

India Partition Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

Was the partition of India a good plan given what people knew at the time?

Materials:

- India Map PowerPoint
- Copies of India Partition Timeline
- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of India Partition Guiding Questions
- Copies of India Partition Graphic Organizer

Plan of Instruction: *[Note: This lesson is designed to take place over two class periods. We recommend working through the first round of documents on day one and the second round on day two. If you only have one day, focus on Documents A and B and eliminate Round Two.]*

1. Project the map of India PowerPoint slide. Ask students to examine the map and answer the following questions in their notebook:
 - a. *When was the country of Pakistan formed and why?*
 - b. *What was an immediate consequence of the creation of Pakistan?*

Discuss students' answers. They should be able to discern the following from the map:

- a. Pakistan was formed in 1947 after India gained independence. The map claims that Pakistan was formed in order to give the Muslim minority their own land/state.
 - b. One immediate consequence was massive migration of Hindus and Muslims into areas where they would be the majority.
2. Before continuing with the lesson, take time to discuss with students whether this idea to split India into two countries makes sense to them. Why or why not? What might have been some of the negative consequences of the decision?
 3. Hand out India Timeline, Guiding Questions.

Read the timeline out loud with students and then have them complete the Guiding Questions for the timeline. Review student answers.

The timeline offers two possible reasons for why India was partitioned. The first has to do with a separate homeland for Muslims and their fear of being a minority in an independent India, and the second has to do with Britain's wish to speed up the transition.

Ask students to discuss whether they think the Partition Plan was a good idea, based just on the timeline. Students who think it was a good idea will likely support their

argument by saying that without a separate state, Muslims would have been a political minority. Those who disagree will likely refer to the ensuing violence.

Note: This is a good opportunity to pause and discuss what it means to evaluate historical actors. Is it fair to evaluate the actions of people in the past, who could not predict the future? This lesson evaluates the Partition Plan based on what leaders knew at the time. Throughout the lesson it will be important to remind students that the goal is to try to enter the mindset of the leaders in 1947.

4. Hand out Documents A and B and have students complete Guiding Questions. Review student answers and then have students complete Round One in the Graphic Organizer.

Most of the guiding questions for A and B are straightforward. Students might get stuck on Questions 3 and 4 for Nehru. For Question 3, they might not understand his reference to an “emotional plane.” Although this phrase isn’t necessarily central, it’s important for students to understand that these discussions occurred in a heightened, tense, emotional time (this also relates to Question 4) and that in such moments it can be particularly challenging to press for reasoned discourse and a careful analysis of consequences.

The fact that partition was tied to independence made all the difference. Nehru ultimately acquiesced to partition because Jinnah was successful in convincing the British of its necessity.

The top part of the Graphic Organizer for Round One is straightforward. Students can go either way for their claim in the bottom part. Jinnah makes it seem as if partition was a good decision given what people knew at the time; Nehru makes it seem as if it was clearly a bad decision given what people knew at the time.

5. Hand out Documents C and D and have students complete Guiding Questions. Review student answers and then have students complete Round Two in the Graphic Organizer.

Documents C and D are trickier, and students might struggle with some of the Guiding Questions. The Mountbatten document differs in that it is an interview given 20 years later, after Mountbatten has had time to reflect on the consequences of his actions. He pins the entire debacle of partition squarely on Jinnah, painting Jinnah as the “only stumbling block” to a united India. Mountbatten claims that had he known Jinnah was dying, he would not have agreed to partition.

Wolpert, by contrast, blames Mountbatten for his impatience and haste in transferring power. Wolpert is the only secondary source in the set, which raises interesting questions about relative reliability. On the one hand, he has the perspective gained from historical distance and scholarly analysis. On the other hand, students can discuss whether Wolpert is in a position to evaluate the motives of the British. Who makes a more convincing case –Mountbatten or Wolpert? Obviously, the students need more information to engage in this debate, but it raises important questions about the evaluation of historical actors and sources.

In the Graphic Organizer, students should write that Mountbatten makes the case that it was a good decision, given what people knew at the time (they thought Jinnah would

continue to live); and Wolpert implies that it was a bad idea (that the British knew enough at the time to have foreseen that partition would have negative consequences).

6. Whole class discussion: Students share their final claims from the Graphic Organizer.

Citations:

Jinnah, M.A. (1940, March). Presidential address.

Presented at the Muslim League Lahore, India. Retrieved from

http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00islamlinks/txt_jinnah_lahore_1940.html

Nehru, J. (1946). *The Discovery of India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collins, L. and Lapierre, D. (1982). *Mountbatten and the Partition of India*.

U.K.: Garlandfold LTD. (pp. 57-58).

<http://www.apnaorg.com/books/english/mountbatten-partition/book.php?fldr=book>

Wolpert, S. (2006). *Shameful Flight: The Last Years of the British*

Empire in India. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc. (p. 1-2).