By the summer of 1945, the victory for the Allies (the U.S., Britain, the USSR, and France) was almost complete. Germany surrendered completely on May 7, 1945. Only Japan was still fighting.

The U.S. had been winning the war against Japan since 1942 — the only question was how to deliver the knockout blow to the Japanese. When President Franklin Roosevelt died in the spring of 1945, Harry Truman became President. Truman decided to use America’s new, secret weapon, the atomic bomb.

“Little Boy” dropped on Hiroshima equal to 12,192 tons of TNT (dynamite)

- Hiroshima population 286,000
- Died first day 45,000
- Total dead after 4 months 64,000
- Surviving casualties 72,000
- Total casualties 136,000

“Fat Man” dropped on Nagasaki equal to 22,352 tons of TNT (dynamite)

- Nagasaki population 174,000
- Died first day 22,000
- Total dead after 4 months 39,000
- Surviving casualties 25,000
- Total casualties 64,000

Factors that influenced President Truman’s decision

1. There was a desire to end the war quickly, with a minimum loss of American lives.

Military advisors to President Truman believed that it might take another year to conquer Japan by traditional means. This would cause the loss of many more American lives. Some generals believed that between 500,000 and 1 million American lives would be lost if the US fought a land battle against the Japanese. For example, battles between the US and Japan on the small island of Okinawa cost the US 12,000 lives.

“I wanted to save a half a million boys on our side… I never lost sleep over my decision.”
- President Harry Truman

2. Using the bomb would stifle (hold back) any Soviet threat

The Soviet Union agreed to join the war against Japan on August 8, 1943, 90 days after the war in Europe ended. The Soviet Union planned to invade Japan from the North.

What if the Soviets occupied Japan? Soviet troops, advancing on Germany, had swept into Poland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary. By April 1945, Stalin had already created a communist government in Poland and was about to do the same in other European countries. The US was afraid that Stalin would spread communism throughout all of Europe and Asia. Many experts believe that the US used the Atomic Bomb to end the war against Japan before the Soviets could get involved and spread communism in eastern Asia.

“The US was “most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in.”
-U.S. Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, diary entry, July 28, 1945

3. Bureaucratic Momentum

Billions of dollars went into developing the bomb, along with the manpower of the nation’s leading scientists. Many politicians believed that the American public would be upset if the US had spent so much money on a weapon and never used it.

4. Truman’s lack of knowledge about the atomic bomb

Truman was only president for two weeks before he learned about the Atomic bomb. Did Truman fully understand the situation?

5. Psychological Factors

The U.S. public was strongly anti-Japanese because of the attack on Pearl Harbor and because of Japan’s treatment of POWs: 27% of US soldiers in Japanese custody died, compared with 4% who died in German and Italian custody.

6. Japan’s Warrior Spirit

Japanese soldiers believed in the Samurai Warrior spirit and did not accept surrender.

“Tomorrow, I drink a ceremonial cup of sake (wine) with my commander and then take off for my mission. Tomorrow, I die for my Emperor and for my country”.
- A kamikaze (suicide) pilot
Arguments Against Using the Atomic Bomb

1. Japan Was Already Defeated
Japan, in a military sense, was in a hopeless strategic position by the time the... demand for unconditional surrender was made on July 26. Such then, was the situation when we wiped out Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Need we have done it? The answer is almost certainly negative.

- New York Times military analyst Hanson Baldwin

2. Japan would surrender if it could set at least one condition
If only the Americans had not insisted on unconditional surrender - that is, if they were willing to accept one condition to the surrender, that the emperor, a holy figure to the Japanese, remain in place - the Japanese would have agreed to stop the war. (In fact, when the war ended, the emperor was allowed to remain.)

- A People's History of the United States, Howard Zinn

3. Japan Wanted Peace
By the summer of 1945, many Japanese government officials and most of the country wanted peace. The military leaders who led Japan into the war were quickly losing power within the government. However, the Japanese wanted to surrender and maintain their honor. This was unacceptable to the Americans, who wanted Japan to surrender unconditionally (completely). If the Americans had changed the terms of the surrender, the Japanese would have surrendered.

4. Dropping the Atomic Bomb was Against International Law
According to the Nuremberg Principles that were signed by the US, Britain, France and the USSR, the following were illegal:

(b) War Crimes: murder, ill-treatment... of the civilian population... destruction of cities, towns, or villages, or devastation not justified by military necessity;
(c) Crimes against humanity: namely, murder, extermination, ... and other inhumane acts committed against any civilian populations, before or during the war;

5. Suffering of Innocent People
“Within a few seconds the thousands of people in the streets and the gardens in the center of town were scorched by a wave of searing heat. Everything standing in the way of the blast walls, houses, factories and other buildings was annihilated (destroyed) and the debris spun around in a whirlwind and was carried up in the air. Trains were flung off the rails as though they were toys. Every living thing was frozen in indescribable suffering. Houses were flattened as though they had been built of cardboard.”

- A Japanese journalist. Hiroshima, August 1945

“I tried to find my mother, but all I saw was a bunch of white ashes with one black spot, and a heap of charred (burnt) bones. I then saw a young woman lying in the road with her two children. Her face was one big swollen blister, with the skin starting to peel off.”

- A Japanese woman in Nagasaki

HW- Should the Atomic Bomb have been dropped on Japan?

HOMEWORK- READ CAREFULLY!!!
You MUST pick a side and explain your answer to the above question. Using what you consider to be the THREE strongest documents on the worksheet, create an argument that backs up your view. You must refer to these as in any DBQ essay- “According to document #1...” Each point must clearly answer the essay question “Should the Atomic Bomb have been dropped on Japan?” Your three documents can be used in one body paragraph. In total, this will be a three paragraph essay. This will prepare you for the class debate.

 luyện Văn: You must complete this HW in order to participate in the debate