

ENQUIRY 6

CONTESTED EVIDENCE. WHY IS THE USE OF BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS IN THE KOREAN WAR A CONTROVERSIAL SUBJECT?

A two-lesson enquiry by Kristian Shanks

ENQUIRY OUTLINE

SUMMARY

This resource will enable students to explore a key controversy from the Korean War – whether or not the US used biological weapons against civilians in North Korea and China in contravention of the modern-day ‘rules of war’.

The resource will also enable students to think about how certain we can be of the answers to historical questions and about the contested nature of historical evidence and the way in which it is interpreted.

KEY AREAS OF FOCUS

- The reasons for the emergence of allegations of biological weapons usage by the USA during the Korean War.
- The nature of the debate surrounding the allegations of biological weapons usage, both at the time and subsequently by historians.
- Analysis and evaluation of a range of evidence on either side of the debate, leading to the development of a considered argument.

TARGET AGE RANGE

The lessons are designed for use with Key Stage 4, particularly as context for those studying the development of the Korean War for AQA's GCSE unit on Conflict and Peace in Asia 1950–1973.

Students at Key Stage 5 studying Mao's China may also find this resource useful to gain an insight into the way in which the communist regime operated during the early period of his rule.

SCHOLARLY RATIONALE

The debate over whether the US used biological weapons during the Korean War is one that continues to this day, with arguably no clear resolution. The Chinese, Russian and North Korean governments still maintain that the US attempted to spread diseases such as cholera and the plague, through the dropping of infected insects on civilian populations in North Korea and China during the war – the US continues to strongly refute these allegations (Ryall, 2010). As recently as March 2019, the North Korean government reiterated its belief that the US was involved in biological warfare during the Korean War through state media publications (Pyongyang Times, 2019). Historians associated with the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, an American thinktank with significant links to both major political parties and part-funded by the US government, have played a key role in continuing to rebut the allegations.

Kristian Shanks is Curriculum Leader for History at Sherburn High School in England. He has a particular interest in the legacy of the Korean War generally, and in Britain in particular. He also believes in the importance of students using original documents in authentic investigations.

The issue reveals a number of interesting aspects about the Korean War and the broader Cold War. Most obvious is the question of how benign the US actions were at this time – were they, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger (1946), providing the ‘brave and essential response of free men to Communist aggression’ (p. 23), or were they the more cynical actor highlighted by Cold War revisionists like William Appleman Williams (1959)? The germ warfare debate presaged future stains on US foreign policy and military conduct, such as the use of chemical weapons in Vietnam during the 1960s, the covert intervention in Cambodia in the 1970s and the Abu Ghraib torture and prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq in 2003.

Furthermore, Ruth Rogaski (2002) has highlighted that the issue of germ warfare ‘should be seen as a key symbol of China’s modern condition in the twentieth century world’ and that the story combines two key ‘motifs’ that were ‘central to the condition of New China: China as a victim of imperialism, and China as a victim of nature’ (p. 382). Grace Huxford’s (2018) analysis of the work of the Red Dean, Hewlett Johnson (who is cited early in the resource), highlights the fact that his work raised ‘important questions about the limits of democratic citizenship and acceptable behaviour during wartime’ (p. 150). Additionally, the issue of biological warfare was a way in which ‘the Cold War broadened the scope of military weapons and what constituted a military target in the British imagination’.

CURRICULAR RATIONALE

One of the most challenging aspects of the Korean War for students relates to the long stalemate between 1951 and 1953. The allegations of biological warfare come within this part of the topic and could be used by teachers to develop knowledge of this phase of the war. In particular, it would provide useful context for those delivering the AQA GCSE unit on Conflict and Peace in Asia 1950–1973, especially the bullet point covering the ‘Development of the Korean War’. This paper has a source-based component, and work done through the tasks should enable students to develop their skills in this aspect of historical thinking.

Additionally, students at Key Stage 5 covering units on Mao’s China may find this resource useful to gain an insight into the way in which the communist regime operated during the early period of his rule. The Korean War is usually covered as part of most A-level specifications on this topic.

More broadly, this enquiry should help students to develop their ability to handle evidence and think about how historians use it to make claims about the past. Students often see historical evidence in very black and white terms – either it is ‘useful’ or it isn’t. The evidence that students will grapple with in this enquiry has been deliberately chosen to make students pause and consider the status of the evidence before rushing to judgement. Students will have the opportunity to assess the strength of different pieces of evidence while considering their content and provenance. In this topic, the evidence is highly contested by historians on different sides of the debate, thus helping students to consider how problematic much historical evidence can be, and that it can be interpreted in different ways. Students will then have the chance to use their determinations on the evidence to inform a written piece that reflects the uncertainty inherent in making many historical claims.

