

KOREA:
MacArthur's War with Truman

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PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this program is to provide students with the basic information necessary to understand the significance of the Korean war and to raise questions about the war that may stimulate students to do further reading. The program also may be used to teach students to understand the difference between fact and interpretation, between what can be known for sure and what may only be inferred.

ORGANIZATION OF THE VIDEO

The video is composed of eight major segments:

Background
Truman's Korea Decision (to intervene)
Anti-Communism and the China Factor
The United Nations' Role
MacArthur and the War in Korea
China Enters the War
The Firing (of MacArthur by Truman)
Lessons of the Korean War

ORGANIZATION OF THIS TEACHING GUIDE

The guide includes three sections:

Post-viewing Discussion and Questions of Interpretation
Independent Research Projects
Quiz

POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION

Instructors may want to organize a post-viewing discussion around these main headings to reinforce what students remember from the video. The following questions may be helpful in assessing student understanding of the ideas presented:

Background

Why was Korea divided into two parts at the 38th parallel?

Korea was a colony of Japan before the war. After the war the Russian armies were in the north and the American armies were in the south. The 38th parallel was to have been temporary, but became permanent.

Who started the war and why?

Kim Il Sung of North Korea invaded the South hoping to unify all Korea under his rule. Some historians think he was provoked by the threat of an invasion from the south.

How successful was the North Korean invasion of South Korea?

It was extremely successful, and the North Korean armies pushed the South Korean armies into a small perimeter around the city of Pusan at the tip of the peninsula.

Why were the South Koreans unable to stop them?

Because they lacked anti-tank weapons and sufficient air power to resist the North Korean armored attack.

Truman's Korea Decision

What was the Russian role in the Korean War?

There is still controversy about this, but the predominant opinion is that the war was Kim Il Sung's idea, not the Russians', but the Russians went along when they could have stopped it.

What did President Truman think the Russian role was?

Truman clearly thought, as he says in the video, that the war was part of a Soviet master plan, and the Russians were responsible for the whole thing.

What were the various factors that influenced Truman's decision to intervene?

The video describes the following:

1. The assumption that the invasion was part of a Soviet master plan for world conquest, and had to be stopped before it could go any further.
2. Fear that doing nothing would have the same disastrous results as the appeasement of Hitler before World War II.
3. The desire to stop the revolutionary process that had just taken place in China and threatened to spread to all of Asia.
4. Fear of McCarthyism and the possibility that he and the Democrats would be attacked as soft on communism if they did nothing.

The United Nations' Role

Why did Truman take the Korean issue to the United Nations?

He wanted a justification in international law for his action, and he wanted to avoid being isolated and alone in case the Russians decided to enter the war.

Why didn't the Russians use their veto in the Security Council to prevent UN support of Truman's action?

The Russians were boycotting the Security Council at the time because of its refusal to give China's seat on the Council to the People's Republic of China. Being absent they couldn't vote.

MacArthur and the War in Korea

What was the event that turned the tide of the war after the South Koreans were pushed into the Pusan perimeter?

MacArthur's landing at Inchon.

Who decided to cross the 38th parallel and go into North Korea after the North Korean armies had been pushed out of South Korea?

There is still considerable controversy about this. Some historians believe that MacArthur sent his forces across the border before he was authorized to do so and thus presented Truman with a fait accompli with which he had to go along.

Why did MacArthur proceed all the way to the Yalu River?

He wanted to unify all of Korea under one government.

China Enters the War

What did MacArthur and Truman believe the Chinese would do about the American drive to the Yalu?

MacArthur assured Washington that the Chinese would not enter the war, but the Chinese had let it be known through the Indians that they would. MacArthur was wrong.

What did MacArthur plan to do if the Chinese did enter the war?

He planned to use air power and nuclear weapons on China.

What was the nature of the American retreat from the Yalu after the Chinese intervened?

Notice that the two Korean veterans interviewed for the video have opposing opinions on this. David Carlisle describes it as a disorganized rout; William Barber thinks it was orderly and well conducted. Historians are divided. It was probably orderly with some units and disorderly with others.

