

Part 3: The Ending of WWII and the Post-War Period, 1945-1950

Lesson Overview

Students will analyze, evaluate, and discuss international political, social, economic, and militaristic situations that arose during the end of the Second World War and the post-war period from 1945 to 1949. As the last lesson plan in the World War II series, it will highlight the circumstances of the war's end and the transition of the United States into the Cold War. Additionally, lesson plan activities will require students to interact with human emotion and empathize with different perspectives on historical events of this period. Provided with this lesson plan is a written timeline/synopsis of the end of WWII and the post-war period. Review this with students and/or print it out to distribute to the class before each activity within this lesson plan.

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.
- SS12.4.5: Using primary and secondary sources, apply historical research methods to interpret and evaluate important historical events from multiple perspectives.
- SS12.1.6: Compare and contrast various world political systems (e.g., ideologies, structure, and institutions) with that of the United States.

Objectives

- Students will identify and describe the political ideologies of the United States and the Soviet Union in the context of the Cold War, its proxy wars (i.e., the Iranian Crisis, the Greek Civil War, etc.), and global influence.
- Students will discuss how the Holocaust and Asian War Crimes were addressed and their consequences.
- Students will evaluate domestic policy and the political and social climate within the United States after 1945.
- Students will analyze global relations and policy from 1945 to 1949.

Materials

- Supplementary readings on the post-WWII period (e.g., the provided timeline)
- Smart Board or Projector
- Primary and secondary source documents
- Whiteboard and markers
- Print-outs (included throughout the lesson and in the Compilation of Sources at the end)

Classroom Activities

Geography and Conflicts Activity

This activity will task students in groups with identifying geographical locations and summarizing the conflicts and military actions that occurred at these locations during the post-WWII period. Additional maps for this activity are included in Compilation of Sources: Additional Maps.

1. Begin the lesson by presenting the information included in the synopsis (attached to the lesson plan), emphasizing conflicts that occur throughout the timeline.
2. Then, show the class a world map from 1945 to familiarize them with the locations they will be discussing. This is a good one to use: [World Map 1945 CE](#). Keep this map up during the lesson, if possible, for students to use as they work.
3. Divide students into 6 groups and assign (or let the groups choose) one of these conflicts/military actions:
 - a. The Berlin Blockade and Airlift, the First Indochina War, the Chinese Civil War, the Greek Civil War, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the Iranian Crisis.
4. Using secondary resources, groups will analyze and describe their assigned event and write a one to two-paragraph summary of the event. At this time, students will also identify where their event occurred.
 - a. Ask students to explore whether their event was connected to the Cold War. If so, ask them to elaborate within their summary.
5. After summarizing the event in their own words, each group will share their summary with the class, identifying where their assigned conflict/action occurred, what happened, and its implications for future foreign relations.
 - a. Use the world map as a tool for students to use and point to as they present to their classmates.
6. Optional: once each group has presented, facilitate a Socratic seminar using this (or a similar) prompt: What results of these international conflicts and military actions do we see reflected in the world today?

Jigsaw on the Cold War

Students will discuss the main characteristics of the Cold War with their classmates in small groups and come together as a class to outline the importance and implications of these characteristics.

1. Begin the lesson by presenting the information included in the synopsis (attached to the lesson plan), emphasizing events where the Cold War is mentioned. Review the major characteristics and timeline of the beginning of the Cold War.
 - a. This is a good timeline to show the Cold War in its entirety, while the class focuses on the period from 1945 to 1949: [Key Events of the Cold War](#)
2. Evenly divide students into four groups and assign each one with a characteristic of the Cold War to explore further. There should be a group for ideology, the arms race, U.S. policy and social/political response, and global conflicts.
3. Give the class a time limit to work within their group research and use primary and secondary sources to define these aspects of their assigned characteristic, **specifically as it applied to the years from 1945 to 1949:**
 - a. Dates and context of the characteristic and any events within it.
 - b. A description of the characteristics, including how it was experienced by or affected the United States and the Soviet Union (and other countries if relating to conflicts and proxy wars).
 - c. A relation of the characteristic to the larger context surrounding the Cold War and how it impacted future events.

Students should record their research on a digital document or in a notebook where it is easily accessible to share (verbally) with their classmates later in the activity.

For grading and comprehension purposes, each characteristic and what may/should be included in students' explanations follow. See Compilation of Sources: Cold War Primary and Secondary Sources for helpful links for students on each characteristic.

- Ideology
 - The Cold War is commonly seen as the fight between communism, the ideology of the Soviet Union, and democracy, that of the United States. Although the United States is more accurately a constitutional republic, its government operates through a representative democracy. After WWII, the United States committed itself to preserving freedom around the world through democracy and defending it against communism. Students should evaluate each ideology to gain an understanding of their principles and compare them to one another in the context of the post-

war period and the Cold War. The Truman Doctrine is an important primary resource for this characteristic.

