

WHDE
Lesson Plan

Choosing Sides in the Korean War

AUTHOR INFORMATION

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GENERAL INFORMATION

Lesson Grade Span: Secondary (9-12) (Could be adapted for middle grades with scaffolding)
Targeted Grade Level/Course: Modern World History or U.S. History (10/11)
Estimated Time to Complete Lesson: 1-2 50-minute classes

FOCUSED QUESTION

How do we choose sides in a conflict?

STANDARDS (STATE/C3)

Georgia State Standard WH20: Demonstrate an understanding of the global social, economic, and political impact of the Cold War and decolonization from 1945 to 1989.
Georgia State Standard USH20: Analyze the international policies and actions developed as a response to the Cold War including containment, the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and the Korean War.
C3 Framework: D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras.

STUDENT & TARGET OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- Explain how Japanese imperial policy created an economically, socially, and politically divided Korea by 1945.

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- Explain Korea's strategic location for the U.S. and for the Soviet Union in the post-WWII world.
- Identify factors countries consider when choosing sides in a conflict
- Apply a class-created criteria from an assigned historical perspective
- Explain how a civil war became the global conflict known as the Korean War

LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson is primarily designed for use in a modern world history survey course, specifically within a unit that examines how forces unleashed by the Cold War and decolonization affected many developing nations in the post-WWII era. The lesson is purposely brief so that it can be realistically incorporated into a survey course, although lesson activities could be expanded.

In this lesson, students will explore how the forces of decolonization and the Cold War impacted the people of Korea between 1945-1950, as well as determined policy choices made by the United States and the Soviet Union. Students will examine the various perspectives that existed within post-colonial Korea, as well as those from the Americans and Soviets. Students will use these perspectives to identify likely allies and will create a criteria for alliances.

PROCEDURES

1. **Opening Activity:** Ask students to predict the challenges a former colony might face after gaining independence, using the opportunity to review the effects of imperialism on society, politics, and the economy. *Student responses could include, but would not be limited to, extreme class differences/wealth disparity, limited political experience, undeveloped economies based on the extraction of natural resources, lack of infrastructure, etc.*
 - a. **Follow up question:** Would there be any additional challenges for a colony that gained its independence in 1945 after WWII? (This question assumes that tension among the Allied Powers has been introduced in the previous WWII unit and serves to prompt students to identify the Cold War as an additional challenge.)
2. **Review Prior Knowledge:** Show students a map of Korea. What countries border Korea? Prompt students to think contextually about what the situation is on the ground in Korea in 1945, including the immediate context (end of WWII, defeat of Japan) and the broader context (Japanese colonization of Korea, beginning in 1910.) *If specifics of*

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imperial Japan have not been previously covered, they could easily be added here in the lesson.

3. **Introduce the Lesson:** The teacher should tell students that Korea was a country that faced the challenges of decolonization, as well as the Cold War. Today students will take on the perspective of an interest group on the Korean peninsula in 1945 as a way to understand how a civil war in Korea that started because of challenges posed by decolonization became a global conflict between communist and Western powers.
4. **Group Perspectives:** In groups of 3-4, students will read, discuss, and answer questions from one interest group's perspective in 1945: wealthy Korean landlords/collaborators, Korea peasants and workers, the United States government, and the Soviet Union. If time is limited in class, this activity could also be assigned for homework as a preparation for the lesson itself. *(Individual historical figures could also be assigned in addition to the interest groups in Korea, depending on the amount of time and type of class you do this with--adding additional points of view from figures such as U.S. Army General John R. Hodge, President Truman, Joseph Stalin, Syngman Rhee, Kim Il Sung, and Mao Zedong would serve to further illustrate the complexity of the situation that unfolded in Korea.)*
5. **Finding Allies:** Once students have discussed and completed their group's perspective, the teacher asks the whole group--how do countries choose their allies? How is it similar or different from choosing your friends? What criteria should a country use when picking a side to support?
 - a. Students should propose criterions; class will vote on the top 2-3. These can be added to the student worksheet, which includes a checklist.
 - b. "Find Your Friends"--Students should circulate around the room. They must talk to the other 3 interest groups and take notes on what they learn about the other group's perspective. *(Depending on the maturity of your students and preferred classroom management style, a jigsaw format could easily be applied here for a more structured format that ensures students will hear from all interest groups.)*
 - c. After an appropriate amount of time, students should meet back with their original groups to share what they have learned and to determine which group would meet the criteria for an ally.
6. **Debriefing:** The teacher will ask the interest groups to share their choices. Follow-up questions to ask the groups: *Did you find that you had common interests with more than 1 group? How did you make your choices? What was a priority for you? Did the people of Korea have a choice about the decisions made by the U.S. and the Soviet Union? What does this show us about the number of choices former colonial peoples had vs choices superpowers had after WWII?*
7. **Closing Questions:** Which groups had direct conflicts with one another? *(Identify the groups within Korea and the U.S. and the Soviets.)* Why did the Korean people not have

