



INTRODUCTION

World War II presented American political and military leaders with many tough choices, every option having potential risks, costs, and ramifications. Even after careful study and deliberation, many situations arose where there was no clearly “correct” alternative, and leaders had to make a decision based on their own analysis of the pros and cons. In this lesson, students are presented with difficult decisions, then are asked to weigh the evidence supporting each option before making a choice about how to proceed. They will then compare their own choices with the actual outcomes in order to evaluate historical decisions and understand why historical actors took the courses of action they did. Examining the reasoning behind multiple options for solving a historical problem helps students understand that history is not inevitable and that individual human decisions shape the formation of history at every stage.

GRADE LEVEL

7–12

TIME REQUIREMENT

1–2 class periods

OBJECTIVE

By analyzing actual WWII strategic scenarios, students will be able to (1) identify the central problem in a scenario and propose and justify a historically plausible solution to it, (2) evaluate the actual decision that was made at the time and assess the likelihood and impact of alternative courses of action, and (3) identify and discuss the causal factors that contributed to a particular outcome (for example, the roles played by individuals, chance, ideas, etc.).

MATERIALS

- Scenarios and scenario outcomes are available as inserts in the published kit and online at ww2classroom.org.
- Copies of the accompanying **Student Worksheet**

ONLINE RESOURCES

ww2classroom.org

- ▶ **What Would You Do? Scenario: Standing Up to Hitler**
- ▶ **What Would You Do? Scenario: Segregation**
- ▶ **What Would You Do? Scenario: Bombing to Invade**
- ▶ **What Would You Do? Scenario: Dachau**

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1.A](#)

Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2](#)

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.9-10.9](#)

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR HISTORY

[HISTORICAL CONTENT ERA 8, STANDARD 3B](#)

The student understands World War II and how the Allies prevailed.

[HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 2](#)

The student is able to identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses and the purpose, perspective, or point of view from which it has been constructed.

The student is able to differentiate between historical facts and historical interpretations but acknowledge that the two are related; that the facts the historian reports are selected and reflect therefore the historian's judgment of what is most significant about the past.

The student is able to read historical narratives imaginatively, taking into account what the narrative reveals of the humanity of the individuals and groups involved—their probable values, outlook, motives, hopes, fears, strengths, and weaknesses.

[HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 5](#)

The student is able to identify issues and problems in the past and analyze the interests, values, perspectives, and points of view of those involved in the situation.

PROCEDURES

1. Introduce the lesson by reviewing, or by having students read, the **European Strategy Overview Essay**. Explain that students will be investigating wartime strategy in a more detailed manner by analyzing real-life scenarios from the war in Europe, proposing and justifying responses to those scenarios, and comparing their ideas with what actually happened.
2. Divide the class into groups, assigning each group a **scenario strip** (but not the corresponding **outcome strip**). Depending on where this lesson falls in your WWII unit, you may want to review the scenarios to make sure you have not already discussed the specific decisions they involve. Depending on your students' ability levels or the amount of time you have available for the lesson, you may prefer to work through these scenarios as a whole class.

NOTE: In addition to the printed scenarios included in this lesson, you may also complete this activity using the **What Would You Do?** videos available on ww2classroom.org.

3. Instruct students to read their scenario carefully and write their own independent responses to questions 1, 2, and 3 under Part I of the Student Worksheet.
4. Have students share their answers with the other members of their group. The group must then try to come to an agreement about which of the choices presented in the scenario is the best choice. Once the group has reached a consensus, students should answer questions 4 and 5 under Part I of the **Student Worksheet**.
5. Distribute the appropriate **outcome strip** to each group to inform students of how their scenarios were actually resolved in real life. Have students complete Part II of the **Student Worksheet** independently to identify the impact of the actual decision, the factors that influenced it, the alternative courses of action that were available, and the potential consequences of those alternatives.
6. After students have finished reflecting on their outcomes by completing Part II of the **Student Worksheet**, instruct them to share their responses with their group, noting any points of disagreement.
7. Have each group share its scenario with the whole class, explaining which course they would have chosen versus the course that was actually chosen, which factors influenced the actual outcome, and whether they agree with the actual decision that was made. As students present their stances, press them to provide evidence from the scenarios and reasoning to support their arguments. You may also find the following discussion questions useful:
 - What were the factors driving the decision-making process among American leaders in Europe during World War II?
 - What challenges did you face in attempting to evaluate these historical decisions?
 - Do you believe there were other realistic alternatives to the ones presented in your scenario? Name an example and explain why you believe this was a reasonable alternative.

ASSESSMENT

You will be able to assess students' understanding based on their responses to the **Student Worksheet**, their discussion within their groups, and through their contributions to the whole-class discussion.

EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT

- Have students write a brief essay describing how events might have gone differently if the actual decision in their scenario had not been made and the opposite path had been taken.
- Based on the whole-class discussion at the end of the activity, have students reflect on the factors that seem to be driving policy across all of these scenarios, ranking them from most to least important.
- Have students search the Museum's Digital Collections (ww2online.org) for oral histories and photographs related to the events covered in the scenarios.

NAME:**DATE:****PART I: SCENARIO ASSESSMENT**

1. What is the scenario's primary issue or problem?
2. What would you do in this scenario?
3. Why would you choose this course of action?
4. What arguments did your group members make, and how easy/difficult was it for everyone to come to an agreement?
5. Explain the reasoning behind your group's decision about the best course of action.

PART II: OUTCOME ASSESSMENT

1. What was the actual decision in this scenario, and what was the impact of that decision?
2. What factors influenced the decision? Why do you think the person made the decision he did?
3. Do you think this person made the right choice given the circumstances and the information available at the time? Why or why not?
4. What alternative course(s) of action could the decision-maker have realistically pursued? What do you think the impact of that alternative course would have been?
5. What additional historical information about this scenario do you wish you had before evaluating the decision? Where could this information be found?