Paths to Surrender

Weighing military results against human costs in the Pacific War

SS24.US2.7c "Evaluate the effectiveness of United States strategies in the war, including the decision to utilize atomic weapons on Japan."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details that show how U.S. strategies weakened Japan, circle two details about their costs, and number the events that make it hard to credit one strategy alone for Japan's surrender. Use your marks to weigh effectiveness against cost.

What Ended the War in the Pacific?

1. From 1943 to 1945, U.S. forces moved across the Pacific by taking selected islands rather than attacking every Japanese base. This strategy, often called island hopping, brought American airfields closer to Japan while leaving some enemy garrisons isolated. Capturing the Mariana Islands in 1944 put Japan's home islands within range of B-29 bombers. The advance came at a steep price: battles for islands such as Saipan and Iwo Jima killed thousands of U.S. troops and far more Japanese defenders. Island hopping improved military reach, but its losses made leaders fear the costs of invading Japan itself.

2. Another U.S. strategy attacked Japan's ability to keep fighting. American submarines sank merchant ships carrying fuel, food, and raw materials. By 1945, shortages had weakened Japan's economy and armed forces, but the blockade also threatened civilians who depended on imported supplies. U.S. bombers struck factories and cities; a March 1945 firebombing raid devastated Tokyo and killed tens of thousands of people. These attacks damaged production. Some Japanese leaders explored ways to end the war, yet the government did not surrender. Success at weakening an enemy, in other words, was not the same as ending the fighting.

3. On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The explosions killed tens of thousands immediately, and radiation and injuries caused more deaths later. President Truman's administration argued that using the bombs could end the war without a costly invasion. Critics have argued that the civilian toll was unacceptable and that other options, including continuing the blockade, deserved more time. The Soviet Union entered the war against Japan on August 8. Japan announced its surrender on August 15. Because several pressures converged, the bombs' exact share in causing surrender remains debated.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did island hopping advance U.S. military goals, and what detail limits a claim that it was an unqualified success?

2. Which seems more effective at weakening Japan's ability to fight, submarine attacks or bombing? Support your judgment with a detail about each strategy and identify a limit they shared.

3. Evaluate the decision to use atomic bombs by weighing the military aim stated in the passage against a civilian consequence.

4. How does the timing of Soviet entry affect a claim that the atomic bombs alone caused Japan's surrender?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 70- to 100-word museum caption arguing which U.S. Pacific strategy most effectively advanced Japan's surrender. Compare it with another strategy using at least two details from the passage, address civilian costs, and state one limit of what the evidence can prove.

ANSWER KEY

Paths to Surrender

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.7c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details that show how U.S. strategies weakened Japan, circle two details about their costs, and number the events that make it hard to credit one strategy alone for Japan's surrender. Use your marks to weigh effectiveness against cost. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did island hopping advance U.S. military goals, and what detail limits a claim that it was an unqualified success?	**It brought airfields closer to Japan, putting the home islands within B-29 range. Battles for islands also killed thousands of U.S. troops.**
2	Which seems more effective at weakening Japan's ability to fight, submarine attacks or bombing? Support your judgment with a detail about each strategy and identify a limit they shared.	**Either judgment is defensible. Submarines cut shipments of vital supplies, while bombing damaged production; neither strategy brought a surrender on its own.**
3	Evaluate the decision to use atomic bombs by weighing the military aim stated in the passage against a civilian consequence.	**The administration hoped to end the war without a costly invasion, but the bombs killed tens of thousands immediately and caused further deaths from injuries and radiation.**
4	How does the timing of Soviet entry affect a claim that the atomic bombs alone caused Japan's surrender?	**The Soviet Union entered the war between the two bombings, before Japan announced surrender. The passage therefore cannot isolate the bombs' effect from that additional pressure.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would rank submarine attacks as the most effective long-term pressure on Japan, although the evidence does not show that they ended the war alone. Submarines cut shipments of fuel, food, and raw materials, weakening both the economy and armed forces. Atomic bombs preceded Japan's surrender, but they killed tens of thousands immediately and caused further deaths afterward. A blockade also endangered civilians who relied on imports, so my ranking does not excuse its harm. Because Soviet entry occurred between the bombings and before surrender, the passage cannot isolate any one cause.

Accept different rankings when students support them with passage evidence and weigh civilian harm. Do not require students to attribute Japan's surrender to a single cause.