Mutually Assured Destruction: Lesson Plan

Topic	
The Doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction states that the impact of nuclear warfare is so devastating that it deters any country from using nuclear weapons. The use of atomic weapons will lead to the destruction of both the attacker and the defender. The term was first coined by John Von Neumann and remains an important idea today as nations try to remain diplomatic and broker peace.	
Possible subjects/classes	**Time needed**
Political Science, History, Government, Philosophy	35-40 minutes
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/mutually-assured-destruction-nuclear-weapons-boon-or-bane/	
Objective: *What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?*	
Students will be able to... • Explain the catastrophic consequences of a Nuclear War. • Define the doctrine of "Mutually Assured Destruction." • Critically analyze the connections between the past and the present world by examining the historical context of the Second World War and the Cold War.	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Cold War, Nuclear Warfare, and Non-Proliferation	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, Student Internet Access	
Before you watch	
Think, pair, share: Since the end of World War 2, the world's superpowers have not entered into a global war with each other. Why do you think that is?	

While you watch

1. Define the logic of deterrence.
2. What event ended the Second World War?
3. List the P-5 countries.

After you watch/discussion questions

1. What are the consequences of the doctrine of "Mutually Assured Destruction"?
2. Do you think the P-5 nations should have a monopoly over nuclear weapons?
3. Should nuclear weapons be disarmed all together or do they have a role in world peace?

Activity Ideas

- **Research**: Work in pairs or small groups and research the Cuban Missile Crisis. Determine if the theory of Mutually Assured Destruction helps partially or fully explain that event. Write a brief paragraph explaining your answer.
- **Class Debate**: Should countries completely disarm all their nuclear weapons in the near future? Discuss advantages and disadvantages, and be sure to provide evidence and reasoning behind any assertions.
- **Game Theory**: Countries with nuclear weapons have two main options - keep their weapons or disarm. Assuming that two such countries are on unstable terms with another (like the US & USSR during the Cold War), a country's decision can have disastrous consequences. As a class, create a simple chart representing the potential outcomes that could result from such a situation. It might look something like this:

	USSR USES WEAPONS	USSR DISARMS
US USES WEAPONS	NUCLEAR ANNIHILATION	US WIN / USSR LOSS
US DISARMS	US LOSS / USSR WIN	PEACE

Then discuss in groups what rational leaders of both countries would be likely to do and why. Consider what factors would need to be present or absent to increase the likelihood of different outcomes.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. "Nuclear triad". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 19 Mar. 2020. https://www.britannica.com/topic/nuclear-triad.
2. Buzan, Barry. “The Logic of Deterrence”. In: *An Introduction to Strategic Studies*. International Institute for Strategic Studies Conference Papers, 1987. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-18796-6_12.
3. Kaplan, Edward. "To Kill Nations: American Strategy in the Air-Atomic Age and the Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction." Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015.
4. Wilde, Robert. “What Is Mutually Assured Destruction?” ThoughtCo, Feb. 16, 2021, https://www.thoughtco.com/mutually-assured-destruction-1221190.