



THE NATIONAL
WWII MUSEUM
NEW ORLEANS

Where in the World War? Mapping the War in the Pacific

A Lesson from
the Education Department

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Where in the World War? Mapping the War in the Pacific

Americans who served in the Pacific fought a very different kind of war than those fighting in the European Theater. Whether in the jungles of New Guinea or on tiny atolls in the central Pacific, they confronted environments and cultures with fewer reference points. For Americans at home, following news of the war in the Pacific meant learning the geography and place names across that vast ocean.

OBJECTIVE: As an introduction to WWII in the Pacific, students will use classroom reference materials to learn the basic geography of that theater of war.

GRADE LEVEL: 7-12

STANDARDS: History Thinking Standard 2—the student comprehends a variety of historical sources and can draw upon historical maps in order to obtain or clarify information on the geographic setting in which the historical event occurred.

Content Era 8 (1929-1945), Standard 3B—the student understands WWII and how the Allies prevailed.

TIME REQUIREMENT: One class period.

DIRECTIONS:

1. Present a short, introductory lesson on the history of WWII in the Pacific.
2. Distribute maps, globes, atlases, (or put up a map on an interactive white board) and the Places in the Pacific activity sheet. Complete the Places in the Pacific activity sheet as a class or in small groups.
3. Pass out the Brief History of WWII in the Pacific worksheet and map. Have students complete this using the materials they used for the class activity. Again, this may be done as a class, in small groups, or individually.
4. Have a class discussion that focuses on the geography of the Pacific, the impact this geography might have had on the course of the war (and its impact on the soldiers), and what students learned from the activities.

ASSESSMENT: Components for assessment include the completed student worksheets and class discussion.

ENRICHMENT: Have students research and create a map of a specific island in the Pacific where fighting occurred, such as Iwo Jima, Saipan, Guadalcanal, the Philippines, or Oahu. Display these maps on the wall.

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Places in the Pacific Activity Sheet

Sixty years ago, a generation of young Americans left their homes to fight a world war. That war was waged in two distant and very different places. In Europe, Americans faced hardship and danger. But they did so amid people and places that—while foreign—had important connections with their lives back in America. Terrain, weather, place names and, sometimes, ethnic ties were familiar links that provided some measure of comfort against the hardships of war.

Americans who fought the Japanese in the Pacific fought a very different kind of war. Whether in the jungles of New Guinea or on tiny atolls in the central Pacific, they confronted environments and cultures with fewer reference points. Their war involved vast distances, isolation, and harsh, unfamiliar surroundings that placed special burdens on them.

Over two million young Americans went to war in the Pacific. They served in places as remote and far-flung as the Philippines, the Solomon Islands and Okinawa. Many struggled and died in places their families had never heard of. They waged a bloody war against a determined enemy.

Consider this: when the Japanese attacked the U.S. Pacific Fleet on December 7, 1941, most Americans had never heard of Pearl Harbor and did not even know where it was.

Directions: Using maps, globes (or a map on an interactive white board), locate these places. You may complete this activity as a class or in small groups.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Japan | 11. Guam |
| 2. Tokyo | 12. New Guinea |
| 3. China | 13. Philippines |
| 4. Manchuria | 14. Singapore |
| 5. Pearl Harbor | 15. Hong Kong |
| 6. Guadalcanal (Solomon Islands) | 16. Aleutian Islands |
| 7. Midway Island | 17. Iwo Jima |
| 8. Gilbert Islands | 18. Okinawa |
| 9. Marshall Islands | 19. Hiroshima |
| 10. Mariana Islands | 20. Nagasaki |

A Brief History of WWII in the Pacific

Student Worksheet

Directions: This activity will help you with learning the geography of WWII in the Pacific. Place the letter from the accompanying map next to each location in the blanks following its description.

In 1931, the Empire of Japan (___) invades Manchuria (___) in order to increase its natural resources. This begins a push by Japan into mainland Asia that continues throughout the 1930's. A decade later, Japan has been slowly pressing into China (___) and is prepared to make a major assault in the Pacific Theater. In order to prevent the U.S. from interfering with their plans, they stage a sneak attack at Pearl Harbor (___) on December 7th, 1941. Much of the United States fleet is destroyed. The Japanese are prepared to move quickly.

On December 8th, 1941, the Japanese attack the American forces in the Philippine Islands (___), the British holdings of Hong Kong (___) and Singapore, on the Malayan peninsula (___). The Japanese are conquering new territory rapidly while the Americans recover. Japan continues to conquer territory throughout the Pacific towards Australia (___). By May of 1942, the Japanese have reached the Coral Sea (___), where American ships are waiting for them. The battle is technically a draw, but it marks the first setback in Japan's offensive.

In June of 1942, the Japanese send a large fleet to the island of Midway (___). American planes have been using this island to refuel on the long trips from California to the South Pacific. If the Japanese can take the island, they will stop these flights entirely. At the Battle of Midway, the U.S. Navy sinks four Japanese aircraft carriers, scoring a clear victory and turning the tide of the war in the Pacific. The Japanese begin losing ground.

In order to defeat Japan, American forces will have to wage a long campaign of island-hopping, slowly taking back islands the Japanese have conquered. On August 7, 1942, the 1st Marine Division lands on Guadalcanal (___). It will take nearly three years and many hard-fought battles for islands large and small to get U.S. forces within striking distance of Japan.

In February of 1945, 30,000 U.S. Marines land in one day on the tiny island of Iwo Jima (___). After 36 days of combat, the U.S. controls an airstrip within range of Japan itself. The battle costs nearly 7,000 U.S. lives and most of the 22,000-man Japanese garrison. Now, bombardment of Japanese factories and military bases can begin. Japan has lost almost all of its conquered territory. In April of 1945, more than 180,000 Americans land on the island of Okinawa (___) and face a Japanese army half their size. The Japanese fight to the end, losing over 110,000 soldiers.

American bombing raids have heavily damaged the home island of Japan, but Japan is unwilling to surrender and prepares to fight to the very end. In order to deal a major blow to the nation of Japan itself and force the Emperor to surrender, President Harry S. Truman authorizes the use of the atomic bomb. On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima (___). On August 14, Japan surrenders.