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complete autonomy in their own land? (*larger geopolitical conflict between the U.S./USSR, lingering legacy of colonialism*)

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

As a follow-up to this lesson, students will be given a description of Syngman Rhee, whose name they are unlikely to be familiar with. They will determine how each group's perspective would determine whether or not they would view Rhee as a potential ally, providing a brief justification for each.

RESOURCE LIST

Interest Group descriptions (The student source perspectives were created using the essay listed below)

Student Worksheet

Student Formative Assessment

General Background Reading:

Brazinsky, G. (n.d.). *The Korean War*. Retrieved from

<https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/resource/modern-korean-history-portal/the-korean-war/the-outbreak-of-the-korean-war>

MODIFICATIONS & EXTENSIONS (OPTIONAL)

MODIFICATIONS

Anything that may need to be modified, excerpted, or annotated for differing reading levels or abilities.

EXTENSIONS

Is there any way the overall purpose of your lesson can have an impact as part of a larger school or community function?

Perspectives in Korea, 1945: Korean peasants

Like the majority of people in Korea in August of 1945, you were born into a peasant family. Before the Japanese took over your country in 1910, you paid rent to a wealthy Korean landlord and farmed the land in order to provide for your family. Once Korea became a Japanese colony, your actual way of life (farming) did not change a great deal, but resisting Japanese authority had severe consequences.

During World War II (1938-1945), however, Korean peasants suffered a great deal as a result of Japanese rule. Many were forced to work in industries that aided the Japanese war effort, such as mining and factories. Korean men could be “drafted” for this work and had no choice but to follow orders, which often meant working far away from your family in poor conditions. Korean women suffered, too; 100,000-200,000 Korean women were forced into becoming “comfort women” for the Japanese military—they were forced to serve as prostitutes.

Now that the war is over and Japan has left your country, you would like to see some things change. In fact, you would like to see a lot of things change! Most of the land in Korea is owned by a small number of wealthy Koreans, some of whom got even richer when the Japanese ruled your country. You hold “collaborators”—your fellow Koreans who cooperated with or worked for the Japanese during colonization—in particular contempt. You think it is only fair that some of their land be redistributed to the peasants, who suffered the most during the war. Then peasants could actually own their own land and have some economic power.

You are also tired of not having a voice in your own country’s government. Now that the fascist powers have been defeated, you think Korean people, men and women, should have a vote in their government. The world is changing, and now it is time that Korea does, too! You support a group that will fight for these changes called the Korean People’s Republic (KPR).

The fact that the Americans and the Soviets have just “decided” to divide your country at the 38th parallel is both confusing and infuriating. Korea wasn’t an Axis power—why should it be divided like Germany? It doesn’t make any sense. This is why Korea needs to reform and make major changes and determine its own future!

