

LEARN ABOUT NUCLEAR WEAPONS

Teaching About the Bomb — Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Education, interactive pedagogy, and a few tricks to make learning about mass annihilation fun

Teacher Tools

For a range of activities: blackboard or large piece of paper for brainstorming, space to move around, respect for students' opinions.

Aim

- To explore the content, style and participatory nature of disarmament and non-proliferation education
- To provide several examples that the educator can use when discussing nuclear weapons and other controversial issues in the classroom
- To create a safe opportunity for discussion of feelings about the nuclear threat
- To take action for disarmament and building a peaceful world

Motivation

In accordance with the recommendations of the United Nations Study on Disarmament and Non Proliferation Education, students should be encouraged to think critically. Through interactive learning, participatory exercises and group discussion, students come to understand better current nuclear dangers and the context of proliferation — the *real* world in which they live.

DIRECTIONS

Step One: establish a safe environment in your classroom

Begin by establishing 'classroom ethics' so that students can feel safe to speak about their feelings and opinions. Have students brainstorm a list of classroom ethics by asking them: What are some things that we each need to feel a part of the classroom community? Write their ideas on the board. Examples include:

- Respect each other.
- Only one person speaks at a time.
- Listen to each other.
- Everyone has a right to their own opinion.

Once a list is drawn up, review it together with the students, and have them agree to these guidelines for the duration of the class period in order to build a respectful environment.

Step Two: sound experiment

Use the sound experiment to introduce the class to the topic and create a sense of that something must be done.

Step Three: create a web on nuclear weapons

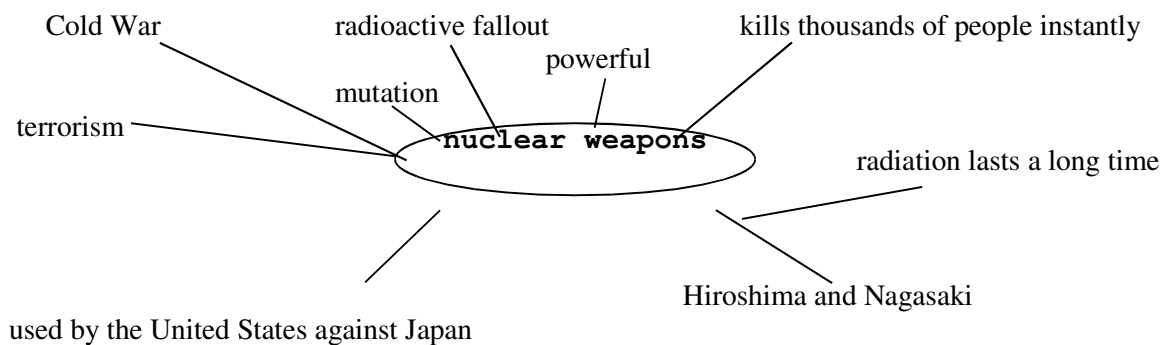
It always good to figure out what your students *already* know. Many educators are surprised by the level of knowledge students have about nuclear issues. Even if they are not discussed in the classroom, students hear the news and often pick up quite detailed information about current nuclear dangers.

Write 'Nuclear Weapons' on the board and circle it. Ask the students to say ANYTHING they think of when they hear the words: nuclear weapons. Draw a line from the circle to connect each idea to the central theme (see "example web" below). Write down everything students report, to affirm their knowledge. This will help the class to outline basic information about nuclear weapons, and can also serve to correct any false assumptions.

Some questions teachers can ask to stimulate students' ideas include:

- Which countries have nuclear weapons?
- What do nuclear weapons do?
- What makes nuclear weapons different than other weapons?
- What is radiation?

Here is an example of a web on nuclear weapons:



To finish up the web brainstorm, educators can encourage students to summarize the discussion. Ask for a few volunteers to come up and make connections between different strands of the web. For example, points from the above web could be summed up as “Thousands of people were killed instantly in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The atomic bombs used by the United States against Japan destroyed entire cities. The radioactive fallout was powerful and caused symptoms never before experienced, like people getting cancer and their children being born with genetic mutations. So people who were not even born were affected by the atomic bombs, because radiation lasts a really long time....” Students’ summaries are useful to reiterate their collective knowledge and provide a segue to the main activity.

Step Four: choose an exercise from the interactive pedagogical toolkit

Any one or collection of the following exercises are great tools for the classroom. Some of the activities are more weighted on an intellectual response, others tend toward the emotional, but both share these head-heart components. Educators should use which ever exercise draws them in, because enthusiasm for an activity is contagious.