- Arms race
 - Throughout the arms race between the Soviet Union and the United States worked tirelessly to outproduce the other in nuclear weapons manufacturing. This greatly increased tensions between the two and would be reflected in foreign and domestic policy and historical events for the next several decades.
 - U.S. policy and social/political response
 - The United States responded heavily to rising tensions with the Soviet Union in the first years of the Cold War. Policies and responses to analyze include the Truman Doctrine, McCarthyism, the Second Red Scare, the establishment of the CIA, the creation of NATO, and the Marshall Plan.
 - Global conflict(s)
 - In the beginning years of the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other during several international conflicts and military actions. These are (as included in the provided synopsis) the Iranian Crisis, the Greek Civil War, the division of Korea (leading to the Korean War in 1950), and the Berlin Blockade and Airlift.
4. After each group has completed its task, count off the students in each group for a jigsaw discussion (i.e., assign each student a number 1 through how many students there are in each group, and restart the count for each group). Then, ask all the students with the same number from each group to gather. For example, all the ones in each group will sit together, and so on.
 5. Once the groups have been formed with one student from each of the characteristic groups, give each student 3-5 minutes to describe the characteristics he/she researched to the group. Ask the students to take notes on their classmate's explanations.
 6. When all the students have presented to their groups, continue with one of these two concluding options:
 - a. Facilitate a class discussion about the Cold War, asking every student to contribute at least once to the conversation, and taking notes on each characteristic on a whiteboard or Smart Board to recap the activity and what the class has learned.
 - b. Provide each student with a graphic organizer (not provided in the lesson plan) or a paper on which to write an extended paragraph reflection on the activity and the Cold War.

Reflection Activity - War Crimes Trials

This activity covers the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Trials that followed the end of WWII and addresses the atrocities committed by the Third Reich and Imperial Japanese. Due to the mature nature of this content, exercise caution when directing students to resources. Some resources suggested, specifically first-hand accounts of victims, contain upsetting content. Although these are incredibly important historical events and situations, review the sources provided beforehand to determine if they are fitting for the ages within your classroom.

1. Review the significance of the European Holocaust and Asian War crimes and introduce the Nuremberg and Tokyo War Crimes Trials (sections on these are included in the provided synopsis in November 1945 and May 1946). Watch videos or read secondary sources that describe these trials in more detail.
 - a. Video recommendations:
 - i. Nuremberg Trials: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APyioYJISXI>
 - ii. Tokyo War Crimes Trials: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3sKqsRNBqM>
 - b. Text sources:
 - i. A secondary source from the National WWII Museum, New Orleans: https://www.ww2classroom.org/system/files/essays/WWII_CURRICULUM_GUIDE_VOL-4_OVERVIEW-ESSAY-5-War-Crimes-on-Trial.pdf
This is a well-done brief overview of both trials. Even if not used in this section of the activity, it would be a great printout for the students to refer to during the next sections.
2. Following the introduction, present the main task of this activity: Students will interact with first-hand accounts of victims of the Holocaust and Japanese war crimes, then write about a one-page reflection that draws a connection between the recollection they chose and the corresponding trials (i.e., the relation between the testimony of a victim of the Imperial Japanese Army and the Tokyo War Crimes Trials). The reflection may be assigned as homework or be completed in class. Once the students have finished their reflection, request that they turn them in for grading.
 - a. This reflection should be interpretive and ask students to use their emotional connections to the material to identify and reflect on the importance of these events and trials.
 - i. Optional: Give students a list of formats to complete their reflection and allow them to choose one. These could include the original essay format, a letter, a journal entry, a video essay, etc.
 - b. For eye-witness accounts and victim testimonies of these events, see these sources:

- i. Asian War Crimes:
 - 1. <https://www.awf.or.jp/e3/oralhistory-00.html>
- ii. The Holocaust:
 - 1. <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/behind-every-name-a-story>
 - 2. <https://www.ushmm.org/remember/holocaust-reflections-testimonies/eyewitness-to-history>

Each of these sources holds a compilation of testimonies. Allow students to read through each source and select a testimony of their choosing for their reflection.

