population	255,000	195,000
Dead	66,000	39,000
Injured	69,000	25,000
Total Casualties	135,000	64,000

Document:	For Or Against Dropping Bomb	How does this document support that position (for or against). Cite evidence in your own words.
A		
B		
C		
D		
E		
F		
G		
H		
I		
J		
K		

Prompt: writing a 7-10 sentence response about if you were Harry Truman in 1945, if you would have dropped the atomic bomb or not. In your answer, you must take a position and cite at least two (2) pieces of evidence.