

World War II: Causes, Home Front, and Aftermath

Grade Level: Secondary (8–12 adaptable)

Length: 4 Class Periods (45–60 minutes each)

Disciplines: U.S. History, Global Studies, Civics, ELA, Humanities

Learning Objectives

Students will:

1. Identify the global causes of World War II.
 2. Analyze U.S. entry into the war.
 3. Examine home front mobilization.
 4. Investigate wartime civil liberties issues.
 5. Evaluate the global and domestic aftermath of WWII.
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Essential Questions

- What caused World War II?
 - Why did the United States enter the war?
 - How did the war transform American society?
 - Were civil liberties protected during wartime?
 - How did WWII reshape the global order?
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Teacher Historical Background Script (Opening Mini-Lecture)

“World War II emerged from unresolved tensions after World War I. Economic depression, fascist nationalism, and territorial aggression destabilized Europe and Asia.

Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and Imperial Japan pursued expansionist agendas. Despite early neutrality, the United States entered the war after Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

The war mobilized the entire nation—economically, socially, and militarily—and its aftermath reshaped global politics and American life.”

Lesson Sequence Overview

Day 1 – Causes of World War II

Day 2 – U.S. Entry & Mobilization

Day 3 – Home Front & Civil Liberties

Day 4 – War’s End & Aftermath

PRIMARY SOURCE EXCERPTS

(All public domain)

Primary Source 1

Adolf Hitler – Territorial Expansion Justification (Speech Excerpt)

“Germany must have space...

We are overcrowded...

The future of Germany lies in the East...

We must secure land for our people.”

Primary Source 2

Franklin D. Roosevelt – “Four Freedoms” Speech (1941)

“In the future days... we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms...

Freedom of speech...

Freedom of worship...

Freedom from want...

Freedom from fear.”

Primary Source 3

Franklin D. Roosevelt – Pearl Harbor Address (Dec. 8, 1941)

Instructional Excerpt

“Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—

The United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked...

By naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan...

No matter how long it may take us...

The American people... will win through to absolute victory.”

Primary Source 4

War Production Board Statement

“Factories once producing consumer goods...

Now produce tanks, aircraft, and munitions...

Industrial mobilization is essential to victory.”

Primary Source 5

Office of War Information – Home Front Message

“Every citizen is a soldier...

Through rationing...

Through conservation...

Through production...

Victory depends on all.”

Primary Source 6

Executive Order 9066 (Japanese American Internment, 1942)

“The Secretary of War... is authorized...

To prescribe military areas...

From which any persons may be excluded...

As deemed necessary for national security.”

Primary Source 7

Japanese American Internment Testimony

“We were given days to sell our homes...

We brought only what we could carry...

Barbed wire surrounded us...

We had committed no crime.”

Primary Source 8

Harry Truman – Atomic Bomb Announcement (1945)

“The United States has dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima...

It is an atomic bomb...

A harnessing of the basic power of the universe...

We shall continue to use it until we completely destroy Japan’s power to make war.”

Primary Source 9

United Nations Charter Preamble (1945)

“We the peoples of the United Nations...

Determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...

To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights...

And to promote social progress.”

DAY 1 – Causes of WWII

Activity 1 – Post-WWI Tensions Brainstorm

Students identify:

- Treaty of Versailles resentment
 - Economic depression
 - Fascism rise
 - Militarism
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Teacher Script

“World War II was not sudden—it grew from unresolved global tensions.”

Activity 2 – Expansion Ideology Analysis

Students annotate Hitler excerpt.

Focus:

- Territorial justification
 - Nationalist ideology
 - Militarism
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Activity 3 – Appeasement Simulation

Roles:

- Britain
- France
- Germany
- Poland

Debate how to respond to aggression.

DAY 2 – U.S. Entry & Mobilization

Mini-Lecture Script

“Although neutral initially, the U.S. supported Allies through Lend-Lease. Pearl Harbor ended isolationism.”

Activity 1 – Pearl Harbor Speech Analysis

Students annotate FDR excerpt.

Focus:

- Emotional appeal
 - Unity language
 - War justification
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Activity 2 – War Declaration Debate

Students role-play Congress voting on war.

Activity 3 – Industrial Conversion Simulation

Students redesign factories for wartime production.

DAY 3 – Home Front & Civil Liberties

Mini-Lecture Script

“The home front mobilized labor, women, and industry—but also restricted freedoms.”

Activity 1 – Rationing Budget Exercise

Students allocate limited goods:

- Gasoline
 - Meat
 - Sugar
 - Rubber
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Activity 2 – Internment Policy Analysis

Students annotate Executive Order 9066.

Questions:

- Who is targeted?
 - Constitutional implications?
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Teacher Script

“National security concerns often collide with civil liberties.”

Activity 3 – Internment Hearing Simulation

Roles:

- Japanese American citizen
- Military officer
- Civil rights lawyer
- Supreme Court justice

Debate constitutionality.

DAY 4 – War’s End & Aftermath

Mini-Lecture Script

“WWII ended with Axis defeat—but introduced nuclear warfare and Cold War tensions.”

Activity 1 – Atomic Bomb Ethical Debate

Students analyze Truman excerpt.

Prompt:

“Was the bomb necessary?”

Activity 2 – United Nations Founding Analysis

Students annotate UN preamble.

Focus:

- Peacekeeping goals
 - Human rights
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Activity 3 – Postwar World Mapping (Text-Based)

Students list outcomes:

- U.S. superpower rise
 - Soviet rivalry
 - Decolonization
 - NATO/Alliances
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Writing Assessment

DBQ Prompt

“How did World War II transform the United States domestically and globally?”

Students must cite:

- Four Freedoms
 - Pearl Harbor speech
 - War mobilization
 - Internment order
 - Atomic bomb statement
 - UN Charter
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Exit Ticket

1. Primary cause of U.S. entry?
 2. Most significant home front change?
 3. Most important global consequence?
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Teacher Content Notes

Clarify:

- Lend-Lease
- Rosie the Riveter
- Double V Campaign
- GI Bill
- Nuremberg Trials
- Cold War origins

Script:

“World War II ended one global conflict—but laid foundations for another.”

Differentiation

- Paraphrased speeches
 - Guided annotations
 - Vocabulary scaffolds
 - Oral debates
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Extension Activities

1. Compare WWI & WWII home fronts
 2. Study Holocaust liberation
 3. Analyze Cold War origins
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Portfolio Artifact

Students submit:

- Annotated speeches
- Internment hearing notes
- Atomic bomb debate reflection
- DBQ essay