

Part 2: Experiencing the Korean War

Lesson Overview

Students will explore and gain an understanding of major events in the Korean War, including combat actions, political and military decisions, key historical figures, and a timeline of the three general phases of the war. After the introduction to the lesson, it is recommended to present the included activities to the students, allow them to choose which ones to complete, and include them in a portfolio for review, grading, and feedback. In addition, a series of group activities may be conducted to tie together ideas, interpretations, and experiences. This approach provides autonomy for students to take responsibility for their learning by selecting the activities that most appeal to them and work together to problem-solve, and hold discussions. For example, a student may choose to complete a timeline and written reflection independently, then come together as a group to debate or discuss aspects of the war.

Wyoming State Social Studies Standards

- SS12.4.1 Describe patterns of change (cause and effect) and evaluate how past events impacted future events and the modern world.
- SS12.4.4 Describe the historical interactions between and among individuals, groups, and/or institutions (e.g., family, neighborhood, political, economic, religious, social, cultural, and workplace) and their impact on significant historical event.

Objectives

- Students will identify the order and significance of key events of the Korean War.
- Students will understand and empathize with different perspectives and experiences of individuals involved in the conflict.
- Students will complete a series of tasks and assignments that allow them to demonstrate an understanding of the three general phases of the Korean War and their implications for future international relations.

Materials

- Projector or Smartboard
- Internet access for research and videos
- Worksheets/notebooks for completion of written activities

- Maps of Korea (pre- and post-invasion) and the world.

Lesson Activities

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- **Hook:** Begin with The Korean War summary video to provide background and engage students in the topic.
- **Discussion:** Discuss how the key events, battles, and decisions changed the dynamics of the war. Use questions like: "Why were these events significant?", "What strategies were used?" and "What were the immediate and long-term effects?"
- **Geography Review:** Explain the geopolitical context, using maps of Korea (included with lesson plan) to highlight key locations including the 38th Parallel, Seoul, Pyongyang, the Yalu River, Pusan, Wonsan, and Hungnam. Additionally, review world maps to show the proximity of Korea to key players in the Korean War, including China, the Soviet Union, and the United States

2. Portfolio/Activity Options

Exploring Experiential Perspectives (30 minutes)

- **Individual or Group Work:** Allow students to divide into small groups or work alone and assign each individual/group a role (e.g., North Korean soldier, South Korean civilian, U.S. general, UN diplomat, Chinese soldier, U.S. female Army Nurse, etc.). Ask students to briefly research and take notes on the experiences of their assigned role during different phases of the war, potentially including the pre and post war periods.
- **Letter or Play Writing:** Task individuals to write a letter or first-person expressive work (i.e., a poem, song, journal entry, etc.) from the perspective of their assigned role. For groups, instruct students to write a short play/skit that displays the perspectives of their assigned roles through the interaction and demonstration of events. Each product (individual or group) should include at least two identifiable events within the narrative (e.g., the invasion, the defense of the Pusan Perimeter, the Battle of Incheon, the Chinese intervention, The Battle of Chosin Reservoir, trench warfare, the armistice, etc.).

- **Presentation:** Allow individuals and groups to share/perform their skits and writings for the class. After each performance, discuss the perspectives and emotions portrayed. Encourage students to ask questions and provide feedback.

Empathy Mind Mapping (15 minutes)

- **Activity:** Distribute blank sheets of paper to each student. Following a design similar to the template below, ask each student to choose a role from the perspective activity and fill out the map based on what the character might be thinking, feeling, seeing, and doing at different times throughout the war. At the center should be the “the Korean War as Experienced by ...”, with the surrounding sections stemming from it to include more thoughts, information, questions, etc.



- **Reflection:** The purpose of this activity is to allow students to further their thoughts and reflect on the *Exploring Experiential Perspectives* activity, with the opportunity of exploring the perspectives of other roles. Encourage students to include any questions, personal connections, or observations on this map.
- **Conclusion:** Before asking students to finish their maps and place them in their portfolios or turn them in, allow students 5-10 minutes to research questions or discuss ideas in groups.

Interactive Timeline Activity (20-30 minutes)

- **Group Work:** Divide students into four groups to represent the First Phase of the Korean War (June - August 1950), the Second Phase (September - November 1950), the Third Phase (November 1950 - January 1951), and the end of the war including the stalemate and armistice (February 1951 - July 1953). The maps included in the introduction may be used for visual reference.
 - Using any digital or physical resources, ask students to identify the dates of key battles and decisions of each phase (see sources) and write a 1-2 sentence description for each.
- **Presentation:** Using a whiteboard or large pieces of paper, have the class groups combine their timelines to create a full timeline of the war. Then, have each group present their part of the timeline to the class, emphasizing the emotional and strategic aspects of the events.

“Family Tree” Activity

- **Key Historical Figures:** Pass out an index card or small piece of paper to each student. Using a list of influential historical figures, assign one to each student and have the students write the name of that figure at the top of their card/paper. Then, the students will conduct brief research of their person. Each card/paper should include the name at the top, the figure’s nationality, title, and relevance to the Korean War.
 - Examples of historical figures from the Korean War: Syngman Rhee, Kim Il Sung, Josef Stalin, Harry Truman, Dean Acheson, John Foster Dulles, Mao Zedong, Douglas MacArthur, Winston Churchill, Matthew Ridgway, Walton “Bulldog” Walker, Marguerite Higgins, Lillian Kinkella Keil, Oliver P. Smith, Philip Crosbie (Father), Edward Almond, Zhou Enlai, Peng Dehuai, Omar Bradley
- **Creating the Tree:** Have students work together as a class and, using a piece of tape or magnets to hold their cards up, ask them to arrange and connect their figures.
 - Organizing could be done in several ways, including by nationality, phase of the war they had the most influence in, government officials, military officials, civilians, etc.