Perspectives in Korea, 1945: Conservative Koreans

It is August 1945, and the Japanese have surrendered to the Allies. You are glad the Japanese are gone and now Korea can be an independent country. The Japanese always looked down on you as inferior, simply because you were Korean. Now is the time for Korea to forge a new path. From your perspective, Japanese rule over Korea wasn't completely bad. The Japanese, unlike Korea, were an industrialized nation in 1910, and their rule did bring some opportunities for economic growth. If you were a wealthy landlord, Japanese control of the Korea economy brought opportunities for you to invest in industry and commerce, both of which Korea will need in order to be a strong nation in the 20th century—plus, you made some money!

In addition to industrialization, the Japanese rule in Korea also opened up some job opportunities. The Japanese needed Korean people to work for them to help run the colony—judges, police, and colonial officials. Most Koreans wouldn't even consider working for the Japanese, but maybe you saw an opportunity to make good money and to send your children to good schools. Your fellow Koreans call you a “collaborator” but you would call yourself “smart”! There weren't that many economic opportunities in Korea before the Japanese came, and you don't think there's anything wrong with taking a job that will allow your children to be more successful!

After the war, you are happy to be independent, but you are concerned about some of the changes the Korean peasants are talking about. Taking land away from wealthy landowners and giving it to peasants? Land redistribution sounds a lot like communism, and that's not a good thing, in your opinion. Private property needs to be protected by the government, not taken away by the government. You might not be opposed to some change, but you also believe that making dramatic changes really quickly can be messy, violent, and chaotic—and that doesn't sound like a good plan to you. You're concerned that if no one stands up to this new “Korean People's Republic”, Korea will become a communist country. For that reason, you support a group that opposes these changes, the Korean Democratic Party (KDP).

The fact that the Americans and the Soviets have just “decided” to divide your country at the 38th parallel is both confusing and infuriating. Korea wasn't an Axis power—why should it be divided like Germany? It doesn't make any sense. But at least the presence of the Americans in Korea might prevent really radical changes from taking place. The influence of the Soviets in the northern part of the country is very concerning to you.

Perspectives in Korea, 1945: The United States

It is August 1945, and the war is over. You are relieved that the Japanese surrendered without the United States having to invade the island, but now you have a new worry: the Soviet Union. You've never liked communism—the whole idea of no one owning property is the complete opposite of what the United States was founded upon—but it made sense to ally with the Soviets in order to defeat the fascist powers of Germany and Japan. The Soviet Union definitely played a big role in defeating Germany, and you were relieved when the Soviets promised to help the U.S. defeat Japan. However, you are hearing some very concerning reports about what the Soviets are doing in eastern Europe—it looks like they're setting up communist governments, not holding democratic elections, the way they promised.

The Soviets are getting ready to invade Korea as part of the war on Japan, which is exactly what you asked them to do 6 months ago, before we knew the Manhattan Project would be ready. But now you're worried that maybe they will try to spread communism to Korea, too. If Korea becomes a communist country, then Japan could be next. And who knows what is going to happen in China; the Communists and Nationalists have resumed their civil war with each other there. Could all of East Asia become communist??

At the last minute, right as the Soviets declared war on Japan on August 9, you propose that Korea be temporarily divided at the 38th parallel, with the Soviets occupying the north and Americans occupying the south. To your surprise, the Soviets agreed and a month later, American troops arrived in southern Korea.

Once American troops were on the ground, you weren't really sure who to trust. Although most Koreans support the Korean People's Republic, you have been told that they are influenced by the Soviet Union and the changes that they want to make to Korea do sound a lot like communism to you. The United States doesn't want to look like we condone communism, so we probably should not have anything to do with this group.

Perspectives in Korea, 1945: The Soviet Union

It's 1945, and the war in Europe is finally over. After a devastating invasion of your country by Nazi Germany, the fascists have finally been defeated. You have also agreed to help the United States in their war against Japan, although it looks like you will not have to do much fighting, since the Americans have dropped a devastating new weapon they are calling an "atomic bomb" on Japan.