REFERENCES

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SCHEME OF WORK

OVERVIEW

The aim of this sequence is for students to wrestle with the inherent problems and uncertainty involved in trying to get to some sort of 'historical truth', while getting their teeth into a controversial and intriguing aspect of the Korean War itself – whether or not the US used biological warfare against North Korean and Chinese civilians during the conflict.

In the first lesson of this two-lesson enquiry, students grapple with some academic reading and summarise how the allegations – and US rebuttals – developed during the war itself.

In the second lesson, students will engage with a range of evidence, leading to a piece of extended writing and finally discussion of the continuing relevance of this debate.

Lesson	Key content
<p>Lesson 1:</p> <p>Why and how did allegations of biological warfare by the USA develop during the Korean War?</p>	<p>The enquiry starts by students considering the story of the 'Red Dean' of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson, and his role in raising awareness of biological warfare allegations in Britain.</p> <p>They will then get into the situation in the Korean War in 1952, when the allegations first surfaced, and explore why biological weapons were and remain so controversial. They will also consider the issue of weapons of mass destruction more generally.</p> <p>The main part of this lesson will require students to read a 500-word academic article that summarises when the allegations arose and how the USA responded.</p>
<p>Lesson 2:</p> <p>How convincing is the evidence about US biological warfare?</p>	<p>Students engage with a range of evidence on both sides of the debate. They evaluate the source material and consider its value or otherwise as evidence in the debate.</p> <p>This leads to a piece of extended writing, where students will respond to the lesson question with supports in place to assist them.</p> <p>Finally, students will return to the overall enquiry question (Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject?), with particular reference to ongoing tensions between the US and the DPRK.</p>

LESSON 6.1 BREAKDOWN: WHY AND HOW DID ALLEGATIONS OF BIOLOGICAL WARFARE BY THE USA DEVELOP DURING THE KOREAN WAR?

BEFORE YOU START

You will need:

- Lesson PowerPoint 6.1
- Resource sheet 6.1A (Article by Milton Leitenberg)
- (if required) Resource sheet 6.1B (Text marking template, which models a way of reading long academic articles like this)
- Resource sheet 6.1C (Sequencing map activity analysing the long article)

Because this is quite demanding reading, we have offered different levels and styles of support. You won't need them all.

STARTER: HEWLETT JOHNSON'S PETITION (SLIDES 1–5)

After a brief preamble introducing the lesson sequence, the starter itself is on **Slide 4**.

You should show students the image and ask them to think about what the image shows. The question prompts on the slide point to why the piece of paper is so long, and why it might have been photographed in this way.

After brief discussion, use **Slide 5** to reveal the provenance of this photo source and ask students why a British clergyman (that term might need explaining) would have a petition from thousands of Chinese people at this time during the Korean War, considering the background about Hewlett Johnson, the so-called 'Red Dean', that is provided. Teachers could use a 'think, pair, share' model here and then ask students to think about any details that are surprising or shocking.

This starter not only raises the content issue – the biological weapons controversy – but it also takes you straight into the 'contested evidence' aspect. So it is worth extending the discussion to consider the petition as evidence to answer:

- what they think about the fact that a Christian priest is also a communist sympathiser
- how trustworthy the petition might be as a source of Chinese public opinion
- why communist governments like those in the USSR and China might find someone like Johnson useful, especially during that specific time period

LINK: CONTEXT – THE KOREAN WAR IN 1952 (SLIDE 6)

This is not an activity, just teacher talk.

Simply outline the position that the Korean War had reached in early 1952 – particularly for those new to the topic.

However, if you have been studying the conflict, you might use this opportunity to test student knowledge of the conflict and the broader Cold War conflict at this stage. You could white out a key word from each bullet point (e.g. movement, nuclear, armistice, 38th, etc) and ask them to supply the missing information from memory.

ACTIVITY 1: WHAT ARE BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS AND WHY ARE THEY CONTROVERSIAL? (SLIDES 7–8)

Students now have the opportunity to understand what biological weapons are and why their use is considered controversial. **Slide 7** provides some basic information about the position of biological weapons within international law and in popular imagination.

