

History
UNFOLDING

AMERICA'S WORLD WAR II A WORLD IN FLAMES



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

Contents

Introduction	2
Lesson 1	Dictators on the March.....	4
Lesson 2	The Long Road to D-Day.....	8
Lesson 3	The War in the Pacific.....	12
Lesson 4	The Final Triumph.....	16
Appendix	Image Close-ups.....	21

Introduction

Americans at War in World War II

World War II engulfed all of humanity in a titanic struggle. It was fought with mechanized and highly mobile forces whose range and destructive power on land and in the air caught up entire civilian populations in the violence. At the end of the war, whole societies lay in ruins.

America's World War II was quite different from this. The only Americans to experience the war's terrible destructiveness directly were the soldiers sent abroad to fight. At home, Americans lived the war vicariously, through official announcements, news reports, news photos, and newsreels, and from the letters and stories of GIs overseas. This booklet looks at "a world in flames" from the perspective of these U.S. soldiers, their military leaders and the U.S. policy makers who had such an impact on the outcome of this colossal struggle.

It is impossible to tell the entire story of World War II with just twelve illustrations. But the twelve we have chosen focus on many of the central themes in the war, especially with regard to their impact on the ordinary soldiers involved. The illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three of the illustrations to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Dictators on the March

The years before the start of World War II saw the emergence of a number of powerful totalitarian states. It may be hard for students today fully to grasp how terrifying this was for ordinary Americans. The images in this lesson focus on the helpless sense of horror with which many witnessed the sweeping conquests of the dictators.

The Long Road to D-Day

It took some time for the Allies to gear up for full scale warfare in Europe. Isolationism and appeasement had left them poorly prepared for the titanic challenge they faced. Not until 1944 did the U.S. and Britain finally decide the time had come for the full scale assault on Hitler's homeland. The images in this lesson focus on the nature of the warfare in Europe during that long lead up to D-Day.

The War in the Pacific

Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the U.S. had to contend with the Empire of Japan. A very different kind of warfare predominated there: island hopping and "leapfrogging," with huge sea battles and bloody island assaults against a tenacious foe. The illustrations here will help students compare and contrast the fighting in the Pacific with the fighting in Europe.

The Final Triumph

The United States emerged from the war in triumph. But it was a triumph tempered by the enormous horror of what the war had done, and by an uneasy sense that the emerging nuclear age would bring fresh problems and new anxieties. The illustrations in this lesson focus on these themes.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS

Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

*America's World War II—A World in Flames***OBJECTIVES**

1. Students will better understand the events leading up to U.S. entry into World War II.
2. Students will better appreciate the intense fear felt by ordinary citizens as the world descended into total war.

Dictators on the March

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION**Illustration 1**

The 1930s were desperate years. The Great Depression generated fear, and this fear often fueled popular support for dictators promising national renewal through military conquest. In 1931, Japan invaded Manchuria. In 1936, Adolf Hitler's Germany reoccupied the Rhineland, in violation of the treaty ending World War I. Benito Mussolini's Italy also seized Ethiopia that year. Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan's Hideki Tojo would later join in plans to dominate the world. This U.S. army cartoon shows these men "carving up" the globe. The cartoon makes fun of them. But it also conveys their cruelty and insatiable appetite for conquest.

Illustration 2

By the late 1930s, many people knew how dangerous Hitler was. Yet millions hoped he could be satisfied, or "appeased," with just a little extra territory. No other event illustrated this appeasement policy more starkly than the Munich Conference of 1938, when the leaders of Britain, France, Italy, and Germany allowed Hitler to seize the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia. After this meeting, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain promised "peace in our time." But as this photo suggests, the Czechs had been betrayed. Many gruesome images tell us of Hitler's brutality. Yet few are more dramatic than this one, which captures the utter helplessness of a Sudeten woman as she gives the mandatory German salute to passing Nazi troops. Appeasement died a year later when Germany invaded Poland, finally triggering a world war.

Illustration 3

In the 1930s, most Americans were isolationists—they wanted nothing to do with the rest of the world's problems. But President Franklin Roosevelt was convinced that the U.S. would have to aid the nations fighting Hitler sooner or later. In 1940 and 1941, he took several steps to give them assistance. But only on December 7, 1941, did the nation truly unite and commit itself to the war. It was on that Sunday morning that the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, in Hawaii, suffered a devastating surprise air attack by Japanese forces. The terrifying reality of that day is captured in the large photo here. The next day, President Roosevelt signed the declaration of war against Japan, calling the surprise attack a "day which will live in infamy." Germany declared war on the U.S. just days later.

Lesson 1—Dictators on the March

Illustration 1



The National Archives

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Discussing the Illustration

1. This editorial cartoon shows three world leaders who rose to power in the 1930s. They did this by exploiting the harsh economic conditions that existed in their nations due to the Great Depression and the aftermath of World War I. Together, these three leaders brought on the greatest war ever—World War II. Can you identify each leader in this picture and name the nation each one led?
2. In this editorial cartoon, these three leaders appear to be carving up a meal, as one might carve a turkey. But if you look closely, you see that what they are carving is actually something quite different. What are they actually about to “feast” on?
3. The three leaders in the cartoon seem impatient to get to their meal. Their appetite is very strong. What point does this help the cartoon make about these leaders? In your opinion, what view of these leaders does the cartoon seem to take? Explain why.

Follow-up Activities

1. Keep in mind the imagery in the above cartoon (men with huge appetites dividing a meal) and write one or two captions that you think would work well with this cartoon. Share these with the class. As a class, choose the five best captions. Then, display the cartoon with these captions. Make an enlarged photocopy of the cartoon and tack it up on a bulletin board with the five best captions around it.
2. **Small-group activity:** Should the United States have acted sooner to prevent the leaders in the above cartoon from plunging the world into war? Some at the time did say the U.S. should take action to stop these men. But others were “isolationists” who said the troubles in Europe and Asia were not worth any U.S. sacrifices. Pretend you are the editors on two newspapers in 1940. Write two editorials—one for a strongly isolationist newspaper, the other for a strongly anti-isolationist newspaper. Display this cartoon along with each editorial, and make copies of the editorials to use in an all-class discussion.