War and Ceasefire Debate Activity (10 minutes)

- **Reading & Discussion:** Read the beginning section of the synopsis about UN police action in Korea and the last section about the armistice and ceasefire together as a

class. Then, review these concepts:

- President Harry Truman sought approval from the United Nations Security Council to defend South Korea. The conflict became a UN-sponsored “police action,” not an American war. War must be declared by the US through Congress.
- An armistice indicates that Korea is now only in peacetime. The conflict has not officially ended, and neither side won or lost the conflict.
- The United States still has a presence in a nominally democratic South Korea, and North Korea remains under a strict “Juche”, or self-reliance policy reminiscent of communism (see sources)
- **Debate:** Divide students randomly into two groups and place them at opposite ends of the room facing each other. With the understanding they have gained throughout these lessons, the synopsis, and any additional research, ask one side to argue that the United States was right to go directly to the UN Security Council for intervention approval. Ask the other side to argue that the United States should instead have gone to Congress to officially declare a war.
 - Although students may be asked to argue against their personal beliefs, this activity is designed to promote critical thinking skills and encourage engagement with opposing perspectives.

Optional Homework/Activity: Personal Reflection (15 minutes)

- **Reflection:** Ask students to write a brief reflection on what they’ve learned about the Korean War through the lesson’s activities. Reflections should be a half-page to a full-page of writing to include thoughts on historical figures, the purpose of U.S./U.N. involvement in Korea, the three phases, the battles, decisions made, the armistice, and/or perspectives they engaged with.

Assessment/Lesson Conclusion

Collect any individual/group written work in portfolios (e.g., combined in a folder) or through regular submission routines. Aim to provide thoughtful feedback on students’ effort and engagement with the topic and concepts presented.

Compilation of Sources

- Video summary of the Korean War (1950-53)
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxaegqvl4aE>
- Article and Map on the Korean War
 - <https://www.britannica.com/event/Korean-War>
 - Maps of Korea June – August 1950, September – November 1950, November 1950 – January 1951, and February 1951 – July 1953 (Included on subsequent pages)
- Basic Timeline and Explanation of the Korean War
 - <https://www.nam.ac.uk/explore/korean-war>
- Empathy/Mind Map Templates
 - <https://www.canva.com/graphs/mind-maps/>
- “Juche” Ideology of the modern Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
 - <https://time.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/korea1.pdf>
- Modern US/South Korea Relations
 - <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3425351/we-go-together-us-south-korea-celebrate-alliance/>
- For additional educational resources, see the Korean War Legacy Foundation and World History Digital Educational Foundation
 - <https://www.koreanwarlegacy.org>
 - <https://www.worldhistoryde.org/korean-war-module/>
- Additional Primary Sources Included in These Collections:
 - <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/online-collections/korea-prelude>
 - https://www.archives.gov/research/military/korean-war?_ga=2.205654359.51895514.1741373367-1812291420.1694535297

Planning a Visit to the NMMV

Although the lessons in this series can be implemented in the classroom without time-consuming or difficult preparation, they are also designed to be taught along with a visit to the National Museum of Military Vehicles, specifically the Puller Gallery.

For this lesson (Experiencing the Korean War), pay special attention to these displays and/or highlight the significance of these concepts in the museum. All suggestions are made in a chronological sequence and as they appear in the museum’s exhibit.

1. The Pusan Perimeter display illustrates the advantage the North Koreans had in their initial invasion of South Korea across the 38th parallel in June 1950.
 - a. Compare the Soviet T-34/85 tank used by the North Koreans to the American

- M24 Chaffee light tank used by UN forces in their defense.
2. Several stories and points may be referenced in the Incheon Landing display.
 - a. Marguerite Higgins (suggested for the *Family Tree Activity*) is featured on a reader rail directly behind the Higgins Boats in the display of the climb over the Incheon seawall.
 - b. When facing the Incheon Landing display, to the right is a wall map titled “Advancing Forces.” This map is a great opportunity to show the advancements of the Second Phase of the Korean War, as US/UN troops moved through North Korea toward the Chinese border.
 3. With additional time, the interactive Actions + Consequences screens between the Battle for Seoul and Defeat at Chosin displays could be completed by groups to explore the series of decisions that led to U.S./U.N. defeats throughout the Second Phase and the entrance into the Third Phase of the war.
 4. The Defeat at Chosin display presents a series of challenging ideas and struggles US/UN forces faced in the winter of 1950-1951 in North Korea.
 - a. The panels titled “MacArthur’s Miscalculation” and “Bugles in the Night” may be read out loud by students to set the stage for the retreat from the Chosin Reservoir (which is explored further within the display)
 - b. When facing the Chosin Reservoir display, along the bottom right side on a reader rail titled “Task Force Faith,” a powerful and notable sentiment to the underestimation of the Chinese forces’ determination and power is made.
 5. Throughout the last displays of the Korean War exhibit, titled “Stalemate and Armistice,” multiple panels that reference key historical figures (suggested for the *Family Tree Activity*) are included, as well as several interactive displays and touching stories.
 - a. The interactive “Line of Defense” map may be controlled by students to show the general movement of opposing forces throughout the war. This depiction may be connected to the maps and discussions of the three phases within this lesson.
 - b. In the first section, panels include excerpts on General Walton “Bulldog” Walker, General Douglas MacArthur, and General Matthew Ridgeway. Further along (adjacent to the statistics wall) is a highlight of prisoners of war in Korea, including Father Philip Crosbie and Jack Browning. Have students read and discuss the power of these quotes.
 - c. As a fun aside and connection to Wyoming, the 300th Armored Field Artillery Battalion of Wyoming’s National Guard (which was deployed to Korea) is featured in this section.





