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Mount Vernon High School

Japanese Firestorms (9ᵗʰ Grade US History)

Ohio Standards Addressed:

History Standards:

Benchmark D: Connect developments related to World War I with the onset of World War II

9. Assess the global impact of post-World War I economic, social and political turmoil including:
a. Disarmament;
b. Worldwide depression;
c. Colonial rebellion;
d. Rise of militarist and totalitarian states in Europe and Asia.
10. Analyze the causes of World War II including:
a. Appeasement;
b. Axis expansion;
c. The role of the Allies.

7. Analyze the impact of U.S. participation in World War II, with emphasis on the change from isolationism to international involvement including the reaction to the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Benchmark E: Analyze connections between World War II, the Cold War and contemporary conflicts

11. Analyze the consequences of World War II including:
a. Atomic weapons;
b. Civilian and military losses

Purpose: Students will understand the experiences of people living in wartime Japan, and their travails as a result of US bombing.

Rationale: Although often neglected in textbooks, the US military killed more civilians by firebombing civilian targets than with the atomic bombs.

Essential Questions:

1) **Why did the US firebomb Japanese cities?**

2) **What was the result of the bombings on Japanese psyche and morale?**

3) **Why is the firebombing neglected in US history texts?**

Background: Students should be familiar with the basics of the US-Japanese Pacific war. They should know the policies of Japanese expansionism and militarism, and identify with the US strategy of island hopping.

Materials: *The Fog of War* by Errol Morris (DVD), current class US History textbook, blank map of United States, copies of article from: http://www.bookmice.net/darkchilde/japan/fire.html; charts from http://www.ditext.com/japan/napalm.html, http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/tokyo.htm

Activities: Have students read current textbook section on war in the Pacific. Have them make notes of military action against Japanese. After they are finished, ask if they know what a war crime is, and what could be considered a war crime.   Ask students if it is ok to kill civilians knowingly in a war. Students should be familiar with basics of war in Pacific. Ask, "Should civilians ever be killed to try and end a war?"

Hand out article from bookmice website, and let students read. After completion, put in clip from *Fog of War* when Robert McNamara talks about firebombing 67 cities. Hand out charts from ditext.com website and have them analyze. Hand out US maps. With partners have them plot the equivalent US cities in map and label percentage of US city destroyed above city name.   Using a computer lab with internet, have them map and label corresponding Japanese cities on a blank Japan map.

After completing maps, have students read Eyewitness to History primary source accounts about Tokyo fire raid. Have students individually write a 5 minute response answering: If you were a Japanese civilian living in Tokyo during the raid, how would you feel about the war? About the US?

Wrap-up: Have students look at map of US, and answers to previous questions and formulate an opinion on should the firebombing be included in US textbooks? Was it a war crime firebombing US cities? What did it do to the morale of Japanese civilians? Should this tactic ever be justified?

Assessment: Students should write a two-paragraph textbook addendum, meaning they should write an excerpt to include in their textbook, detailing US crimes against Japanese civilians and why the US attempted to justify it. Have them create a graph detailing deaths in Japan from war combat, atomic bombs, and firebombing that could be used in textbook.

Adaptations: Possible adaptations include having students create a fake prosecution of Gen. Curtis LeMay, the man who ordered the Tokyo fire bombing. Students can also view *Grave of the Fireflies* and have them write about how it is displaced and ruined many Japanese families.