

The Korean War

LENGTH OF LESSON:

Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL:

9-12

SUBJECT AREA:

U.S. History

OBJECTIVES:

Students will understand the following:

1. Veterans of the Korean War deserve recognition for their service.
2. First-person accounts of the Korean War make the long-ago and almost forgotten war come alive.

MATERIALS:

For this lesson, you will need:

Access to the Internet

Art materials for students who choose to paint, draw, and so on rather than write their responses

PROCEDURE:

1. Inform or remind students that the Korean War was often called the Forgotten War. Go on to specify that it was not until 1995 that a national monument to Americans who served in the war was erected on the Mall in Washington, D.C. It is called the Korean War Veterans Memorial. Tell students that they will have the opportunity to interact with one or more veterans and then create in various media their own memorials to the dead.

2. Explaining that many of the veterans who survived the war are now in their seventies, posit that it is still possible for students to interview Korean War veterans but that the opportunity will soon fade—although students may be able to learn a lot by interviewing sons and daughters of veterans. Discuss with students whether you and they can locate one or more Korean War veterans in the local area to interview in person (in the classroom or off campus). Another option is for you and them to search for veterans who are available for interviews by phone, mail, or e-mail. An Internet site with veterans' stories and current addresses or means of contact for some of the vets can be found at koreanwar.org/html/units/frontline.

3. When you feel that students have acquired substantial facts and intellectual and emotional understanding of the issues surrounding the Korean War, prepare them for requesting and carrying out one or more interviews. The first step is discussing with students the basics of in-person interviewing, as follows:

- By phone, by mail, or in person request an interview, and set it up at a time that is convenient for the interviewee.
- Based on your research into available sources (printed or online), make up a list of questions to ask. Make a point of asking questions that require more than a yes or no response: the interviewer should get the interviewee to comment in detail.
- Arrive on time for the interview.
- Throughout, act patiently and politely. Do not argue with anything your interviewee says.
- Ask the interviewee if you can take notes or record the interview.
- Follow your prepared questions, but be willing to go off in other directions if something the interviewee says intrigues you. That is, listen carefully, and ask follow-up questions that occur to you on the spot.
- As soon as the interview is over, review your notes to see if they make sense. Then summarize them in writing. If you have further questions about what someone said, get back in touch quickly and politely.
- Make a phone call or send a note thanking the interviewee for his or her time and insights. Offer a copy of your finished report to the interviewee.

The preceding advice can be adjusted for carrying out interviews by phone, mail, or e-mail.

4. Brainstorm with students the kinds of questions appropriate to ask veterans of the Korean War. Questions might touch, for example, on the following topics:

- How the veteran got involved in the war
- What the veteran's job was
- If the veteran saw action
- How the experience of war compares to one's expectations of war
- Good memories and bad memories of the war
- With hindsight, what the veteran wishes he or she had done differently in the Korean War

5. Depending on whether (a) one or more vets will be coming to the school, (b) students will be going out to meet with vets, or (c) students will conduct interviews by phone, mail, or e-mail, determine how many students will pose the questions and the follow-up questions—all the students or a representative sample of students?—and how many will write up summaries of interviews. If not everyone has participated in the interviewing and summary writing, make sure that each student gets a chance to read the summaries and to ask the interviewers questions about the interview.

6. Remind students that conducting the interviews and reporting on them is only the first part of this project. Now students will have a chance to respond emotionally to what they've read, heard, and learned. Brainstorm with students the various ways in which they can share their feelings about the Korean War with one another. You may come up with the following options and others:

- Writing a poem, song, or short story
- Writing a letter to a descendant of a Korean War veteran
- Creating a picture in paint or another medium
- Generating an artwork
- Setting up a display
- Choreographing a dance

7. Set up one or more forums for students to share their products with other classes or other individuals or groups.

ADAPTATIONS:

Instead of sending students off to do field research, collect for them from the Internet letters and comments by veterans of the Korean War. Read these to students, or make them available for students to read themselves. Then proceed to have students prepare their creative responses to the facts they have learned and the personal accounts they have heard or read.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Compare and contrast the state of U.S. military forces during World War II and the Korean War.
2. Why did war break out in Korea in 1950? Who decided to divide Korea at the 38th parallel? In your opinion, what is the importance of the Korean peninsula's geographic location?
3. Consider MacArthur's leadership style and his actions in Korea. Debate whether or not he was a good leader.
4. Compare and contrast the Chinese and U.S. military forces in terms of their leaders, numbers of troops, equipment, winter supplies, tactics, training, and casualties.
5. Discuss the relationship between Truman and MacArthur. How did their views on the war in Korea differ? Debate whether or not Truman's decision to fire MacArthur was a good one.
6. Explain how the Korean War ended. What is the relationship between North and South Korea today? Describe the current relationship between the United States and these two countries.

EVALUATION:

Since students will be producing works in different media, discuss with the class what overall criteria you can apply to individual pieces (e.g., originality, effort, perseverance, revision) and whether you should rate each piece, according to those criteria, as pass/fail or as unacceptable/acceptable/good/excellent.