

Korean War

Background:

On June 25th, 1950, North Korean forces invaded South Korea by crossing over the 38th parallel. The United States immediately pressed for the United Nations to act. On June 25th and June 27th, the United Nations passed directives urging for a ceasefire and for all member nations to provide assistance to the South Koreans. President Harry S. Truman did not press for a Congressional declaration of war. Instead, he classified the Korean conflict as a UN led “police action,” operating under the authority of the Security Council.

When asked later in his life what decision was the most difficult for him to make as president, Mr. Truman stated that it was the decision to send troops to Korea in 1950. By the time that an armistice was signed in July, 1953, nearly fifty-four thousand Americans had lost their lives in the “Forgotten War.”

A man named William Banning of New Canaan, Connecticut, was the father of a soldier who was killed in Korea. He sent President Truman the letter below. He included in the envelope his dead son's Purple Heart. Harry S. Truman was obviously deeply affected by this letter, for he kept it in his desk drawer for many years past his presidency. Such action was uncharacteristic of President Truman, who is known for his ability to make difficult decisions without looking back.

The soldier, PFC George C. Banning, Co. B, 5th Infantry Regt., 5th Regimental Combat Team, was killed in action near Sagimak, Korea, May 11, 1953. His Purple Heart medal, ribbon bar, lapel pin, "Gold Star" pin and button were mailed to former President Truman by the deceased soldier's father, William Banning. A handwritten letter written by Mr. Banning accompanied the medal. Truman kept the medal and letter in a drawer in his desk that museum staff found when processing the contents of Truman's desk after his passing.

Standard:

3.TS.7.B.a With guidance and support, use visual tools and informational texts to interpret, draw conclusions, make predictions, and communicate information and ideas

Materials Needed:

Image of Purple Heart
Letter

Vocabulary:

Purple Heart - The Purple Heart Medal is awarded to members of the armed forces of the U.S. who are wounded by an instrument of war in the hands of the enemy and posthumously to the next of kin in the name of those who are killed in action or die of wounds received in action. It is specifically a combat decoration.

Gold Star family - A Gold Star Family is the immediate family member(s) of a fallen service member who died while serving in a time of conflict.

Procedure:

1. Discuss background information with the class
2. Define vocabulary words
3. Activity 1: Discuss questions:

Assessment: Imagine you are President Truman and you received this letter and purple heart. Write a response to Mr. Banning.

Activity 1:

1. Examine the letter.
2. What was your emotional response to this letter?
3. Why did you think Mr. Banning sent this letter to Truman?
4. Why do you think he included the purple heart?
5. Mr. Banning mentions President Truman's daughter in the letter. What did he say and why do you think he did that?



NURSERY RD
NEW CANAAN
CONN.

MR. TRUMAN

AS YOU HAVE BEEN DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
LOSS OF OUR SON'S LIFE IN KOREA, YOU MIGHT JUST AS WELL
KEEP THIS EMBLEM ON DISPLAY IN YOUR TROPHY ROOM, AS
A MEMORY OF ONE OF YOUR HISTORIC DEEDS.

OUR MAJOR REGRET AT THIS TIME IS THAT
YOUR DAUGHTER WAS NOT THERE TO RECEIVE THE SAME
TREATMENT AS OUR SON RECEIVED IN KOREA.

SIGNED
William Banning