

A Tale of Two Cities

COMMENTARY AND SIDEBAR NOTES BY DAVID WALBERT

This media is available in the web edition only.

In 1946, the U.S. War Department produced a twelve-minute film about the atomic bomb, called *A Tale of Two Cities*. The two cities were, of course, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (The War Department, by the way, ran the Army and the Army Air Force. It was merged with the Department of the Navy in 1947 to become today's Department of Defense.)

The film begins with the Trinity test in the New Mexico desert in July 1945, noting that on that day, "the atomic age was born." It then takes you on a tour of the ruins of the two devastated cities.

Questions to consider

1. How would you describe the tone of the script and the narrator? Do you think it is appropriate to the topic?
2. How would you describe the music? Why might it have been chosen? Do you think it is appropriate?
3. The narrator says that there were 20,000 Japanese military personnel in Hiroshima, who are "among the missing." Why would they be considered "missing"?
4. The priest who witnessed the destruction of Hiroshima says that the "deadly rain" that followed the bombing was just a rumor. By this time, though, the effects of nuclear fallout — radiation spread by the explosion — were well known to the army, and thousands of Japanese people had died from "atomic sickness." Why does the film not mention this?
5. Does the film portray the atomic bomb as "just" a bigger bomb, or as an entirely new kind of weapon?
6. Why would the War Department have made a film like this?
7. What can you tell from this film about the way most Americans felt about Japan and the Japanese people by the war's end?
8. If you have watched the documentary of the Battle of Midway¹, compare this film with that one. How are they similar? How are they different?

9. How do you imagine this film would have been received in 1946?
10. How does the film make you feel today?

On the web

The effects of radiation

http://www.rerf.or.jp/general/qa_e/qa12.html

This page from the Radiation Effects Research Foundation gives information about the immediate and long-term effects of radiation from the atomic bombs used at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

A survivor of both atomic blasts

<http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/newsobserver/obituary.aspx?n=tsutomu-yamaguchi&pid=138232271>

The obituary of Tsutomu Yamaguchi, the only survivor of *both* atomic blasts, who died in 2010 at the age of 93.

World War II: Pearl Harbor, Japanese internment camps, and the atomic bomb

<http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/civiced/resources/docs/WWIIPearlHarbortoAtomicBomb8.pdf>

In this lesson from the Civic Education Consortium, students will explore major events occurring at the end of World War II, including the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the forced relocation of Japanese Americans into internment camps, and America's use of atomic weapons against Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Students will explore primary sources, read poetry and a narrative, and discuss the US government's choices in depth while examining the affect on America, Japan, and the world community at large.

What should President Truman do?

<http://www.sog.unc.edu/programs/civiced/resources/docs/WhatshouldTrumando.pdf>

In this lesson from the North Carolina Civic Education Consortium, students will explore the various options for ending the war with Japan by simulating a meeting of President Truman's advisory committee. Students will also evaluate Truman's decision to drop two atomic bombs on Japan.

More from LEARN NC

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Notes

1. See <http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/5943>.

About the author

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David Walbert is Editorial and Web Director for LEARN NC in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill School of Education. He is responsible for all of LEARN NC's educational publications,

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David holds a Ph.D. in History from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *Garden Spot: Lancaster County, the Old Order Amish, and the Selling of Rural America*, published in 2002 by Oxford University Press. With LEARN NC, he has written numerous articles for K–12 teachers on topics such as historical education, visual literacy, writing instruction, and technology integration.