Slide 7 includes a link to the film poster for *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, also available here, where you will also get a plot summary if you want: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_Her_Majesty%27s_Secret_Service_\(film\)#/media/File:On_Her_Majesty's_Secret_Service_-_UK_cinema_poster.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/On_Her_Majesty%27s_Secret_Service_(film)#/media/File:On_Her_Majesty's_Secret_Service_-_UK_cinema_poster.jpg)

This could lead into a discussion about how the poster/film is not really useful evidence about biological weapons but it is useful evidence that the issue was in the public consciousness.

Slide 8 places biological weapons within the context of the modern-day concept of 'weapons of mass destruction' and also asks students to consider their own responses to weapons of this type.

Students could discuss the questions given on **Slide 8** before writing short answers to them – or perhaps discuss the first two more general questions and then write their answers to questions 3 and 4. The aim is that students should reflect on the differences between biological and other types of deadly weapons and think about what has made the prospect of germ warfare a frightening one to civilian populations over time.

Biological warfare is, in some respects, fairly 'low-tech' compared to something like nuclear warfare. If students have studied 'Medicine through Time' courses, they will have considered epidemic diseases and societal reactions to them in the past. Biological warfare does bring the prospect of a modern equivalent. Students may have encountered biological warfare issues in popular culture, and we all know the sense of panic that can be created by germs spreading, from our shared experience of the 2020 coronavirus. Germs scare us!

ACTIVITY 2: WHAT IS THE BIG STORY OF THE ALLEGATIONS OF US BIOLOGICAL WARFARE DURING THE KOREAN WAR? (SLIDES 9–12)

Slide 9 presents a basic introductory overview of the story of the allegations, which is then developed by the academic reading.

The academic article referred to on **Slide 10** is an abridged extract from M. Leitenberg's, 'China's False Allegations of the Use of Biological Weapons by the United States during the Korean War'. He is a prominent American academic on this issue. It is shown on Resource sheet 6.1A. If you want to consult the full article, you can find it here: www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/chinas-false-allegations-the-use-biological-weapons-the-united-states-during-the-korean

Slide 10 prompts students first of all to read through the extract. Students may need some support reading the material and you should use your preferred whole-class reading strategies to support them in this.

It is recommended that students should have the opportunity to discuss and pull apart the key vocabulary in the text while reading through.

You might also use a text-marking strategy, which we have modelled in Resource sheet 6.1B. This simply helps students to start reading attentively by looking for specific features.

Slide 11 then provides a tool to summarise the key information graphically. (If you are familiar with Thinking Maps, then this is an example of a Sequencing Map.) Students should aim to answer the questions using no more than 50 words per box. The blank Sequencing Map is provided as Resource sheet 6.1C. This can be particularly effective if you print it out at A3 to give the students more space to write.

Page 2 of Resource sheet 6.1C provides further support in the form of possible responses for the sequencing grid. You could use these as sorting cards – jumbled up so students match to the right section. Finally, page 3 has the answers, the completed grid, which also appears in the PowerPoint as **Slide 12**.

We have offered a range of strategies because it really is vital to the lesson that students understand the way in which the accusations developed. This will help to ensure that they have a firm outline of the topic before analysing the evidence for themselves in the second lesson of the enquiry.

ACTIVITY 3: EXTRA CHALLENGE – SPOTTING LEITENBERG’S VIEWPOINT (SLIDES 13–14)

There is an opportunity for additional challenge here on **Slide 12** by asking students to identify the personal perspective of the historian. Leitenberg is one of the leading historians who has refuted the communist allegations of US impropriety on this issue, and that point of view can clearly be detected in the loaded language used at times in the text: examples are extracted on **Slide 14**, such as in the last paragraph, when he states that ‘in subsequent years, other criticisms [of the allegations] and admissions were **even more telling**’. This should help students to see historians as conveyers of arguments rather than people who just dispassionately retell the facts.

PLENARY (SLIDE 15)

Students have the opportunity to reflect on the key knowledge gained in the lesson by thinking about:

- a question they have that remains unanswered
- one thing they already knew
- two new things they learned

You could provide a printout of **Slide 15** and ask students to write on the template, or use sticky notes and ask them to stick their questions or points on the slide as it is projected on the board.

