

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Class \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Critical Thinking Worksheet 31

Skill: Making Decisions

Topic: Memoirs of Harry Truman — The Atomic Bomb

In 1945, the new President of the United States, Harry Truman, had to make one of the most difficult decisions anyone has ever had to face — whether or not to use the newly developed atomic bomb. While making his decision, President Truman progressed through the specific steps of a decision-making process. A historian might read the following excerpt from Truman's memoirs to reconstruct the decision-making process Truman utilized and to discover why the President made his decision.

The task of creating the atomic bomb had been entrusted to a special unit of the Army Corps of Engineers. . . . My own knowledge of these developments had come about only after I became President. . . . [T]he project was nearing completion and . . . a bomb could be expected within another four months. . . . [I] set up a committee . . . to study with great care the implications the new weapon might have for us. . . .

It was their recommendation that the bomb be used against the enemy as soon as it could be done. They recommended further that it should be used without warning and against a target that would clearly show its devastating strength. I had realized, of course, that an atomic bomb explosion would inflict damage and casualties beyond imagination. . . . [T]he committee reported . . . that no technical demonstration they might propose, such as over a deserted island, would be likely to bring the war to an end. It had to be used against an enemy target.

The final decision of where and when to use the atomic bomb was up to me. Let there be no mistake about it. I regarded the bomb as a military weapon and never had any doubt that it should be used. The top military advisers to the President recommended its use, and when I talked to Churchill he unhesitatingly told me that he favored the use of the atomic bomb if it might aid to end the war.

In deciding to use this bomb I wanted to make sure that it would be used as a weapon of war in the manner prescribed by the laws of war. That meant that I wanted it dropped on a military target. . . .

On August 6, . . . came the historic news that shook the world. . . .

. . . I could not keep back my expectation that the Pacific war might now be brought to a speedy end.

Source: Harry S. Truman, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, *Year of Decisions* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1955)

Answer each question to reconstruct the decision-making process that Truman followed.

1. What decision did Truman have to face shortly after he became President? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How did Truman gather information about the issue? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. What were the President's alternatives? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What were the possible consequences of two alternatives you listed above? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. What course of action did Truman choose and why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_