

PACIFIC STRATEGY

Strategic Decision-Making in the Pacific

(National Archives and Records Administration, WC 1207.)

INTRODUCTION

The war in the Pacific involved vast distances, inhospitable environments, and combatants who thoroughly misunderstood one another due to ignorance, arrogance, and racial prejudice. These conditions contributed to the battle becoming a “war without mercy,” with fierce fighting and atrocities on both sides. In this context, chance, opportunism, and split-second decision-making played as much of a role in the US Pacific strategy as did long-range planning and calculated analyses of costs and benefits. This lesson places students in the center of the action as they consider actual wartime scenarios in order to evaluate historical decisions and to determine and justify courses of action.

OBJECTIVES

By analyzing actual WWII strategic scenarios, students will be able to:

- identify the central problem and propose and justify a historically plausible solution to it,
- evaluate the decision that was made at the time and assess the likelihood and impact of alternative courses of action, and
- identify and discuss the causal factors that contributed to a particular outcome (e.g., what role did individuals, chance, ideas, etc., play?).

GRADE LEVEL

7–12

TIME REQUIREMENT

1–2 class periods

MATERIALS

This lesson plan uses scenarios and scenario outcomes included as inserts with the printed guide and online at ww2classroom.org.

ONLINE RESOURCES

ww2classroom.org

- ▶ **Mapping the Pacific Strategy Video**
- ▶ **Strategic Overview Video**
- ▶ **Battle of Midway Video**
- ▶ **Guadalcanal Intro Video**
- ▶ **Rosemarie Weber Oral History**
- ▶ **Island Hopping Map**
- ▶ **Extent of Japanese Occupation Map**
- ▶ **Approach to Midway Map**
- ▶ **Guadalcanal Map**
- ▶ **Invading the Gilbert Islands Map**
- ▶ **What Would You Do? Civilians as Human Shields Video**
- ▶ **What Would You Do? Battle of Philippine Sea Video**

STANDARDS

COMMON CORE STANDARDS

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HISTORICAL CONTENT ERA 8, STANDARD 3B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 3

The student is able to challenge arguments of historical inevitability by formulating examples of historical contingency, or how different choices could have led to different consequences.

The student is able to analyze cause-and-effect relationships bearing in mind multiple causation including (a) the importance of the individual in history; (b) the influence of ideas, human interests, and beliefs; and (c) the role of chance, the accidental, and the irrational.

HISTORICAL THINKING STANDARD 5

The student is able to formulate a position or course of action on an issue by identifying the nature of the problem, analyzing the underlying factors contributing to the problem, and choosing a plausible solution from a choice of carefully evaluated options.

The student is able to evaluate the implementation of a decision by analyzing the interests it served; estimating the position, power, and priority of each player involved; assessing the ethical dimensions of the decision; and evaluating its costs and benefits from a variety of perspectives.

PROCEDURES

1. Introduce the lesson by reviewing, or having students read, the **Pacific Strategy Overview Essay** and by referencing the **Island Hopping Map** available at ww2classroom.org. Alternatively, you may introduce the lesson by showing the **Mapping the Pacific Strategy Video** (up to 3:10) and/or the **Strategic Overview Video**, which are also available on that website. Explain that students will investigate wartime strategy in a more detailed manner by analyzing real-life scenarios from the war in the Pacific, proposing and justifying responses to those scenarios, and comparing their responses with what actually happened.
2. Divide the class into five groups, distributing a **scenario** (available at ww2classroom.org and as an insert to the printed guide) to each group. Have each group complete Part I of the **Scenario Worksheet** in order to identify the scenario's primary issue or problem, choose a course of action, and write a brief justification for that course of action. While you may want students to complete the first three questions independently before discussing their answers with their group, the goal is for each group to reach a consensus regarding its assigned scenario. In order to reflect on the process of reaching consensus, students should respond to questions four and five after discussing the scenario with their group.

Note: In addition to the printed scenarios included in this lesson, you can complete this activity using the two **What Would You Do? Videos** that are available online at ww2classroom.org.

3. Distribute the appropriate **Scenario Outcome** (available at ww2classroom.org and as an insert to the printed guide) to each group to inform students of the situation's actual resolution. Have students complete Part II of the **Scenario Worksheet** 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.
4. After the members of each group discuss their responses with each other, have them share their scenario with the whole class, as well as what they would have done, what actually happened, the factors that influenced that outcome, and whether they agreed with the real-life decision.
5. Lead a discussion in which students assess the decisions that were made in each scenario by providing evidence/reasoning to support their stance. You may also ask students to identify and rank the factors that influenced decision-making during the war in the Pacific, to identify the challenges of evaluating historical decisions, and to determine the extent to which realistic alternatives were available.

ASSESSMENT

You will be able to assess students based on their responses on the worksheet, their discussion within their groups, and through whole-class discussion/sharing.

EXTENSION/ENRICHMENT

- For homework, have students rank the factors that influenced the course of the war in the Pacific in terms of importance, providing evidence to justify their responses.
- Have students learn more about the Invasion of Tarawa and listen to an oral-history excerpt with filmmaker Norman Hatch at <http://www.nationalww2museum.org/see-hear/collections/focus-on/invasion-of-tarawa.html>.
- Have students investigate other key moments in the war in the Pacific through the website for the Museum's special exhibit, *Turning Point: The Doolittle Raid, Battle of the Coral Sea, and Battle of Midway*: <http://turningpoint1942.org/>.
- Have students search the Museum's Digital Collections (<http://ww2online.org/>) for oral histories and photos related to the events covered in the scenarios.
- Have students read the Guadalcanal and Midway **Overview Essays** for more information on those battles.

YOUR 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 take this action?
4. What arguments did your group members make, and how easy/difficult was it for everyone to come to an agreement?
5. How did your group reach an agreement about the best course of action to take?

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 that he did?
3. Do you think this person made the right choice given the circumstances and the information available at the time? Why/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?