As a communist, you know exactly how your "allies", Britain and the United States, feel about you. They hate communism, and they allied with you only because of a common enemy, Germany. You were happy to have allies in the fight against Germany, but it's hard for you not to be a little suspicious of Britain and the U.S. Why did it take them so long to implement the D-Day invasion? For almost three full years, the Soviet Union bore the full brunt of the German army, which meant that by the end of the war at least 26 million Soviet citizens were dead, and the western part of the country was in ruins. Isn't it possible that Britain and the U.S. delayed their invasion because they wanted Germany to weaken the Soviet Union?

You have no intention of suffering like this again, and if that means surrounding the Soviet Union with countries whose governments are led by true allies—fellow communists—so be it. You have earned the right to a "buffer zone" of friendly countries. Communism is the ideology of the future and it is up to the Soviet Union to unite the workers of the world.

When the United States suddenly proposed dividing Korea temporarily, you agreed. Your priority was Europe, after all, not East Asia. However, the conditions in Korea do look promising for the future of communism and you would not mind having another communist power on your borders. Korea is a nation where a few elite landowners have long controlled the means of production, sometimes even choosing profit—collaborating with the Japanese—over the well-being of their own countrymen. If Koreans support radical land reform, how could you not help them?

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Perspectives in Korea, 1945

DIRECTIONS: In order to participate in class and complete your homework assignment, all of your group members need to fill out this sheet. Your answers should come from the “Background Information” about the group you have been assigned, as well as your group discussion.

Part I: Perspective of

Country that you call home	
Major events in the past 10 years that have changed your way of life	
What you want in 1945, <u>after</u> WWII has ended	
Who might be friendly to us and why	
Who might not be friendly to us and why	

Part II: Choosing Sides / Making an Alliance

A. Getting to Know You: Share information about your group with people from the 3 other groups. Use the space below to take some notes about their perspective. You do not have to fill in the space for your own group.

Korean conservatives	
Korean peasants	
The United States	
The Soviet Union	

B. Choosing Sides: With your group, determine whether the other interest groups you met with would meet each criteria from your perspective. Check the “yes” box if this group meets the criteria from your perspective. Check the “no” box if they do not.

Criteria (Write in the class criteria)	Group:		Group:		Group:	
	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO
Criteria 1:						
Criteria 2:						
Are we likely to form an alliance with this group? Why or why not?						

Korean Perspectives Follow-Up: Formative Assessment

Directions: Read the description below. Then answer the questions at the end.

Syngman Rhee, 1945

Syngman Rhee was born into an aristocratic family in Korea, and, as a young man attending school in Seoul, converted to Christianity and became very active in a student movement demanding reforms from the Korean government. He even spent 6 years in prison!

When Rhee was released from prison in 1904, some American friends arranged for him to study in the United States, where he eventually earned a Ph.D from Princeton in political science, making him the first Korean to earn a doctorate in the West. Unfortunately, Japan took over Korea in this period, and he was arrested by the Japanese when he returned home.

With the help of some Christian missionary friends, Rhee returned to the United States, where he spent the next 35 years advocating for an independent Korea. He became relatively well-known as a Korean nationalist, but also had a number of disagreements with other Koreans and with U.S. diplomats.

When the war was over and the U.S. military arrived in South Korea, Rhee applied for permission to return, which he was granted.

Answer the following questions:

1. From your group's perspective, is Rhee likely to be an ally for you? _____
2. Why or why not? When you answer, make sure that you refer to the class criteria and that you cite specific examples from your perspective or from Rhee's background to support your answer.

Works Cited:

Brazinsky, G. (n.d.). *The Korean War*. Retrieved from <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/resource/modern-korean-history-portal/the-korean-war/the-outbreak-of-the-korean-war>

Clark, C. (2008). Syngman Rhee. In R. Gorman (Ed.), *Great Lives from History: The Twentieth Century*. Hackensack: Salem. Retrieved from <https://online.salempress.com>

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