LESSON 6.2 BREAKDOWN: HOW CONVINCING IS THE EVIDENCE ABOUT US BIOLOGICAL WARFARE?**BEFORE YOU START**

You will need:

- Lesson PowerPoint 6.2
- Resource sheet 6.2A (Evidence pack)
- Resource sheet 6.2B (Evidence recording sheet)
- Resource sheet 6.2C (Degree of certainty continuum)

STARTER – RECAP TASK (SLIDES 1–3)

This sorting exercise on **Slide 3** recaps and retrieves content from the previous lesson. Students put the basic outline of the story of the allegations into chronological order. The correct order is F-C-A-D-B-E.

ACTIVITY 1: HOW CONVINCING IS THE EVIDENCE ABOUT US BIOLOGICAL WARFARE DURING THE KOREAN WAR? (SLIDES 4–15)

(NB The evidence pack is provided both as Resource sheet 6.2A and also as slides in the lesson presentation, so you can use them flexibly in modelling and setting up the task and in feedback stages.)

Students study the different sources provided and, for each one, complete the relevant section of the table (on **Slide 5** and Resource sheet 6.2B). For each piece of evidence, they should briefly say whether or not it supports or opposes the allegations, provide a score out of five for how convincing the evidence is in supporting or opposing those allegations, and then make some justification for their choice.

The recording table (Resource sheet 6.2B) should be enlarged to A3 if possible. It might be useful to model the thinking and table-filling process with students with one of the sources first before letting students loose on the rest of the evidence pack.

The purpose is to help students to see that while some evidence may on the surface offer clear support for a particular argument, that evidence may not be very convincing when issues such as its provenance are factored in. This could be seen in Source C, which clearly supports the allegations but given, the origins of the evidence (being created by the communist government of China for propaganda purposes), is not likely to be seen as convincing. Shade could also be cast on apparently more convincing evidence – for example, students might see the historian Leitenberg as being more convincing, but the information about the status of his evidence, as shown in Source F, may raise further questions for students.

It may be useful for students to work in pairs or threes for this task, or you might allocate certain sources to particular groups of students. Alternatively, you could choose pairs of sources that contrast and look at the utility of those sources as evidence for historians studying this issue. Sources A and J might provide a good contrast, for example.

This activity needs most of a lesson to work properly – at least half an hour, and you could easily spend longer depending on how much discussion and feedback you want.

ACTIVITY 2: HOW CERTAIN CAN WE BE THAT THE USA USED BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS DURING THE KOREAN WAR? (SLIDES 16–17)

This lesson culminates in a written response. Students are doing two things here:

- Saying whether they believe the allegations.
- Saying how certain they are (based on the evidence they have studied).

Whichever view they take (believe or not believe), **Slide 16** invites students to put themselves on the spectrum of certainty between 0% and 100%. In the box on Resource sheet 6.2C (page 1), they explain their degree of certainty with reference to the sources.

Slide 17 (also page 2 of Resource sheet 6.2C) provides some writing stimulus (vocabulary and sentence starters) for their written answer, which you could print out.

Feedback could be provided by sharing exemplar work using a visualiser or by asking students with contrasting views on their 'level of certainty' to share aspects of their work with the whole class.

PLENARY (SLIDE 18)

This final task brings us back to the overall enquiry question (Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject?) through a recent (2019) article created by the North Korean government. Students should think about why the issue of US biological weapons remains a 'live' debate and controversy in the modern day.

Draw their attention to the comment on the spending of the Department of Defense, which includes money allocated for a biochemical warfare plan. How should they take this information when we also know that North Korea wish to undermine the morality of US claims to global leadership?

SELECTED LESSON POWERPOINTS

ENQUIRY 6.1

Enquiry 6: Contested evidence

Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject?



Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 1

Enquiry: Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject

Lesson 6.1

Why and how did allegations of biological warfare by the USA develop during the Korean War?

Lesson 6.2

How convincing is the evidence about US biological warfare?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 2

Lesson 6.1 overview

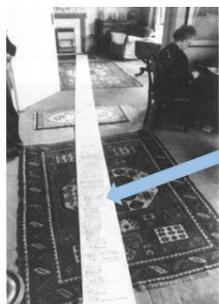
Lesson 6.1

Why and how did allegations of biological warfare by the USA develop during the Korean War?

