

## Potsdam Revisited: Overture to the Cold War Education Guide

Possible questions for discussion after watching Professor Norman Naimark, Scott Sagan, George Schultz, and Stuart Canin's [panel discussion](#) about the Potsdam Conference, and the video [The Rifleman's Violin](#) about Stuart Canin's WWII experiences.

**Intro Questions:** These questions draw on the response Stuart gave when asked why he was bringing his violin: "Because you never know." These questions can be used to draw students into the story and to relate to history on a personal level.

- Have you ever been invited to an event but had no idea what to expect when you arrived? Maybe you felt underprepared, or that you wouldn't be able to keep up or fit in. Were you surprised by outcome? Tell a story illustrating what happened.
- While packing for a trip, have you ever worried about what to bring? Think of an example of a personal possession that wasn't necessary for your trip but that you brought anyway. How did this personal item add or detract from your experience?
- What music has helped you through an odd or difficult situation? What did the music do for you? How did it help you feel better or more comforted?

**Through Questions:** These questions focus on the content of the Potsdam Conference and the significance of this historic event.

- What were the goals of the Potsdam Conference, and were those goals achieved?
- For the goals that were not achieved, why weren't they?
- How might the success of the Trinity test and the development of the first atomic bomb have affected the outcomes of the Potsdam Conference?
- Compare the experiences and points of view of the leaders of nations to the experiences of the men with their boots on the ground engaged in the fighting.
- In your opinion, what were the most significant outcomes of the Potsdam Conference?

**Beyond the topic of Potsdam:** The aim of these questions is for students to use the information learned and discussed in previous questions to think about our world today and in the future. They may need to do further research to answer these questions fully and make the final connections to the Potsdam Conference.

- What exactly were George Shultz's arguments supporting his view that the Potsdam Conference was a success?
- According to Scott Sagan, the United States did not follow through on our initial demand of unconditional surrender in Japan. Why did the United States negotiate with Japan?
- The United States had three targets already chosen in Japan. Why did we only destroy two of the chosen targets?
- What are some current examples of diplomacy on the global stage breaking down, leading to imperialism, violence, and possibly even war?
- What is the function of international peacekeeping organizations that grew out of this post-WWII period? What are some examples of successes and failures?
- What is the role of the United Nations in our world, and how well does it function?
- Can you conceive of an organization better than the United Nations to help prevent future conflicts? What would this organization do, and how would it keep the peace?