The Firing

What were the incidents of MacArthur's insubordination?

MacArthur allowed his forces to cross the 38th parallel before Washington had decided to do it. He allowed American troops to approach the Yalu when he had been specifically ordered by the Joint Chiefs to keep them away. He flew to Taiwan (then called Formosa) to confer with Chiang Kai-shek, thus usurping the State Department's diplomatic function. He gave an interview to an American magazine in which he challenged Truman's policy. He wrote a letter to a leading Republican in which he endorsed the idea of carrying the war to China, while Truman's policy was to keep it limited.

The Lessons of the Korean War

The narrator says there are five reasons why it is important to study the Korean War.

What are they?

1. It was the first American war undertaken without a declaration of war by the Congress.
2. It was the first war sanctioned by the United Nations.
3. It was a limited war. Wars can be limited by the number of participants, the territory that is involved, the weapons used, and the nature of the war aims. The Russians didn't participate; the war was kept within the Korean peninsula; nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons were not used; and after the initial stages, the belligerents limited their war aims to the restoration of the status quo ante.
4. It ended in a stalemate and no real victory for anyone.
5. It was the first war in which there was extensive insubordination by an American field commander.

QUESTIONS OF INTERPRETATION

The preceding questions were designed to help students understand what happened. The following questions have to do with why it happened. Both "what" and "why" questions can be controversial, of course. Use those below to reinforce an understanding of the difference between fact and opinion.

Was Truman right in keeping the war limited to Korea, or should he have followed MacArthur's plan to attack China, as one of the veterans in the video appears to think?

Was Truman correct in firing MacArthur?

Why did the American people side with MacArthur and not Truman? Were they impressed by the man in uniform? Would they have liked to have had a war with China?

At the close of the program, the narrator expresses the view that the Korean War may have prevented World War III, and that the conflict reinforced our constitutional system. It could also be argued that the Korean war locked the United States into an unrealistic China policy that became the major cause of the war in Vietnam. In any case, was the Korean War necessary, and was it worth what it cost in lives and devastation? Or was it an unmitigated disaster?

INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

The following research topics may be helpful both in increasing understanding of the war and developing skills in research methodology.

Project 1: Was the United Nations tricked into supporting the war? This assignment will teach students the importance of a chronology as a research tool. Have them prepare a chronology of events leading up to the two UN resolutions, and look closely at their wording. A case can be made that Truman went beyond the authority of the first resolution, and that's why he needed the second. Did the members of the UN know what they were getting into?

Project 2: Who made the decision to cross the 38th parallel? Did MacArthur go ahead and have his forces cross over before they were authorized to do so, and was Truman then afraid to call him back? This project also requires the development of a chronology to make clear the chain of events that would lead to MacArthur's war with Truman.

Project 3: Compare the Korean War with the Vietnam War. These were both limited wars, neither was a victory for the United States, in both there was pressure to expand the war, in both air power played a major role but was not decisive, and both were expensive in casualties and the financial costs of war. This project can be used to teach students analysis, that is, reducing events to component parts that then can be compared with the component parts of similar events.

Project 4: Was MacArthur a hero or a menace to Democracy? The hero worship of MacArthur that prevailed during the war subsided, and recent biographies and histories of the war have been more critical of the General. Even the Inchon landing has been criticized as reckless, and his drive to the Yalu was responsible for massive American casualties. Had Truman not fired him, might he have started a nuclear war with the Soviet Union? Students could identify the key questions about MacArthur and then compare the views of two or more biographers or historians.

Project 5: Who did the fighting in Korea? The war was a United Nations war, but how many of the United Nations sent troops? Students can research the numbers of troops from the various countries and how much fighting they did. They can then form a judgment as to whether it was a UN war only in a token sense.

The following reproducible quiz is designed to determine how much information and understanding the students have acquired from watching the program and participating in the follow-up discussions and projects. (Answers below.)

