TEACH DEMOCRACY

Why Did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution?

Civil Conversation Lesson Plan

Materials

- Handout A: High School Text
- Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide
- Teacher Presentation

Standards and Topics

- CCSS.SL.6-12.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively
- CCSS.R.6-12.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- C3.D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.
- CA HSS.10.9 Students analyze the international developments in the post–World War II world.

Topics: Chinese Revolution, People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong, Chiang Kai-shek, world history

Overview

In this Civil Conversation, students discuss the reasons for the Communist victory in the Chinese Revolution. First, they examine a text that offers multiple perspectives on the factors that led to the outcome. Next, they participate in a Civil Conversation on the text. In this structured discussion method, students are encouraged to engage intellectually with challenging materials, gain insight about their own point of view, and strive for a shared understanding of issues.

Objectives

1. Evaluate reasons for the Communist victory in the Chinese Revolution
2. Participate effectively in a civil discussion by expressing clear and persuasive arguments, while building on others' ideas
3. Consider other perspectives with a sense of empathy

Procedure

I. Focus Discussion

A. Ask students, "What words or phrases come to mind when you hear the following term? Revolution." Then, direct students to discuss the following questions:

1. Why might people choose to participate in a revolution?
2. Can you think of examples from history or the present day?

You may ask students to record their rationales and then share with partners or the whole class.

B. Inform students that the Chinese Revolution was a long and complex conflict that resulted in the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Their task today is to consider various reasons for the Communist victory in the Chinese Revolution by examining multiple perspectives.

II. Reading: Why did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution?

A. Briefly provide students with an overview of the purpose and rationale of the Civil Conversation activity. Use the overview above to help you.

B. Give each student a copy of **Handout A: Why did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution?**

C. Distribute a copy of **Handout B: Civil Conversation Guide** to each student to complete as they read. Each student should fill in their own guide.

III. Civil Conversation

A. Divide the class into groups of 3–4 students. You may want to have each group select a leader who will get the discussion started, ensure the group stays on-task, and finishes on time.

B. Determine how much time the groups have to complete the discussion. (You will know what's best for your students, depending on the length of the reading and how experienced your students are in student-directed discussion.)

- **Time:** Conversations for classroom purposes should have a time limit, generally ranging from 15 to 45 minutes and an additional five minutes to reflect on the effectiveness of the conversations. The reflection time is an opportunity to ask any students who have not spoken to comment on the things they have heard. Ask them who said something that gave them a new insight that they agreed or disagreed with.
- **Small Groups:** This discussion strategy is designed to ensure the participation of every student. Groups of 3-4 students are ideal. If you are scaffolding text for various reading levels, group students who will use the same text together.

C. Review the rules of a Civil Conversation (listed under Step 3 on the Guide) and direct the groups to follow the instructions on the guide to get started.

D. Let groups know you will be circulating to listen in on their conversations and that each person in a group is expected to participate. The goal is for everyone to contribute equally to the conversation.

E. If necessary, remind groups of the time and urge them to move to the next steps.

IV. Assessment / Closure

A. After the groups have completed their discussions, debrief the activity by having the class reflect on the effectiveness of the conversation:

- What did you learn from the Civil Conversation?
- What common ground did you find with other members of the group?
- Ask all participants to suggest ways in which the conversation could be improved. If appropriate, have students add the suggestions to their list of conversation rules.

B. If you want to also debrief the content of the Civil Conversation, you might ask students:

- Was there any surprising information you learned from the reading? What was it?
- In what ways were Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong similar? Different?
- Why did the Communists win the Chinese Revolution?

C. For assessment, look for the following on each student's Civil Conversation Guide:

Step 2 – A, B: Basic understanding of text.

Step 2 – C, D: Text-based arguments.

Step 2 – E: Appropriate and compelling questions about the text.

Step 4 – A: Level of participation (should be "about the same as others").

Step 4 – B: Answer is appropriately related to topic/issue presented in text.

Step 4 – C, D: Specificity/text-based.

