

Truman and MacArthur Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

How did Americans respond to President Truman's decision to fire General MacArthur?

Materials:

- Korean War Map (PPT from Korean War Lesson Plan)
- Copies of Truman and MacArthur Documents A–C
- Copies of Truman and MacArthur Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction: Project map of Korean War and lecture on General MacArthur in the Korean War:
 - *General MacArthur led the UN forces in Korea. At first, he had major success and pushed North Korean troops north past the 38th parallel.*
 - *In response to UN troops crossing the 38th parallel, China sent troops to help the North Koreans. With Chinese help, the North Koreans pushed the UN troops back south.*
 - *For a long time, the war remained a stalemate at the 38th parallel.*
 - *Tensions mounted between President Truman and General MacArthur: MacArthur wanted to push past the 38th parallel and even invade mainland China. Truman wanted to use diplomacy and avoid a major war with China.*
 - *MacArthur tried to go over Truman's head by using the media to get public support, and Truman fired him for insubordination on April 11, 1951.*

The central historical question for today is: *How did Americans respond to President Truman's decision to fire General MacArthur?*

2. Warm-up discussion:

- How do you predict the public will respond to Truman's decision to fire MacArthur?
- Is it a big deal to fire a General? Why or why not?
- Based on what you know about the Cold War and the 1950s, do you think the public sided with Truman (who wanted diplomacy) or with MacArthur (who wanted to invade mainland China)? Why?

3. Hand out Document A. Discuss as a class:

- What does this say about how the American public felt about Truman's decision to fire MacArthur?
 - Did more people support or oppose Truman? How did this change over time?
4. Hand out Documents B and C and Graphic Organizer. Have students complete the Graphic Organizer in groups.
5. Debrief:
- How did people feel about Truman's decision?
 - What were some of the reasons that people gave for supporting or not supporting Truman?
 - What does this say about how people felt during the early years of the Cold War?
6. Wrap-up:
- The Korean War ended in 1953 as a stalemate, with the country still split at the 38th parallel.
 - Truman's decision to fight a limited war (and not invade China, as General MacArthur wanted to do) cost him popularity at home.
 - The "loss" of China to Communism and the stalemate in the Korean War led many Americans to become increasingly paranoid about the spread of Communism.

Citations:

Memorandum from the President, April 8, 1951.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur/sfeature/misc06.html>

AMVETS, Letter to President Truman, April 11, 1951.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur/filmmore/reference/primary/letters01.html>

Elizabeth Wood, Letter to President Truman, April 12, 1951.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur/sfeature/letters06.html>

Document A

May 8, 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following is a tabulation of the correspondence – including telegrams, letters, cards, etc. – relative to your action in relieving (firing) General MacArthur of his commands [on April 11, 1951]:

Week ending April 13th		
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Telegrams	PRO	CON
Letters, cards, etc.	4,322	8,677

Week ending April 20th		
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Telegrams	PRO	CON
Letters, cards, etc.	14,501	18,873

Week ending April 27th		
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Telegrams	PRO	CON
Letters, cards, etc.	10,448	10,617

Week ending May 4th		
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Telegrams	PRO	CON
Letters, cards etc.	7,524	7,912

Present week through noon May 7th		
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Telegrams	PRO	CON
Letters, cards etc.	913	310

Total Correspondence received:	84,097
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Document B

April 11, 1951

The Honorable Harry S. Truman
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Dear Mr. President:

AMVETS (American Veterans) support your painful decision to relieve General Douglas MacArthur of his command on obvious grounds of repeated insubordination in violation of basic American principles governing civil versus military authority.

AMVETS recognize, and believe the overwhelming majority of Americans recognize, that the issue here is not whether General MacArthur is right or wrong or whether administration policies are right or wrong. The issue clearly and simply is whether the ultimate civil authority of the United States can tolerate, no matter what the motives, actions in contempt of constitutional lines of authority. Any lessening of civil power over military power must inevitably lead away from democracy.

AMVETS are keenly aware of General MacArthur's greatness and his immense contributions to his country as a military leader. But constitutional principles are greater than any one individual.

We know your decision demanded coverage because of the many emotional factors involved. We believe you had no other choice.

We hope, however, that you will speedily re-enunciate (re-state) and re-affirm our overall and long-range policies in the Far East to help unify America and to stabilize political opinion throughout the world. We pledge you our continued support as Commander in Chief in the prosecution of the Korean war while praying for the success of your efforts to achieve peace.

Sincerely yours,

Harold Russell
National Commander

Document C

P. O. Box 6615 AH
220 Allen Street
San Antonio, Texas

April 12, 1951

The Hon. Harry S. Truman
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

Our far-eastern policy must protect either the rights of free nations or Communists interests. Without regard to the preferences of most Americans, you have chosen to support the latter.

You have thrown into the trash-pile all that has been accomplished in Japan in the last five years.

You have sold us out and the Kremlin (Soviet government) should give you a 21-gun salute. They probably will – aimed right at our bewildered forces in Korea.

If the letter of a single person will persuade my senators or my representative in Congress to support a motion for your impeachment, that letter is in the mail.

Your dismissal of Douglas MacArthur confirms your devotion to Communist Russia. You have kicked out, with insults, the most brilliant, courageous and successful man representing our country abroad.

You have fired a man whose first and whole devotion has been to the best interest of our country. (He didn't think about the Democratic vote in Missouri.) He has done a top job, but he couldn't be red-taped. So he got fired, and the hell with U.S.A. Harry is top-boy, and he has to prove it. Why stop with Formosa? Let's give them Japan, and Hawaii, and Alaska - and why not the Panama Canal?

Yours sincerely,
(and don't bother with the form
letter reply)

Elizabeth Wood

Name _____

Truman and MacArthur Graphic Organizer

	Source: Who wrote this? When was this written (a long time or short time after Truman fired MacArthur)?	Does this person support President Truman's decision to fire General MacArthur?	What are TWO reasons this person gives for either supporting or not supporting President Truman?
Document B			
Document C			

In the space below, write one paragraph explaining what these two letters tell you about the *historical context* of the early 1950s in the United States.