Content covered in this lesson:

- The context – the Korean War up to 1952
- What are biological weapons?
- The accusations against the USA
- An academic perspective: evaluating Milton Leitenberg's conclusions about the accusations

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 3



Starter

- What do you think this could be?
- Why is it so long?
- Why has someone taken a photograph of it in this way?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 4

The petition

- This photograph shows a petition. It was signed by over 13,000 Chinese people, including 410 Chinese Protestant pastors (church leaders).
- It was brought back to the UK from China by the Dean of Canterbury, Hewlett Johnson.
- It was a petition against the alleged use of bacteriological weapons by the United States against China.
- Johnson himself was known as the 'Red Dean' and was a well-known supporter of Stalin and the Soviet Union. He had been awarded the Soviet Order of the Red Banner of Labour and also the Stalin International Peace Prize in 1951.

Discuss

Are there any details here that are surprising or shocking or that you would like to investigate further?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 5

Context: The Korean War to 1952

- 1950–1951 was the 'movement' phase of the war, as UN and communist forces retreated and advanced rapidly.
- The USSR achieved nuclear weapons capability in 1950.
- July 1951: Armistice negotiations began to try to end the conflict in Korea.
- War reached stalemate phase around the 38th parallel. There were high casualties on both sides but little movement of the front lines.
- The communist regime in China had only been in power for three years at this point and was still establishing itself. Its intervention in Korea should be seen as part of this.
- Allegations of bacteriological warfare surfaced in the spring of 1952; China and North Korea accused the United States.

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 6

What are biological weapons?

- Biological weapons are germs deliberately spread to harm your enemy. They are also sometimes called bacteriological weapons and germ warfare. They all mean the same thing.
- Biological weapons are an example of **weapons of mass destruction (WMD)**.
- There are three main categories of WMD: Biological, chemical and nuclear.
- The concept of WMD is modern, particularly associated with the 2000s and the Iraq War. However, the use of biological weapons was prohibited as early as 1925 under the Geneva Protocol – which was agreed at the League of Nations.
- In the 1950s, the biggest fear was that of nuclear weapons. However, the Cold War increased popular awareness and fear of a wide range of weapons that could be used against civilians.
- This is reflected in popular culture, where various film and TV programmes of the time depicted germ warfare – notably the 1960s James Bond film *On Her Majesty's Secret Service*. The villain, Blofeld, is brainwashing his 'Angels of Death' to smuggle biological weapons (such as anthrax germs) into Britain and around the world. (Click the green icon to view the film poster.)



Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 7

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD)

A biological weapon:
anthrax germs



A chemical weapon:
mustard gas



A nuclear weapon:
atomic bomb at Nagasaki, 1945



Activity 1

- Why do countries build WMD?
- Why is the use of WMD controversial?
- How do biological weapons differ from other WMD?
- Why might a country use biological weapons rather than other WMD?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 8

ENQUIRY 6.1 (continued)

What is the big story of the allegations against the USA?

- Early 1952:** North Korean and Chinese governments formally alleged use of biological weapons by the USA. Allegations included that flies, mosquitos, spiders and fleas, carrying diseases such as plague, smallpox and cholera, had been dropped by US planes.
- March 1952:** The US immediately refuted the allegations and Secretary of State Dean Acheson called for an International Red Cross investigation. This was vetoed by the Soviet Union at the UN Security Council.
- September 1952:** The Needham Commission (established by an organisation called the World Peace Council) confirmed that there was evidence that the US had used biological weapons against Korea.
- February 1953:** Chinese government produced two captive US Marine Corps pilots to confirm that the allegations were true.
- These allegations have been strenuously denied by the USA to this day, while Chinese and North Korean governments continue to support the claims. Historians are divided on the issue.

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 9

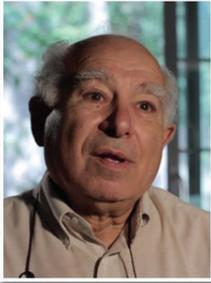
Academic reading task

Activity 2

What is the big story of the allegations against the USA?

You will be given an article written by historian Milton Leitenberg (Resource sheet 6.1A). It tells you the big story of how the allegations developed and how the USA responded to them.

- Read through the extract.
- Summarise the key points from the extract – using the questions and chart on the next slide (or Resource sheet 6.1C). Summarise your answer to each question in 50 words or less.



Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 10

Summarise Leitenberg's answer to each question in 50 words (or less!)