D. For additional assessment, you may want to collect the article/text students used to assess the annotations they made in terms of connections to prior knowledge/experience, questions they had while reading, and comments they made.

WHY DID THE COMMUNISTS WIN THE CHINESE REVOLUTION?

From 1911 to 1945, China experienced a **revolution**, a struggle against warlords, a civil war between the Nationalists led by Chiang Kai-Shek and the Communists led by Mao Zedong, and an invasion by the Japanese. After the Japanese defeat in World War II in 1945, a full-blown civil war erupted again in 1946. The Nationalists were backed by the United States, and the Communists had support from the Soviet Union. By 1949, Chiang and the Nationalists, despite having more soldiers than the Communists, were defeated and forced to evacuate the Chinese mainland for the island of Taiwan.

Historians point to a number of factors for the Chinese defeat.

Chiang's Kuomintang government was filled with incompetent and **corrupt** officials. The people especially hated the tax collectors, who were commonly called "blood-sucking devils." Chiang himself held dictatorial powers, but his orders were often ignored. He had little success in rallying Chinese nationalism to win an unpopular war against the Communists.

Chiang's decision to go to war against the Communists in 1946 came at the cost of postponing the economic **reconstruction** of China. This meant diverting tax revenues, investment, and other resources to the war effort rather than to the needs of the people. Heavy taxes, a huge government debt, inflation, unemployment, and food shortages caused many, especially in the cities, to lose faith in the Nationalist government.

Economic discontent in the cities led to thousands of labor strikes. Students, newspaper editors, and intellectuals protested against Chiang's Nationalist government. They demanded an end to the civil war and the creation of a government that included the Communists. The Nationalists responded with censorship, beatings, mass arrests, and even assassinations. This repression drove many to the Communist cause.

The Nationalist government seemed to care only for city business interests and **rural** landlords while ignoring the suffering of the peasants. In Communist areas captured by the Nationalists during the early part of the civil war, corrupt government administrators helped landlords take back lands that the Communists had handed over to the peasants. The government often punished peasants for participating in Mao's land distribution programs.

Chiang's army had more soldiers than Mao's, but it was poorly led. Chiang's military was not coordinated by a central command. Generals tended to head independent armies and even competed with one another for food and ammunition. Many officers were corrupt, sometimes selling for personal profit

revolution a sudden change in government or society, often through force

corrupt dishonest or unfair

reconstruction the process of rebuilding or fixing something that was damaged

rural related to the countryside, where there are fewer people

the rice intended for their troops. Chiang's military supply system was inadequate, unreliable, and crippled by corruption.

More importantly, few volunteered to join Chiang's armies. Most soldiers were **drafted** against their will or even kidnapped by army "recruiting squads." Soldiers were poorly trained, clothed, and fed. Officers enforced discipline by beating them. Some were roped together on marches to prevent them from deserting.

Communist **propaganda** took full advantage of all the Nationalist failings. Mao focused on winning over the peasants to gain their support in the civil war. "The battle for China," he said, "is a battle for the hearts and minds of the peasants."

Whenever the Communists **secured** an area during the civil war, Mao's cadres (teams of supporters) went to work, organizing village "struggle meetings." Peasants and laborers, who owned little or no land, met to force wealthy landlords to confess their bad treatment of the poor. This sometimes included torturing, beating, or even killing landlords as "enemies of the people."

The cadres then canceled all **debts** owed to the landlords and distributed their land and other property to the poor peasants and laborers. What they received became their own private property.

As more peasants and laborers acquired land, more of them had a stake in the success of the Communists. If the Nationalists won the civil war, the new landowners understood they would lose everything the Communists had handed over to them. As a result, they increasingly supported Mao's army with food, labor, transportation, and soldier recruits. Most of these people were not dedicated Communists, but now they had something to fight for. Mao had an even greater reason to confiscate and re-distribute land from the landlords to the poor peasants and laborers. In doing so, he destroyed the traditional landlord power structure in the villages and replaced it with new peasant leadership under the control of the Chinese Communist Party.

Land reform built Mao's peasant revolution to transform China into a Communist society. As he kept reminding his cadres, land reform was "the mother of all other work."

