

Innocence in an age of Infamy

Lesson 7: Could World War II Have Been Prevented?

Grades 7-12

Objectives:

- Students will use a jigsaw teaching strategy to learn about several of the possible causes of World War II.
- Students will decide whether or not they think World War II could have been prevented.

Materials:

- Research materials about World War II
- See <http://www.opb.org/lmd/infamy>

Procedure for Classroom Activity:

1. Begin the lesson by writing this question on the chalkboard: “Could World War II Have Been Prevented?”
2. Divide the class into “home” groups of five students each. Within each group, each of the students will choose to become the “expert” on one of the following topics:
 - The effects of the Treaty of Versailles
 - The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party
 - Appeasement and isolationist policies
 - The Axis military victories and defeats
 - The Allies military victories and defeats
3. Students will meet in their “expert” groups on each of the topics to work together to do research and develop a five-minute presentation on their topic to deliver to their “home” groups. The goal of each student is to help their home group members learn the most important facts about their topic. Each “expert”

group will also develop five questions (and answers) to cover the material they believe is the most important to learn about their particular topic.

4. Students will return to their “home” groups to deliver their presentations and help their fellow home group members to understand and remember the most important facts about their topic. Encourage the idea of cooperation and working together to help each other learn.
5. To conclude, ask each group to analyze what they learned about World War II and discuss whether or not they believe that World War II could have been prevented. Have them share their conclusions and reasoning with the entire class. Develop generalizations from their conclusions about ways that other conflicts might be prevented in the future.

Assessment Suggestions:

1. Use the questions developed by each of the “expert” groups to assess the students’ understanding of the topics.
2. For a motivating way to assess students’ understanding, play a “Jeopardy”-style game using the questions developed by the “expert” groups to assess the students’ learning. Organize the questions into categories and award points to the students who answer the questions correctly. Hide a few “Daily Doubles” in the game, and develop a few bonus questions for the final round of the game.

Extension Ideas:

1. Compare the development of World War II with other major wars in history, for example World War I, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and the Persian Gulf Conflict. What is similar and different about how each of these conflicts developed? Could any of these other conflicts have been prevented? How?