Skill Worksheet

Compare Viewpoints

Comparing viewpoints can help you understand events and issues and form your own views. To compare viewpoints, you need to identify the authors, examine the viewpoints, determine each author's frame of reference, recognize facts and opinions, and evaluate each viewpoint's validity.

The following excerpts contain two viewpoints on the U.S. use of atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II. One excerpt is from President Harry Truman, who made the decision to drop the bomb. Truman was aware that after four years of war the American people wanted victory as quickly as possible.

The other excerpt is from Admiral William Leahy, who served as Truman's personal chief of staff. After WW II, Admiral Leahy was one of several key military figures who said they had opposed using atomic bombs on Japan. Leahy felt that Japan was near to surrendering.

Read the two excerpts. Then answer the questions that follow.

Having found the bomb we have used it. We used it against those who attacked us without warning at Pearl Harbor, against those who have starved and beaten and executed American prisoners of war, against those who have abandoned all pretext of obeying international laws of warfare. We have used it in order to shorten the agony of war, in order to save the lives of thousands and thousands of young Americans. —President Harry Truman	The lethal possibilities of atomic warfare in the future are frightening. My own feeling was that in being the first to use it, we had adopted an ethical standard common to the barbarians of the Dark Ages. I was not taught to make war in that fashion, and wars cannot be won by destroying women and children. —Admiral William D. Leahy

Questions

1. What were the arguments President Truman offered *for* using the atomic bomb?

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2. What were the arguments that Admiral Leahy gave *against* using the atomic bomb?

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3. How might each man's frame of reference have affected his viewpoint?

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4. Do you think both views were based on facts or reasonable arguments? Explain.

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