1. What claims were made about US biological weapons development before the Korean War?
2. What specific allegations did China make about the use of biological weapons during the Korean War?
3. What were the main 'investigations' launched by China and NK into the use of biological weapons?
4. What were some weaknesses of these investigations identified in the extract?
5. What was the US response to these allegations?
6. What weaknesses about the allegations emerged after the war?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 11

What is the big story of the allegations of US biological warfare during the Korean War? **Answers**

1. What claims were made about US biological weapons development before the Korean War?
 - Soviets alleged US use against 'Alaskan troops.'
 - Chinese said that US collected with Japanese WWII General Ishii, who had used germ warfare in that conflict against China.
2. What specific allegations did China make about the use of biological weapons during the Korean War?
 - NK first alleged US use of smallpox in May 1951.
 - NK then claimed US dropped plague- and cholera-infected insects by air.
 - China claimed over 600 attacks on over 70 cities in NK.
3. What were the main 'investigations' launched by China and NK into the use of biological weapons?
 - Soviets raised the issue at UN.
 - Chinese rejected WHO offer of investigation.
 - Chinese then commissioned IADL and ISC investigations – these corroborated allegations.
4. What were some weaknesses of these investigations identified in the extract?
 - Neither did any field investigations of their own.
 - They accepted Chinese and North Korean evidence fairly uncritically.
5. What was the US response to these allegations?
 - They denied them publicly at the UN.
 - They criticized the ISC report and said that the insects in the allegations would not have been able to carry those diseases.
6. What weaknesses about the allegations emerged after the war?
 - There were reports that paper packets of insects had been placed in the snow by Chinese soldiers.
 - Some Chinese officials themselves have been reported at separate times as saying that the claims were fabricated.

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 12

Activity 3: EXTRA CHALLENGE: Spotting Leitenberg's viewpoint

- What appears to be Leitenberg's attitude to or viewpoint on the allegations?
- What evidence from the text supports your view?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 13

Consider these three extracts from Leitenberg's article. What do they suggest about his view of the strength of the allegations?

Extract 1
The Chinese and North Koreans rejected repeated offers of on-site investigations by the World Health Organization and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Instead, the two governments hosted their own 'investigations'.

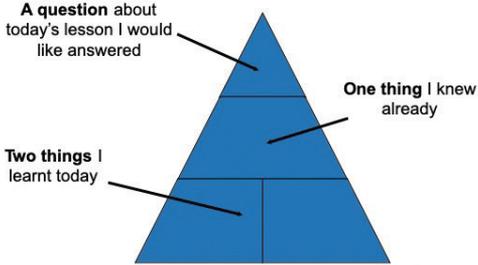
Extract 2
The most significant aspect of both the jurists' and ISC 'investigations' is that neither group did any field investigating of their own. They were presented with 'evidence' by the Chinese and North Koreans, which they accepted, on faith, as fact.

Extract 3
In subsequent years, other criticisms and admissions were even more telling. Tibor Meray, a Hungarian journalist who had spent the Korean War inside North Korea, reported that North Korean peasants told doctors at a Hungarian field hospital that paper packets of insects had been placed in the snow by Chinese soldiers.



Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 14

Plenary: What have you learnt today?



Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.1 15

ENQUIRY 6.2

Enquiry: Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject?

Lesson 6.1

Why and how did allegations of biological warfare by the USA develop during the Korean War?

Lesson 6.2

How convincing is the evidence about US biological warfare?

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.2 1

Lesson 6.2 Overview

Lesson 6.2

How convincing is the evidence about US biological warfare?

Content covered in this lesson:

- Recap the key moments in the debate
- Examine and evaluate the evidence
- Summarise your conclusions
- Answer the enquiry question using appropriate language of certainty

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.2 2

Lesson starter

Recap the last lesson by putting the following events in correct chronological order:

A - The US requests to have the International Red Cross investigate the charges – denied by the USSR.

C - The North Korean government alleges biological weapons usage by the USA. The Chinese government later reinforces this.

E - Tibor Meray, a Hungarian journalist, reports in 1956 that Chinese officials had said to Polish and Yugoslavian counterparts that the allegations were likely a hoax.

B - Dean Acheson, US Secretary of State, rejects the Needham Commission report.

D - The USSR establishes two investigations backed by its own front organisation, the World Peace Council (the IADL and Needham Commission) – these 'confirm' US biological weapons usage.

F - US government allegedly conspires with ex-Japanese WWII scientists involved in biological weapons development.

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.2 3

How strong is the evidence to support the claims that the USA used biological weapons in Korea?

- In this lesson, you are going to examine some of the evidence yourselves about whether or not the USA used biological weapons in the Korean War.
- The evidence itself is highly contested and you should treat it with caution.
- It is vital that you read not just what each source says, but also the information about its creation. This will help to determine whether it is strong or weak evidence.
- Some of the sources are documentary, while others provide factual information.

