

Inquire & Investigate



USING THE ATOMIC BOMB

President Truman's use of nuclear weapons has always generated controversy. There was little public debate at the time, however.

From a military standpoint, some historians argue that nuclear weapons brought the fighting to an early end and reduced further American casualties. Others claim that Japan was already so weakened by the war that conventional weapons would have brought hostilities to an end just as quickly.

People also question whether the use of nuclear weapons was morally justifiable. Conventional bombs killed millions of people during the war, but it was only the radiation fallout from nuclear weapons that continued to harm people for decades after the war ended.

THE NUCLEAR DEBATE

Do you think President Truman's decision to use nuclear weapons was justifiable, either militarily or morally?

- **Stage a debate among your classmates or friends in which you argue for or against Truman's decision.** Conduct your research online and at the library. Come up with three to five points in support of your position.
- **Consider these questions in your research.**
 - Is there evidence that Japan was ready to surrender before the bombs were dropped?
 - Did Japan's conduct during the war justify extreme measures?
 - Is there evidence that nuclear weapons were no more destructive than firebombing?
 - Is there a "right" or "wrong" way to kill civilians during a war?
 - How did the scientists who developed the atomic bomb feel about what they created?
- **Did your original opinion change after you listened to both sides of the debate?** Why or why not?

To investigate more, read newspapers and news magazines for stories about nuclear weapons today. Which countries have them? Are efforts being made to reduce their numbers? Is there a danger that nuclear weapons might be used again?