

# Pearl Harbor Lesson Plan

## Background

In 1939, World War II had begun, but America was not involved in the war. In June of 1940, President Roosevelt had the U.S. Pacific Fleet transferred from its main base in San Diego, California, to Pearl Harbor in Oahu, a Hawaiian island.

This was done in response to Japan's attacks on China. Japan wanted to take over the Southeast Asian countries, and the United States didn't agree. In Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet could monitor Japan's war activity in the Pacific Ocean. On Saturday, December 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made a final appeal to the Emperor of Japan for peace but received no response. Later that day, the U.S. code-breaking service deciphered 13 parts of a 14-part Japanese message which led the U.S. to believe an impending attack was coming.

## The Attack

The assault was extremely strategic, and Japan took advantage of the element of surprise.

- At 6:00 am Hawaii time on Sunday morning on December 7, 1941, a fleet of Japanese aircraft take off from carriers 230 miles away from Oahu.
- At 7:02 am, two army operators at Oahu's north shore detect and report a Japanese air attack. The junior officer who received the information dismissed the report, believing they were American B-17 planes.
- At 7:55 am, a Japanese flight commander called out the battle cry 'Tora, Tora, Tora!' (which stands for 'Tiger, Tiger, Tiger!') and launched a surprise attack on the U.S. naval base of Pearl Harbor.
- At 8:10 a Japanese bomber drops an armor-piercing bomb that releases a million pounds of gunpowder on the battleship *Arizona*. 1,177 men died. At this time, the two countries were not officially at war, and the U.S. was unprepared for the attack. As a result, there was a tremendous amount of damage and loss of life.

The Japanese designed the assault to occur in two waves; in the first wave, they launched 183 planes, and in the second wave, 167 planes were launched. Aircraft dropped bombs and fired bullets. A fleet of submarines also dropped torpedoes which caused further damage. By 10:00 am, the battle is over.

Due to a variety of delays, the final part of the Japanese message, stating diplomatic relations with the U.S. will be cut off, does not reach Oahu until noon. It was originally timed by the Japanese to arrive at the time of the attack.

## Damage

The damage from the battle was devastating. A tremendous number were killed or injured, and there was extensive destruction to the military's ships and planes.

- The death total from the attack was 2,403, including 68 civilians.
- 1,178 were injured, including 35 civilians.

- Out of the 394 planes in nearby airfields, 188 were destroyed and 159 damaged.
- Out of the U.S. Navy's 96 ships located at Pearl Harbor, 21 were sunk, and many more were damaged.

## Significance

As a result of the surprise assault on Pearl Harbor, on Dec. 8, 1941, U.S. President Roosevelt addressed congress in a compelling speech that proposed declaring a state of war with Japan due to the attack. In the speech he refers to the date of the Pearl Harbor battle as 'a date which will live in infamy,' and the speech is therefore known as the Day of Infamy Speech or Infamy Speech. Congress approved the declaration of war on Japan, and on that day, the U.S. entered into World War II.

## Discussion

After teaching key points about the battle, you can ask your student questions about Pearl Harbor. She can write down the responses, or just answer verbally, so you can evaluate how well your student picked up the material. Sample questions may include:

1. What was the reason Japan decided to attack the U.S. at Pearl Harbor?
2. Where is Pearl Harbor located?
3. On what date did the battle occur?
4. What was the approximate damage to planes and ships?
5. What is the approximate number of casualties?
6. Who was the President at the time?
7. What was his response to the attack?
8. What does he call the tragic day Pearl Harbor occurred in his speech to Congress?

## Activities

After discussing Pearl Harbor and its significance, parents can use one or more activities to help children understand more about this historic event.

### Create a Timeline

Using markers and a small poster board or card stock, have students create a timeline of the day's events. Parents and children can discuss the significance of each event and how it related to the overall disaster. This activity is good for upper elementary and middle school students. Parents can expand the activity for high school learners to find and include additional events that occurred in the days before and after as well.

### Listen to the President's Day of Infamy Speech

National Geographic offers an audio resource of [President Roosevelt's Day of Infamy Speech](#). You can have your child listen to the audio, and then discuss together the impact of the speech, why the President himself didn't declare war, why House of Representatives member Jeannette

Rankin might have opposed it, and how the people were feeling at the time. This activity works well for middle and high school ages.

## Look at Location

Look at the location where the battle happened using an interactive map, such as:

- [National Geographic's Attack Map](#) - This map shows the various points at which Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. There is a timeline at the bottom of the map that students can click, and the map will then zoom in on that specific spot. When you zoom in on a spot, the site will give you the story, combined with authentic audio, of what happened there.
- [Houghton Mifflin's Interactive Pearl Harbor Map](#) - The map also has a timeline of the events of Pearl Harbor on the bottom. Students click on the timeline and the map animates the events. In addition, there is a sidebar of text helps where students can click on highlighted people, events and places.
- [Combat Maps from the War Times Journal](#) - These maps animate the flight approach the Japanese took for their attack on Pearl Harbor.

These maps help combine the events of the day with specific locations of where things occurred, such as where the *Arizona* was located when it was bombed. These make great visual tools and are good for middle and high school youth. For younger students, parents can also work with a globe or world map to locate a few key areas, such as Pearl Harbor in relationship to Japan.

## Write a Fictional Journal Entry

Have students listen to a [radio broadcast](#) of the attack or [audio clips from individuals](#) the day after Pearl Harbor. Then have your child write a fictional journal entry about what he or she might have been doing when the strike occurred and how he or she might feel the day after the disaster. This can be adapted for various age levels - upper elementary students can do this in a simple paragraph, while middle and high schoolers can make it more of an extended essay and incorporate other facts from the history of the time period that they may have learned.

## A Part of History

Although devastating, Pearl Harbor is an important event to learn about. For more resources about this day, visit:

- [Pearl Harbor at a Glance](#) from the National World War II Museum website
- [Pearl Harbor Information](#) from History.com
- [Pearl Harbor Entry](#) from Encyclopedia Britannica

Parents can help their students understand this historic event, and its incredible impact, by teaching key facts, having discussions, and doing activities together that bring this historical event to life.