



INTRODUCTION

After the United States dropped Little Boy on Hiroshima, Japan, the morning of August 6, 1945, the world learned of the great secret behind the Manhattan Project. Even with thousands of people involved in the construction of atomic bombs, the secrecy around the manufacture of nuclear weapons remained tightly held. Outside of limited cases of espionage, news of the atomic bomb went unnoticed among the general public until after the bombing of Hiroshima, and the dropping of Fat Man three days later on Nagasaki. As knowledge of atomic weapons reached the general public, reactions varied widely. In this lesson, students will examine primary source materials from The National WWII Museum's collection in which differing responses to the atomic bomb appear. Looking at the letters of civilians living near Alamogordo, New Mexico, of a participant in the Manhattan Project, and of a servicemember stationed in the Pacific theater of operations (PTO), students will see how people perceived the atomic bomb, as well as the extent to which the general public understood the significance of that moment.

MATERIALS

- + Copies of the essay "Life in a Secret City"
- + Transcriptions of letters from The National WWII Museum's collection
- + Copy of Student Worksheet
- + Videos of Secret Cities – Clip from "Critical Past" video

OBJECTIVES

In reading different letters about the atomic bomb sent to and from a worker in the Manhattan Project, students should be able to determine how people from various backgrounds reacted to the news of its existence and its use in combat. Students should also assess how the differing perspectives affected the way certain individuals reacted to the dropping of such bombs on Japanese cities. By contrasting the views preserved in these primary sources, students will be able to see how limited the knowledge of nuclear weapons was in 1945, how debates on use of the bomb emerged in the aftermath of the war, and how even those who participated in the Manhattan Project had concerns about the existence of such weapons.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

ONLINE RESOURCES

ww2classroom.org



Fallout Protection guide

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 2

The student conducts historical research; therefore, the student is able to demonstrate the following:

- Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
- Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses and the purpose, perspective, or point of view from which it has been constructed.
- Appreciate historical perspectives.

HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 3

The student conducts historical research; therefore, the student is able to demonstrate the following:

- Consider multiple perspectives of various peoples in the past by demonstrating their differing motives, beliefs, interests, hopes, and fears.
- Compare competing historical narratives.

PROCEDURES

1. Before beginning the lesson, have the students read the included essays in the curriculum guide, "The Destroyer of Worlds" and "Life in a Secret City." Start the lesson by showing students the video clip of footage from Hanford and Oak Ridge. Have students briefly outline in a full-class discussion the key points they understand about the Manhattan Project, the primary project sites, and the kind of work people who participated in the Manhattan Project did.
1. Before starting the lesson, have the students review Robert "Bob" Garber's profile included in the essay, "Life in a Secret City." Have the students discuss where Garber worked and his connection to the Manhattan Project.
2. Move the discussion to the end of World War II and the use of atomic bombs on Japan. Remind the students that, before the bombing of Hiroshima, knowledge of the atomic bomb remained highly limited. Ask the students how they think people in the United States reacted to the bomb? How might someone affiliated with the Manhattan Project react?
3. Through a study of letters from the Robert Garber Collection from The National WWII Museum, students will gain insight into the differing perspectives that emerged following the bombing of Japan. In letters to and from Garber, friends, and family members, students will gain insight into how family members living near the Trinity Test site, a servicemember stationed in the Pacific, and a chemical engineer working at Oak Ridge reacted to knowledge of atomic bombs. Either have the students read the segments in advance of the class meeting, or have the students break up into small groups to read and present to the rest of the class what the letter covers.
4. In written and group discussions, have the students consider the different perspectives captured in the letters. Ask them how the different letters discuss the bomb itself, the kind of tone used, as well as how much detail the author appears to include. To what degree do the authors share their personal views? Why do the students think some express more personal views than others? What can students decipher from what the authors do not say, in addition to what they do say?
5. Conclude the discussion by asking the class whether people at the time understood the significance that came with the development and use of the atomic bombs. What examples from the letters indicate this awareness, or lack of awareness? Do the letters seem to indicate that the world had entered a new atomic era? Why or why not?