Compilation of Sources

- Additional maps:
 - Map of the Soviet Union - https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/7b/EasternBloc_BorderChange38-48.svg/1200px-EasternBloc_BorderChange38-48.svg.png
 - Map of German Occupation Zones Post WWII - https://bostonraremaps.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BRM3563-Occupation-Areas_Germany-1945_lowres-3000x2472.jpg
 - Map of the Division of Berlin, 1949-1990 - <https://cdn.britannica.com/48/64948-050-5DE84F9C/Map-Cold-War-Berlin.jpg>
 - Map of the Middle East with Iran highlighted - <https://cdn.britannica.com/67/183667-050-DBEF72B0/World-Data-Locator-Map-Iran.jpg>
 - Map of Arab-Israeli Conflict 1949 Armistice - https://ichef.bbci.co.uk/news/480/cpsprodpb/0166/production/_131385300_1949_armistice_line_640-nc.png.webp
 - Map of the Proposed Two-State Solution (Arab-Israeli Conflict) - https://www.economist.com/content-assets/images/20231021_WOF907.png
- Article and maps of countries divided by the Cold War, including Germany, Vietnam, Korea, and Romania.
 - <https://brilliantmaps.com/divided-by-the-cold-war/>
- Cold War Primary and Secondary Resources
 - Timeline of the Cold War Arms Race (this timeline goes beyond the focus period, but it is a clear and comprehensive overview) - <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-russia-nuclear-arms-control>

- YouTube video summary on the Arms Race - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zg2KjhJy-MQ>
- The Truman Doctrine - <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/truman-doctrine>
- Article and primary sources on McCarthyism and the Red Scare - <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/age-of-eisenhower/mccarthyism-red-scare>
- The Marshall Plan - <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/marshall-plan#:~:text=On%20April%203%2C%201948%2C%20President,economic%20infrastructure%20of%20postwar%20Europe.>
- “President Truman & the CIA” - <https://www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.org/key-west/president-truman-cia>
- “A Short History of NATO” - https://www.nato.int/cps/ge/natohq/declassified_139339.htm

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 Marshall Gallery.

For this lesson (The Ending of WWII and the Post-War Period) 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 as they appear in the museum’s exhibits.

1. Beginning after walking through the “Battle of the Bulge” and “Battle of Iwo Jima” displays (which extend through March 1945 in the timeline of the museum), walk into the “Victory in Europe, May 1945” display. Read the introductory panel titled “Victory in Europe” for a review of the end of the war in the European Theater.
2. At the end of the Doris Miller Annex, pay close attention to the information, stories, and statistics in the “War Crimes” and “Resilience” rooms. Ask students to read all the panels and reader rails in these sections. They hold information that is incredibly relevant to the activities in this lesson plan.
 - a. In “War Crimes,” note the Nuremberg Trials and the mention of the Rape of Nanjing (the Nanjing Massacre). Also, pay attention to the images in this room. Encourage students to make socioemotional connections with what they are observing.
 - b. In “Resilience,” emphasize the reader rail section titled “Executive Order 9981 Bans Segregation in the Armed Forces.”

- i. The desegregation of the U.S. military was incredibly significant in the social and political spheres of the U.S.
3. While walking out of the Doris Miller Annex and through the end of the “Victory in Europe, May 1945” exhibit, ask students to observe the emotions of the people captured in pictures that are on the walls, the newspaper articles and other images hanging above the walkway, and the murals of the destruction of Europe after the end of the war.
 - a. Ask the students to think about how the attitudes and expressions of the people in these images and the damage to infrastructure shown contributed to post-WWII demobilization and reconstruction efforts.
4. After exiting the “Victory in Europe, May 1945” exhibit, remind the students that although the war was over in the European Theater, the Imperial Japanese were still being fought by the Allied Powers in the Pacific Theater.
 - a. Along the walkway toward the end of the Marshall Gallery, read the “Violent Combat,” “Operation Downfall,” and “A New Weapon Against Japan” explanations on the banners. Be mindful when reading these explanations of the people these events and operations affected *and* of the significance of the first atomic bomb, which became an influential factor in the rising tensions of the Cold War.
 - b. Then, read the banner including “VJ Day,” to review the end of the war in the Pacific Theater.
5. At the end of this gallery, review the wall including statistics on “WWII Casualties” and “WWII War Deaths by Nation.” Emphasize to the students, while looking at these statistics, the scope of the war, particularly how many countries it affected and the damage it caused.
 - a. To the left of this wall, observe the image on the banner and the reader rail below it titled “Father and Son.” Ask students to keep in mind the reactions they have to this display, so they may recall them while completing the activities in this lesson plan.
6. In the entrance to the Puller Gallery, read the demobilization statistics lining the wall leading toward the Consequences Theater before watching the short film on the post-WWII period and the beginning of the Cold War.
 - a. This film explores the consequences of WWII, the conditions of the Cold War, and the conflicts that emerged in the post-war period. This is a great overview of the content explored in the geography and conflicts activity and jigsaw on the Cold War.