

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Five Years In, Iraq War Pushes On, 03/19/08

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june08/iraq_3-19.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. Find Iraq on a map. What countries does it border? What are the major cities?

2. Why did the United States invade Iraq?

3. What is your impression of life for kids your age in Iraq?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. What is the state of security in Iraq now?

ANSWER

Five years into the war in Iraq, the United States is still working to secure the country and create conditions for a lasting peace between religious factions. Divisions between two sects of Islam, Sunni and Shiite, have caused a violent rift in the country, and the U.S. military has faced a brutal insurgency.

2. How many Americans have died in the war? How many Iraqis are estimated to have died?

ANSWER

Nearly 4,000 American soldiers have died and another 30,000 injured, according to the Washington Post. About 171 British and between 200,000 and 600,000 Iraqis have died, according to the Guardian Newspaper.

3. What was the U.S. justification for invading Iraq?

ANSWER

In the run up to the Iraq invasion in 2003, the U.S. government alleged that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell made the case to the U.N. Security Council, showing aerial photographs of what were thought to be chemical weapons sites and mobile labs.

4. Did the military find weapons of mass destruction? Why or why not?

ANSWER

No weapons of mass destruction were ever found in Iraq, though teams of weapons specialists carried out

an extensive search. Bush administration official Condoleezza Rice later said that intelligence reports pointing to the existence of weapons may have been incorrect.

5. What groups started attacking U.S. military after the initial combat mission was over?

ANSWER

In the years following the invasion, militia fighters and members of the terrorist group dubbed al-Qaida in Iraq targeted U.S. military operations.

Sunni fighters and al-Qaida in Iraq members went after U.S. soldiers and rival Shiites with guerilla tactics like roadside bombs and attacks on busy markets.

6. What event drove Sunnis and Shiites to the brink of civil war?

ANSWER

In February of 2006, one of the holiest shrines of Shiite Islam, the Golden Mosque, was bombed.

"One cannot overemphasize the blow to Shiaism of the destruction of the shrine," Vali Nasr of the Council on Foreign Relations told the NewsHour at the time of the attack.

"This was an attack on the very existence, on the very meaning of Shiaism."

The attack set off fighting that bordered on civil war. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis left their homes as areas became more clearly Shia or Sunni.

7. What was the surge?

ANSWER

In early 2007, President Bush ordered a new deployment of troops to help curb Iraqi violence in a tactic called "the surge." An additional 30,000 troops focused on violent hot spots like Baghdad.

The general in charge of U.S. troops in Iraq, General David Petraeus, put a new emphasis on forming trust and relationships with the Iraqi people.

8. Has violence decreased in Iraq?

ANSWER

Violence dropped significantly in many of the areas targeted by the surge. Iraq's civilian death toll fell from about 1,700 fatalities in January 2007 to 246 in December, according to Reuters. But a new uptick in bombings has gripped parts of Iraq since January.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Do you agree with the quote by Jon Alterman that "this is a war that most Americans continue to feel they don't have to make sacrifices for?" Why or why not?

2. How have the goals of the war changed since it began? Do you think the United States made the right decision by invading? Why or why not?

3. Pick one of the following key players found on the Iraq in Transition site

(http://www.pbs.org/newshour/indepth_coverage/middle_east/iraq/keyplayers/index.html):

Interim President Jalal Talabani

Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani

Shiite Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr

U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad

Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus

Research your person, then write 3 paragraphs about what your key player would say he wants to see happen over the next year in Iraq.

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.