ASSESSMENT

By reading and discussing this collection of letters, students should demonstrate critical thinking and assessment of primary source materials. Analyzing the different perspectives of the bombing of Japan that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the war, students should draw conclusions about the debate over the use of such weapons and why these contrasting views emerged so soon after news of atomic bombs became public. In the discussion, encourage students to connect the emergence of such debates to the continued historical analysis over the use of atomic bombs against Japan and the enduring legacy of the atomic weaponry post-World War II.

EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT

1. The revelation of nuclear weapons and the power that certain nations came to possess, forever changed the way people lived in the decades that followed the end of World War II. As the Soviet Union developed their own nuclear weapons and the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union (USSR) began, life across the United States changed in a multitude of ways. Have students consult the **Fallout Protection guide** available on ww2classroom.org to find examples of the way the Atomic Age altered daily life. Ask students to find additional examples, including “duck and cover” drills in schools. Students should then create a multimedia presentation that illustrates the ways news of nuclear weapons affected daily life in the post-war United States.
2. In the immediate aftermath of use of the atomic bombs to end the war, the general American public did not yet have a full understanding that they had entered a new atomic age. Have students explore other major current events that may have greater historical significance than people anticipate. Ask students to examine current headlines and see if there are any stories that receive some attention, but whose importance people today may underestimate or question. What new forms of technology or pressing issues directly affect the way people today live? Is the public today fully aware of these changes? Some examples can include the creation of “smart” technology, climate change, or even present-day debates over nuclear weapons.

LETTER TRANSCRIPTIONS FROM ROBERT GARBER COLLECTION

Courtesy of The National WWII Museum

**FROM: D.W. GARBER, ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO
TO: ROBERT GARBER, OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE**

[Excerpts from a 12 page letter]



Robert Garber headshot.
(Image: The National WWII Museum, 2018.233.538_1.)

This letter from Robert Garber's brother includes descriptions of the Trinity Test, indicating that people living in the area in New Mexico had an idea of the testing, described here as "the big experiment," but did not fully understand the implications of the test. Garber's connection to the Manhattan Project may have helped his family have greater insight into the work conducted, but that is not fully clear.

Dear Long Lost Brother

This is to advise you that your long delayed communication has been received and the content noted. Was beginning to think that you had us at the top of the list (and started at the bottom). No foolin though was sure glad to hear from you and how that the ice is again broken, sure hope you can spare a few moments soon to repeat.

[...]

Well I guess I had better bring you up to date on the History of the Great Southwest Garbers, so here goes.

[...]

We didnt hear or feel the big experiment but there were a lot in town that did. You boys sure got something there. I also get a bang out of the commentators and their expert explanations. Did you hear the one that was wondering where it got its oxygen supply from? Los Alamos isn t so far from here (north toward Santa Fe). Any chances of you getting transferred down here? Alamogordo is quite a bit south of here, near El Paso.

Well I guess I sure outdid myself this time.

Love,

Alice, Gary, & Don

In this letter, postmarked August 7, 1945, Garber writes to his parents and finally discusses his role in the Manhattan Project, as well as news reactions to the atomic bomb. He refrains from discussing his personal views in depth, but he does detail the way people at Oak Ridge responded to news of the bombing of Hiroshima.

Hi Again Folks,

But you're surprised to hear from me again so soon. I suppose your interest has been aroused by the sensational headlines about Atomic Bombs. Well, security permits to say that we are connected with the Manhattan Engineering District. And the papers aren't kidding, that is, where you can crawl through all the stuff spread by characters who don't have any idea what they're talking about. Anyway you won't have to try to pump me anymore. No, Mom, it wasn't flame throwers or poison gas!

I heard the news on a radio out at work at about 11:00 this morning. Everybody got sorta worked up about it. I couldn't even buy a paper tonight. Not a one left.

I can't tell about our part in it or anything else for now. There was quite a splurge on the local radio & papers (Knoxville) about actual facts & figures of Oak Ridge (Pop. 75,000).

It's been a cloudy drizzly day. I got dampened when I went to dinner.

Well, read all about it in the papers. I gotta get to sleep.

Bye now.

Love,

Bob

In this follow-up letter Garber sent to his parents, postmarked August 13, 1945, the war is near its end, and he feels free to discuss his work at Oak Ridge in further detail. Since his arrival at Oak Ridge in March 1944, this is the first time he has been able to share with his family what he had been doing while stationed in Tennessee.

