It is 1939 and while war breaks out in Europe, America remains mired in the Great Depression. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941 thrusts the U.S. into the war, changing the nation from an isolationist continent to a global player.

The nation taps into the vast manufacturing reserves that have been idle for ten years: factories, electrical plants, railroads. The war gives jobs to seven million unemployed – many of them women, nicknamed “Rosie the Riveters.” By 1944, the U.S. is producing 40% of the world’s armaments. The might of America’s strategy and supplies turns the tide of war. The U.S. Air Force launches pioneering daylight bombing raids over occupied Europe in B-17 bombers. Under the command of General Dwight Eisenhower, D-Day is an astonishing success.

In 1945, war in the Pacific is brought to a close by the atomic bomb. The enormous consequences of the atomic bomb would be debated for decades. Much of Europe is in tatters, and millions of Jews lost their lives in the Holocaust. As the war ends in 1945, a new world order has been created – and America has changed forever.
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the U.S. avoid involvement in WWII until December 1941? Why was the Pearl Harbor attack such a shock to the U.S.?

2. Why was the invention of penicillin so important in the context of WWII? What were some other advances in medicine that were important during the war?

3. How were women affected by WWII? Do you think the war advanced the rights of women?

4. During WWII, the American armed forces were still segregated by race. Why do you think this issue became increasingly important during this era, leading to the desegregation of the Armed Forces a few years after the war?

5. What were some of the arguments for and against using the atomic bomb?

6. Overall, what were the consequences of WWII for the United States? How was the U.S. changed by the war?
Primary Source:

Before the United States entered the war, Joe Ichiuji, an American citizen of Japanese descent, was a corporal in the U.S. Army. Within two months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army discharged him and placed his family in an internment camp. When government recruiters came to this camp seeking recruits for an all Japanese-American combat unit in 1943, Ichiuji was one of the first to volunteer. Below are Ichiuji’s recollections of this turbulent period, which proved to be the ultimate test of allegiance.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think were some of the reasons Ichiuji wanted to serve in the Army despite the prejudice he might have faced?

2. Why do you think Japanese Americans were interned in camps during WWII? The U.S. government later apologized to Japanese Americans for these actions. Do you think a similar situation could happen in our world today? Discuss.