

DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF THE POST-WWII PARTITIONING OF KOREA

GRADES: High School

AUTHOR: Nancy Bader

SUBJECT: AP or Regular World History, Post WWII

TIME REQUIRED: One to two class periods

OBJECTIVES:

1. Investigate the process of partitioning Korea post-WWII and understand the complexity of the division.
2. Analyze motivations of the stakeholders involved in post-WWII occupation of North and South Korea and the challenges facing eventual reunification of Korea.
3. Understand current Korean politics by linking current issues to historical events.
4. Synthesize historical narration utilizing primary sources.
5. Develop critical thinking skills through analysis of primary documents.
6. Practice public speaking and discussion skills through fishbowl and class discussions.
7. Analyze diverse historical interpretations and point of view.
8. Practice analysis of change over time.

STANDARDS:

Common Core Standards

RH1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources

RH 2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source

RH3 Evaluate various explanations for actions or events

RH9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea, or event

SL 1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of group collaborative discussions with diverse partners on topics, texts, and issues

SL4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning

MATERIALS REQUIRED:

The following documents are available through two websites, the [Online Cold War International History project](#)

http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/va2/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=home.browse&sort=Collection&item=North%20Korea%20in%20the%20Cold%20War

and [The Korean War and its Origins 1945-1953](#)

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/koreanwar/index.php.

The documents listed below are quality scanned copies of the original documents which offer students the unique opportunity to almost feel like they are holding the original pieces of papers,

complete with their dog-eared corners, staples, and wrinkled folds. It is a great opportunity for students to feel like they are “living” the history as it unfolded. Still present are the scratched out “classified” markings and government officials’ pen and pencil markings. Teachers could either print off the documents and hand them out or have student utilize technology to read them online.

DOCUMENT 1 - Draft statement by President Harry S. Truman to the Korean people after the surrender of Japan in response to a memo from Dean Acheson, September 14, 1945.

This document from Truman describes the desire by the United States, China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union to help Korea build a free and independent nation.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-1-2.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 2 – US War Department Incoming Classified Message, September 18, 1945

This document assesses the complicated and difficult Korean situation, removal of Japanese officials, Russian activity, development of political parties, personnel, monetary matters, food-stuff, industry, demobilization, and the press.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-6-15.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 3 – War Department Incoming Classified Message, October 1, 1945

This document expresses General Hodge’s view that the Soviet Union is supporting efforts to spread communism and disband opposition and that without high level governmental negotiations on political and economic issues, consensus won’t be reached.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-6-14.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 4 – Central Intelligence Report on the situation in Korea - "The Situation in Korea," Office of Reports and Estimates 5/1, January 3, 1947

Pages 2 and 3 of this extensive document summarize the situation in Korea from the US government viewpoint with interesting comment on Korean aspirations and the US/USSR policies.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-8-4.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 5 - Telegram, Kim Koo to Harry S. Truman with Related Material, January 13, 1947

This document, by Kim Koo, a S. Korean popular nationalist, raised concerns about the problems that S. Koreans were facing because of the ideological differences and lack of coordination between the US and USSR.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-1-10.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 6 - "The Position of the United States With Respect to Korea," National Security Council Report 8, April 2, 1948

This report to the President by the National Security Council shows, in the first 4-5 pages, the US foreign objectives and goals in Korea as it relates to the actions of the Soviets.

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/korea/large/documents/pdfs/kr-7-1.pdf#zoom=100

DOCUMENT 7 – Notes of the conversation between Stalin and a governmental delegation from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea headed by Kim Il Sung, dated March 5, 1949.

Compelling discussion between Stalin and Kim Il Sung on what North Korea was requesting from the Soviet Union to strengthen their country.

http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/va2/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=home.document&identifier=5034C68A-96B6-175C-9D18332BAA62DEB6&sort=Collection&item=North%20Korea%20in%20the%20Cold%20War

BACKGROUND:

World history students study Korea throughout their semesters of study from ancient times through the Korean War and amazing modern economic development. However, it takes a back seat to China and Japan in terms of depth of content. Korea has its own unique history and is not merely a transmitter of culture for China to Japan. In terms of the Korean War, the partition of the country is generally given short shrift, as evidenced by this entry in *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, an AP world history text written by Bentley and Ziegler.