Task

You have been given ten sources of evidence to consider. They all relate somehow to the allegations that the USA used biological weapons in the Korean War. Study the information and complete the table on the next slide (Resource sheet 6.2B).

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.2 4

Source	Does it support or challenge the allegations? Explain your answer.	How convincing is the source as evidence? (Score 1–5)	Justification for your score
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			
F			
G			
H			
I			
J			

Exploring and Teaching the Korean War | Lesson 6.2 5

Source A

EVIDENCE PACK

'In the light of all these and other similar facts, the Commission had no option but to conclude that the American Air Force was employing in Korea methods very similar to, if not exactly identical with, those employed to spread plague by the Japanese during the Second World War.'

Information about the origins of the source

The International Scientific Commission for the Investigation of the Facts concerning Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China – Final Report. The Commission was headed by British scientist Joseph Needham, who had long been an expert on China.

The ISC was an organisation that was part of the World Peace Council – A Soviet-backed organisation designed to promote 'peace' around the world.

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Source B

EVIDENCE PACK

'The U.S. had been pursuing an active biological warfare program since 1942. After Japan's defeat in 1945, the Americans absorbed the more advanced Japanese BW research and began an accelerated development program at Fort Detrick, Maryland and other secret facilities. They had already conducted secret tests by spraying anthrax over San Francisco Bay, in Alaska and elsewhere. (As revealed in the German documentary Codename Artichoke.) Now they had to test them in real war conditions, on "gooks" and "reds" that stubbornly refused [to] yield to conventional military force and the natural superiority of the God-Fearing White Christian Man. (If you want to learn how deeply and fundamentally racist the Korean War was, read Bruce Cumings' excellent The Korean War.)

According to Supotnitskiy [a Russian biologist], dropping a few rats with plague-bacteria-infected fleas, contaminated feathers, disease-carrying insects etc. into caves and tunnels where "red rats" were hiding was very tempting and effective, both on an experimental and operational level.'

Information about the origins of the source

From an article by George Burchett in *Counterpunch* (written in February 2018). Burchett is the grandson of Wilfred Burchett, a communist-sympathising journalist from Australia. *Counterpunch* is a radical left-wing political magazine.

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Source C

EVIDENCE PACK



Information about the origins of the source

- Chinese propaganda poster from the Korean War era. The caption reads: 'Vaccinate everyone, to crush the germ warfare of American imperialism!'
- The Chinese government launched a Patriotic Hygiene Campaign to fight back against the alleged biological attacks. The population was mobilised in a mass campaign to eradicate all fleas, rats, mosquitos and flies in the country.

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ENQUIRY 6.2 (continued)

Source D **EVIDENCE PACK**



Information about the origins of the source

This is a Chinese photograph of a vial containing infected fleas allegedly spread by the United States.

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Source E **EVIDENCE PACK**

'... There was no biological warfare carried out by any agency of the US government during the Korean War, or for that matter by anyone else.

The false allegation was disproved as long ago as 1998 when documents from the Soviet Central Committee Archives that had been sent to Mao Zedong and to Kim Il Sung in the month following Stalin's death in 1953 were obtained from the Soviet Presidential Archive. They were published in 1998 in the Bulletin of the Cold War International History Project at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.'

Information about the origins of the source

Written by historian Milton Leitenberg to the *New York Review of Books* in 2018. Leitenberg is a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland.

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Source F **EVIDENCE PACK**

Information about the origins of the source

The evidence used by historians like Milton Leitenberg to refute the Chinese and North Korean allegations has itself been challenged by other historians. The historians Stephen Endicott and Edward Hagermann have written extensively on US use of biological weapons and broadly agree that they were used. They say about Leitenberg's evidence:

'The claim that two places were concocted to fool foreign visitors does not prove that all the sites of alleged biological warfare were also contrived. Our research in Chinese archives shows that the Chinese army in Korea and the Korean medical service serving with it identified occurrences of plague in 13 places during February and March 1952 as well as outbreaks of anthrax, encephalitis and other abnormal diseases. The Soviet documents, if they are genuine, add a twist to the main documentation which, so far, is to be found in the Chinese and United States archives. Questions raised by the documents about their source, who ordered the falsification of evidence, and motive would need to be resolved.'