Unlike Chiang's numerous independent armies, Mao's People's Liberation Army (PLA) was unified under a tightly controlled central command. Mao's generals, dedicated to the Communist cause, were superior military leaders. They transformed small guerilla bands into a modern conventional army capable of moving quickly to take advantage of the much larger but uncoordinated Nationalist armies.

PLA officers treated ordinary soldiers with more respect than the soldiers in Chiang's armies. PLA soldiers were also more motivated than Chiang's troops. During the civil war, hundreds of thousands of individual Nationalist soldiers deserted, surrendered, or defected to the Communists.

drafted chosen or required to join the military

propaganda misleading information spread to influence what people think

secured to get or achieve something

debts money or things that are owed to someone else

The Aftermath

Chiang established a new Kuomintang government in Taiwan but claimed he was still the president of all China. Likewise, Mao declared that Taiwan was part of the

People's Republic of China. This political conflict over Taiwan's status remains unresolved to this day.

As the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party, Mao possessed absolute power. To purify the Communist revolution in China, he ordered political purges, mass imprisonment, and executions of "enemies of the people." By 1955, Mao had forced the peasants to give up their privately owned plots of land to form state-owned collective farms. The peasants then worked for the government. A few years later, Mao ordered the peasants to work on even larger communes. Food production plummeted, and many Chinese starved.

Millions died as a result of Mao's policies. Later, in 1976, claiming that elements of Chinese society were trying to undermine communism, Mao declared the Cultural Revolution. Red Guards and armies of students ravaged the countryside beating and humiliating those suspected of countering the revolution. Thousands of historic Chinese sites and books were destroyed. People were forced from the cities into the countryside for "re-education. Estimates of deaths caused by the Cultural Revolution range from a low of 400,000 to over 5 million.

Chiang Kai-shek died in 1975, and Mao Zedong died the next year. Following Mao's death, China began to adopt free-market reforms that introduced elements of capitalism into its economy. As a result, the People's Republic of China today has greatly improved the standard of living, health and nutrition of the people, and the Chinese economy is now the second largest in the world. The Chinese Communist Party, however, still holds a monopoly of power. It does not tolerate political dissent or anyone who questions its right to rule.

Name: _____

Why Did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution?

Civil Conversation Guide

Step 1: Read.

A. Read through the entire selection without stopping to think about any particular section.

B. Re-read the selection and annotate ("talk to") the text:

- Underline the main/most important points. You can comment on these points in the margins.
- Circle words or phrases that are unknown or confusing to you.
- Write down any questions you have in the margin labeling them with a "?".
- Draw an ➡ in the margin next to text that connects to something you know from outside the text. Note what the connection is, such as a news item or personal experience.

Step 2: Think about the reading to prepare for the discussion.

A. This reading is about...

B. The MAIN POINTS are:

Why Did the Communists Win the Chinese Revolution?

C. In the reading, I agree with:

D. In the reading, I disagree with:

E. What are two questions about this reading that you think could be discussed? (The best questions for discussion are ones that have no simple answer and that can use the text as evidence.)

1.

2.

Step 3: Discuss and Listen.

You will have _____ minutes to discuss. Your goal is to engage with each other and the text to gain insight about your own point of view while finding a shared understanding of the issue.

Start by taking turns sharing your answers to the questions in Step 2, sections A-D. Then, you will likely find at least one discussion question at the end of the reading. If time permits, you can discuss questions you came up with in Section E above.

Rules for a Civil Conversation

1. Everyone in your group should participate in the conversation.
2. Listen carefully to what others are saying.
3. Ask clarifying questions if your do not understand a point raised.
4. Be respectful of what others are saying.
5. Refer to the text to support your ideas.

Step 4: After your conversation...

A. Compared to others in your group, did you speak? ___ Less than, ___ About the same as, ___ More than others.

B. Note some of the ways you added to the discussion.

C. What evidence did you use from the text to add to the discussion? Why was this evidence helpful?

D. What did you learn about the topic from the Civil Conversation? (Be sure to reference the text!)