“At the end of World War II, the leaders of the Soviet Union and the United States had partitioned Korea along the thirty-eighth parallel of latitude into a northern Soviet zone and a southern U.S. zone. Because the superpowers were unable to agree on a framework for the reunification of the country, in 1948 they consented to the establishment of two separate Korean states: in the south, the Republic of Korea, with Seoul as its capital and the conservative anticommunist Syngman Rhee as its president; in the north, the People’s Democratic Republic of Korea, with Pyongyang as its capital and the revolutionary communist Kim Il Sung as its leader. After arming their respective clients, each of which claimed sovereignty over the entire country, U.S. and Soviet troops withdrew.”

The partition of Korea is much more complex than most textbooks present, and as Bruce Cumings emphasizes in his book, *Korea’s Place In The Sun*, “The crucible of the period of national division and opposing states that still exists in Korea was the years from 1943 to 1953.

Nothing about the politics of contemporary Korea can be understood without comprehending the events of this decade...Here was the breeding ground of the two Koreas, of a catastrophic war, and of a reordering of international politics in Northeast Asia.”

In a 1998 review essay, James I. Matray states that “in the final days of the war, the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to jointly accept the Japanese surrender in Korea, with the U.S.S.R. occupying Korea north of the 38th parallel and the U.S. occupying south until an independent and unified Korean government could be established. However, by 1947, the emerging Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union, combined with political differences between Koreans of the two occupation zones and the policies of the occupation forces on the ground, led to a breakdown in negotiations over a unified government of Korea.”

If we want our students to understand modern Korean, they must delve more deeply into the events surrounding that breakdown in negotiations in post-WWII Korea and into the affect it had on the Koreans living through that division. Using the primary documents mentioned above in a fishbowl type of classroom activity, students will better understand the depth and complexity of Korea’s partition and will practice critical thinking skills.

PROCEDURE:

1. Assign equal number of students to each of the 7 documents listed above. Hand out or provide links to the documents 3-4 days in advance. Instruct students to read and analyze the documents and identify the author, purpose, audience, position, and main points.
2. On the day of the discussion, write the following prompt on the board to focus the discussion of the documents: *PROMPT: Analyze the diverse interests, motivations, and the political and ideological divisions of the various stakeholders involved in the partitioning of Korea in 1945 that ultimately led to a breakdown in negotiations over a unified government for Korea. How did the situation change over time?*
Stakeholders can include US and Soviet Union political and military leaders, occupation soldiers, North and South Korean citizens, prisoners of war.
3. Depending on class size, structure a “fishbowl” discussion for one class period. Since there would generally be about 4-5 students reading each document, on the day of the fishbowl discussion set up the classroom with 5 desks in a circle in the center and the put the remaining desks in a larger circle around the center desks.
4. Conduct the fishbowl discussion. The general format for a fishbowl discussion includes students in the center discussing their assigned document while students sitting in the outside circle record notes from that discussion. Instruct students to be creating a list of stakeholder positions and reasoning as the various documents are discussed.
5. Rotate students into the center desks as their document is discussed.
6. When all documents are discussed, allow students to address each other clarifying the positions put forth by the documents.
7. When students are clear on the positions and facts put forth in the documents a group analytical discussion can be held for the remainder of the class period addressing the original prompt. The teacher can list their comments on the board. This discussion may have to be held during the next class period. If so, instruct students to formulate answers to the prompt prior to the next day’s class session.

EVALUATION:

Assign students a 3 paragraph reflection in which they summarize the previous day's discussion and address the following:

1. Analyze the point of view of each of the documents. In what way does the POV affect the understanding of the content in those documents?
2. Is there a document or voice missing from those presented in our discussion today? If so, what additional document could help you better answer the prompt regarding the motives involved in the partitioning of Korea post-WWII?
3. Why are most of the documents authored by US officials?

ENRICHMENT:

Follow up enrichment activities could include research on the current political status of North and South Korea, including the Korean War armistice as well as the current situation at the DMZ. Students could also research contemporary Korean attitudes toward eventual reunification.

RESOURCES:

Bentley, Jerry, and Ziegler, Herbert. *Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2003.

Cummings, Bruce. *Korea's Place In The Sun*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2005.

The Korean War and its Origins 1945-1953

http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/koreanwar/index.php

Korea's Partition: Soviet-American Pursuit of Reunification, 1945-1948

A review essay online, 1998: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/korpart.htm>

Online Cold War International History project

http://legacy.wilsoncenter.org/va2/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=home.browse&sort=Collection&item=North%20Korea%20in%20the%20Cold%20War