QUIZ ANSWERS

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 9. b |
| 2. c | 10. a |
| 3. d | 11. c |
| 4. a | 12. b |
| 5. c | 13. d |
| 6. a | 14. a |
| 7. c | 15. c |
| 8. d | 16. c |

QUIZ

1. At the start of the Korean War, Korea was
 - a. a united independent country.
 - b. a colony of Japan.
 - c. a colony of China.
 - d. two countries divided by the 38th parallel.

2. When did the Korean war start?
 - a. August 1945
 - b. April 1917
 - c. June 1950
 - d. August 1973

3. What was the role of the Russians in the Korean war?
 - a. The war was Stalin's idea.
 - b. The Russians didn't know about it and were taken by surprise.
 - c. The Russians tried to stop Kim Il Sung.
 - d. The Russians were consulted by Kim Il Sung, but didn't try to stop him.

4. The Island that MacArthur visited to meet with Chiang Kai-shek is now called:
 - a. Taiwan
 - b. Formosa
 - c. Guam
 - d. Wake

5. MacArthur and Chiang Kai-shek shared a common aim; namely, they wanted to
 - a. end the war in Korea as soon as possible.
 - b. prevent the war from spreading to China.
 - c. attack China from the south.
 - d. keep Japan out of the war.

6. Which of the following was not a factor in Truman's decision to intervene in Korea?
 - a. Truman's memory of his experience in World War I.
 - b. The atmosphere of McCarthyism in which Truman did not want to appear soft on communism.
 - c. Truman's conviction that the North Korean invasion was part of a Soviet master plan.
 - d. Truman's memory of the consequences of the appeasement of Hitler before World War II.

7. Why didn't the Russians veto the Korean Resolution when it came before the United Nations Security Council?
 - a. The veto power does not apply to matters of war and peace.
 - b. They were angry with Kim Il Sung and wanted to see him put in his place.
 - c. They were boycotting the Security Council and had no delegate present.
 - d. They had no respect for the UN and didn't think it would make any difference one way or another.

8. What forces were under the United Nations command headed by General MacArthur?
 - a. The US Army
 - b. The South Korean Army
 - c. The British troops
 - d. All of the above

9. The Yalu River is the border between
 - a. China and Vietnam
 - b. China and Korea
 - c. North Korea and South Korea
 - d. South Korea and Manchuria

10. Truman ordered MacArthur to keep American troops away from the Chinese border because
 - a. he hoped to show the Chinese that he had no intention to invade China.
 - b. he wanted the victory to appear to be a UN victory.
 - c. he knew the Americans did not have adequate winter clothing.
 - d. he wanted to show the Indians that he was taking their advice.

11. Which of the following did MacArthur not want to do?
 - a. Bomb China
 - b. Use atomic weapons
 - c. Conclude an early armistice and peace
 - d. Expand the war

12. The incident that finally gave Truman the excuse he felt he needed with which to fire MacArthur was
 - a. MacArthur's trip to see Chiang Kai-shek.
 - b. MacArthur's letter to the Republican Joseph Martin.
 - c. MacArthur's march to the Yalu.
 - d. MacArthur's crossing the 38th parallel.

13. The reason that the Chinese overwhelmed the American forces when they entered the war was because
- their soldiers were better trained than the Americans.
 - they were equipped with better weapons.
 - they had superior air power.
 - there were more of them.
14. When Truman fired MacArthur, the reaction of public opinion in the United States was
- an outcry against the president and in support of MacArthur.
 - general apathy and indifference.
 - a rallying behind the president.
 - none of the above.
15. MacArthur made famous a line from a barracks ballad that said "Old soldiers never die, they just fade away" when he used it in
- a song he sang with Bob Hope when he was entertaining the troops.
 - a speech he made to the United Nations.
 - a speech he made to a joint session of Congress.
 - an article he wrote for US News and World Report.
16. The 38th parallel was
- a line created by the United Nations.
 - a line dividing Korea vertically from north to south.
 - an arbitrary line designated by the allies at the end of World War II.
 - a line dividing China from Korea.