

History
UNFOLDING

THE COLD PEACE AND THE KOREAN WAR



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MindSparks
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

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The Cold Peace and the Korean War

Introduction

Korea and the Cold War

The Korean War is often called the “Forgotten War.” It should not be forgotten.

The Korean War was the first major armed conflict of the Cold War in which U.S. soldiers were participants. It took place at a time when the U.S. was experiencing its most intense fears about the menace of communism. And it posed problems for U.S. policy makers that would recur regularly throughout the Cold War.

Specifically, it presented the problem of fighting a “limited” war in a world in which such a conflict could trigger unlimited nuclear annihilation. Secondly, it posed the problem of an invasion that was also partly a civil conflict, making U.S. intervention politically tricky and morally ambiguous. Finally, it was a conflict far from our own borders that officials had to justify, even though no direct threat to the United States existed. These problems would, of course, all come back to haunt the nation in Vietnam.

Last but not least, the war demanded the ultimate sacrifice of thousands of American soldiers who, no matter how confusing the context, fought with heroic determination. For their sake alone, Americans ought not ever forget this war. The illustrations in this booklet will help your students better understand the history and meaning of this conflict. Each of the four lessons in this booklet uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

Cold War: East and West

The illustrations here set the outbreak of hostilities in Korea in the context of the broader Cold War rivalry that made the Korean conflict important to U.S. policy makers.

Invasion and Response

The map and other illustrations help to trace the confusing course of the war, especially its initial stages.

Holding the Line

The invasion by thousands of Chinese soldiers in November 1950 led to the near collapse of the U.N. and U.S. war effort. It also led to a political and constitutional crisis at home, with Truman’s firing of MacArthur.

Stalemated Settlement

After mid-1951, the conflict settled into stalemate. In a sense, stalemate is still, even to this day, the outcome of the Korean War.

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.

*The Cold Peace and the Korean War***OBJECTIVE**

1. Students will better understand the broader Cold War context that influenced the way U.S. officials and the public viewed the outbreak of the Korean War.

Cold War: East and West

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 forces of communist North Korea invaded South Korea on June 25, 1950. The Korean War, often called our “Forgotten War,” was the first armed conflict of the Cold War. In a number of ways, it led indirectly to our involvement in Vietnam a decade later. This July 1950 editorial cartoon captures the anxiety and fear people had in the first days of the Korean War. The Soviet Union and China supported the North Koreans. The U.S., along with most U.N. member nations, supported the South. In the new nuclear age, it seemed likely that the conflict would explode into an all-out war between the Free World and the Communist World.

Illustration 2

Instability reigned throughout the world in 1950. The U.S and the Soviet Union, allies in the fight against Hitler in World War II, were now enemies. The cartoon on the left captures the feelings most Americans had—that they confronted in the Soviet Union a secretive, aggressive, totalitarian foe. The Soviets held all of Eastern Europe in a tight grip, and in 1949 they had successfully tested an atomic bomb of their own. Also in 1949, Mao Tse-tung and his communist forces finally came to power in China. As the cartoon on the right suggests with its hammer and sickle symbol, China was entering a new chapter in its history. From America’s point of view, communism was definitely on the march in that summer of 1950.

Illustration 3

Critics had accused President Harry S. Truman of “losing” China in 1949. He certainly did not want to be accused of losing another nation to the communists. In any case, an ally of the U.S. had been invaded, and Truman decided that a stand had to be taken. On the other hand, Americans were weary of war; memories of World War II were still fresh in their minds. Besides, the post-war economy was booming, and people just wanted time to build better lives for themselves. Nevertheless, patriotism and a sense of duty were felt powerfully at that time. As one historian wrote, “The new infantrymen were the younger brothers of the men who had fought in World War Two.” One of these soldiers is seen here, waiting with his young wife just before boarding a ship for Korea.

Lesson 1—Cold War: East and West

Illustration 1



Fitzpatrick in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Discussing the Illustration

1. This editorial cartoon dated July 6, 1950, warned Americans about a certain part of the world. It seems to suggest that this dangerous place was a threat to the whole world. What place is it?
2. From your knowledge of history, can you explain what was happening in Korea that made it such a dangerous place?
3. What features of the cartoon help make the point that the troubles in Korea could threaten the whole world? Do you think that events in Korea at that time actually could have threatened the whole world? Why or why not?
4. Why do you think the artist drew the smoke from the burning fuse in the shape of a question mark?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity:** It is early summer 1950. You are a group of foreign policy advisors to President Truman. As signs come from the Korean Peninsula that the North is about to invade the South, the president is being pressured to send military aid to the South. Half of you support this; the other half oppose it. The president asks each side to prepare a position paper laying out the reasons for its views and making recommendations for action. Prepare these papers and present them to the class. Have the class make a decision as if it were the president.
2. Find out more about the causes of the Korean War. Be sure to read about Japanese control of Korea in the early 1900s. Find out what happened there during and just after World War II. How did Korea come to be divided into North and South? Why was the 38th parallel selected as the border? Be sure to read more about Syngman Rhee, the leader of South Korea, and Kim Il Sung, the leader of North Korea. Then, prepare a report titled, "Causes of the Korean War."