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Source G **EVIDENCE PACK**

Information about the origins of the source

The following points come from Frank Dikotter's *The Tragedy of Liberation* (2013). Dikotter is a Dutch historian from the University of Hong Kong.

'On 6 April 1952, the New York Times published an article demonstrating that the photos presented by the People's Daily were fraudulent.

It was pointed out by one scientist that infected lice and fleas would not be able to survive the freezing temperatures of North Korea in winter.

Li Shantang, a domestic opponent of the regime, said that "This is all communist propaganda in an attempt to get the world to hate America, don't listen to all that rubbish!"'

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Source H **EVIDENCE PACK**

Factual information

- The United States gave immunity to Japanese scientists from Unit 731, which was a germ warfare research organisation from Japan during the Second World War.
- This was in exchange for obtaining the research data and information that they had developed.
- This information was withheld from other wartime allies and the grant of immunity was covered up by the USA for many decades.

Information found in Rogaski, R. (2002) 'Nature, annihilation and modernity' in *Journal of Asian Studies*, 61, no. 2

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Source I **EVIDENCE PACK**

Factual information

- Two of the key sources of evidence produced by China and North Korea for allegations of germ warfare were captured US prisoners of war who confessed to being involved in dropping infected insects on Korea and China.
- The USA claimed that these confessions were extracted as a result of torture and brainwashing.

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Source J **EVIDENCE PACK**

*'The Koreans stated that the Americans had supposedly repeatedly exposed several areas of their country to plague and cholera. To prove these facts, the North Koreans, with the assistance of our advisers, created false areas of exposure. In June–July 1952 a delegation of specialists in bacteriology from the World Peace Council [the Needham Commission] arrived in North Korea. **Two false areas of exposure were prepared.** In connection with this, the Koreans insisted on obtaining cholera bacteria from corpses which they would get from China.'*

Information about the origins of the source

This is an explanatory note from Glukhov (a Soviet diplomat) to Beria (head of the Soviet Secret Police) in 1953. It is published on the Wilson Center website. The bold emphasis has been added by us.

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How certain can we be that the USA used biological weapons during the Korean War?

100%  0%

Task

Do you believe the allegations or not? 'Yes' or 'No' will do.

- Now draw a line from the text box to the arrow showing **how** certain you are, based on the evidence that you've seen.
- Then justify your choice in the text box, providing a balanced evaluation of the evidence you have examined.

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ENQUIRY 6.2 (continued)

Summary question: How convincing is the evidence about US biological warfare?

Word bank:
Here are some words and phrases that you could use in your answer, depending on your view. Write these down in your exercise book above your paragraph, and tick them off as they get used.
USA – China – North Korea – Soviet Union – insects – cholera and plague – Needham Commission report – Unit 731 – Leitenberg – Patriotic Hygiene Campaign – fraudulent – hoax – strong – weak evidence – convincing – unconvincing – Endicott/Hagermann

Starter sentences:
The evidence against the USA is...
The strengths/weaknesses of this evidence are...
The USA claimed that...
The strengths/weaknesses of the US evidence are...

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Why is the use of biological weapons in the Korean War a controversial subject?

Task
Study this article then consider:

1. Why do you think the North Korean government still refers to these allegations of biological weapons usage in the present day?
2. What does that reveal about the wider debate?

Excerpt from the North Korean *Pyongyang Times* on 28 March 2019

The fact that US forces in South Korea have continued to push ahead with a plan for biochemical warfare has recently been disclosed, giving rise to serious concern among the South Korean people. According to the biochemical defence program budget assessment bill for the 2019 fiscal year worked out by the US Department of Defense, the US earmarked US\$10.14 million more budget, or 15.6 percent rise over last year, for the Jupiter plan, a biochemical warfare plan targeting the DPRK, and decided to disburse US\$3.5 million equivalent to 34.5 percent of the budget for wharf No. 8 of Pusan port, a dock for the US forces' exclusive use, which is furnished with the general biochemical weapon lab and other related facilities.

Already in 2015, the US made an experiment on germ weapons by shipping live anthrax into its airbase in Osan, Kyonggi Province, and took Zika virus into its military base in Ryongsan in 2016 to conduct a bacteriological weapon development experiment. In April 2017, it brought relevant equipment for carrying out the Jupiter plan into wharf No. 8.

Such moves are reminiscent of the atrocities the US forces committed in the past. During the Korean war (1950–1953), they used germ weapons, whose use had been prohibited worldwide, from the winter of 1950 in order to recover a heavy defeat.

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