Hi Folks,

Well, the war is almost over (9:30 pm). Everybody started whooping it up after that false report came through. That is, until the denial came through. Lets hope its over before you receive this. By the way, dont expect me back in civies [civilian clothing] within a couple of weeks after its over. I ve grown to love the army & Tennessee (it says here).

Well, anyway I can tell you that since I ve been down here, I ve been af liated with Clinton Laboratories, one of the plants on the project. Perhaps it has been mentioned in your papers. I cant seem to nd mention made in the papers of the work our plant does, so I cant go on from there. Later, maybe. Todays [sic] paper released a lot of material that we all thought would never be publicized. Ill bring all the papers along with me or send them.

[...]

Its been a pretty interesting & exciting week, hasn t it. Hope it will calm down to peace. Well, thats all for now. Write soon.

Love,

Bob

[In postscript]

Atomic Bombs! Plutonium! I can write them now.

In the final letter in the series sent by Garber to his parents, postmarked August 20, 1945, he speaks even more about the end of the war, which officially came with the announcement of Japan's surrender five days earlier.

Hi Folks,

Well, looks like it's all over but the shouting, doesn't it. The people around here sure carried on like mad. We heard the news Tuesday night, or evening rather. We were swimming in the new pool, when sirens started blowing & long lines of cars started running all over the place honking like mad. After supper we decided to go down town & see the fun. Almost everybody had a bottle & those who didn't sponged. If I drank, that sure would have been a time for it. As it was, I watched everybody else hang a good one on. I didn't get back until after midnight.

[...]

I've saved all the papers from the extra on the atomic bomb to V-J day (the real one which hasn't come yet. I'll bring or send them all along.

I got a 12-page letter from Don & Alice telling all about New Mexico.

Well, write soon, & Bye for now.

Love,

Bob

This letter to Robert Garber came from Lyle Foster, who went through boot camp training with Garber at Camp White. Foster went on to serve in the Pacific theater of operations and wrote to Garber after use of two atomic bombs forced Japan to surrender. Foster's letter appears written in response to a letter sent by Garber; however the original letter is missing. Foster's response, however, reveals not only his own views of the atomic bomb, but also hints at Garber's apparent reservation.

October 19, 1945

Dear Bob,

I got your letter for Sept. 10 yesterday and was surprised to hear from you but glad at the same time.

[...]

The last time that I heard from you it seems you were in the infantry, so it was indeed good to hear that you got a break to go into something as good as you did. I am eager to hear what you think about the Atomic Bomb. In X-Ray we were studying a little about the atom so I have a slight idea what it's all about and the make-up of it. You can understand that I didn't learn what I did in chemistry in high school about it. Boy, those marks I use to get --- Wow. We had a pretty sharpe [sic] boy that taught us X-Ray an hour each day while we were working in New Guinea. It was a little chemistry, physics, electricity, anatomy, etc. so we covered a lot of ground.

[...]

I see that you held sort of a reserve opinion about the atomic bomb. You hinted that it was a little rough. True! True! But it don't hurt the dog less to cut it's [sic] tail off by little pieces. If anybody seen the hell that the boys over here had to go through they would surely approve of it. I was lucky compared to some of them so don't feel sorry for me. But this can be a good subject for us to talk about when I get back. What did I say? That's a bad subject over here. When you expect to get home, I mean.

[...]

I have high hopes to be home by Christmas. It depends largely on how lucky you hit it. I could be on my way by the time this letter reaches you and again it might be after Xmas. We are closing down in about ten days and no good rumors have come out as to what will happen after then.

[...]

Till I write again and hear from you --- of I get home --- I am hoping to see you in the not too distant future. How do you stack up on getting out?

As ever,

Lyle

NAME:**DATE:**

Directions: After reading an assigned letter from the Robert Garber collection, answer the following questions below to complete your analysis of this primary source. Cite specific examples to support your analysis of the letter, showing how it captures an individual's perspective of the atomic bombs.

LETTER INFORMATION (TO/FROM):

1. Describe the overall context of the letter, addressing the following questions:
who wrote the letter, when was it written, to whom was the letter written?

2. In what ways does the author of the letter describe the atomic bomb? What level of detail does the author include in descriptions of the bomb? Are there any notable omissions in the descriptions?

3. How do you think the author's perspective affected a personal view of the atomic bomb? In what ways did the author's experiences during the war influence this perspective and the way the author describes the bomb?