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Since World War II, American forces have occupied the small Japanese controlled island of Okinawa (o-ke-nä-wä). Although military presence has been an economic boon for this area, cultural clashes between the two nations have spurred debate over the American presence.

**Starting Points**

1. Relate to the class the major historical points in Okinawa’s history.

2. Discuss the cultural differences between the citizens of Okinawa and American soldiers stationed in Okinawa.

3. Write the following questions on the board for the students to think about during the lesson. This will help students focus on the most important points of the information presented.
   a. Why did America want to establish military bases in Okinawa?
   b. What economic benefits does the U.S. military bring to Okinawa?
   c. What drawbacks are there to having a foreign military presence in Okinawa?

**Information**

**Cultural Differences**

The island of Okinawa, along with several small surrounding islands, is historically known as the Ryukyu (ryü-kyü) Kingdom. Although located between Taiwan and Japan, it remained independent until the Japanese gained control of it in 1879 (see Politics & Economics Visual 1). Although they are citizens of Japan and are considered Japanese, the people of Okinawa are ethnically different from those on the larger islands of Japan, and many consider themselves an entirely separate race. Ethnically and culturally, the Okinawans come from a unique mix of indigenous Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and other pacific island peoples, developing separately from Japan until 1870. The culture of Okinawa is similar to the culture of Japan, but the people of this small island perpetuate their own traditions along with those commonly found in Japan.

**Military Advantage**

During World War II, American forces discovered the strategic advantages of establishing a base on Okinawa to launch attacks on mainland Japan. The U.S. military invaded Okinawa in 1945 and over 200,000 people were killed during the next three months of battle. Although American bases were established on the island, many people believed the tremendous loss of life influenced U.S. leaders to drop the atomic bomb instead of invade mainland Japan.
Since this incident, the United States government has considered Okinawa a vital component of its military strategy in Asia. It was routinely used as a staging area for military operations throughout the Vietnam War. During the Cold War, the proximity to the U.S.S.R. and North Korea made the island bases a significant deterrent to the spread of communist ideology throughout Asia. The closeness to the Korean Peninsula also helped calm relations between North and South Korea.

Today, Japan is one of the most generous allies to the United States, giving almost five billion dollars each year in peacetime Host Nation Support (HNS). Equipment, weapons systems, and services have been coordinated to provide better military cooperation between the nations. Japan also purchases U.S. weaponry to update and modernize its armed forces.

Currently, 25,000 of the 47,000 U.S. military personnel in Japan are stationed on Okinawa. Although Okinawa only accounts for 0.6 percent of Japan’s territory, seventy-five percent of the land occupied by the U.S. military is on the island.

The continued presence of American soldiers has provided economic and political benefits for Okinawans. The Japanese government considers the bases necessary for maintaining peace and security within the country. Military personnel often have sufficient funds for recreational activities and general consumerism, providing economic strength to Okinawa.

**Drawbacks**

The greatest drawbacks of having American troops in Okinawa come from the burden on the people of Okinawa. Japanese and Okinawans pay support money to cover the cost of the troops in their role as a military protectorate. Environmental concerns, noise levels, and, most significantly, crime associated with the troops, have plagued the American presence on the island.

Tensions have risen during the last fifteen years as crimes committed by United States military personnel have increased. In the nineties, crimes involving stabbing, robbery, and other violent acts were constantly reported in local newspapers, angering citizens and officials on the island. These feelings climaxed, and in 1995 when three U.S. servicemen raped a twelve-year-old schoolgirl, widespread protest erupted all over the island, along with other parts of Japan.

Since this tragedy, Okinawan officials have pressured the central government to revise the Japan–U.S. Status of Forces Agreement making the American military hand over soldiers suspected of breaking Japanese laws. Currently, the United States and the Japanese government have only agreed to hand over pre-indictment servicemen suspected of homicide, rape, and other serious crimes.

Okinawan citizens have also demanded a reduction in the size and scope of the United States military presence on their island. Yet, Japanese officials agree a military presence is necessary to stabilize the situation between North and South Korea. Officials also believe a military base sustains the ability to respond quickly to any Asian area that may be threatened by foreign or domestic conflict. With the new peaceful relations developing between North and South Korea, Okinawans still feel a significant decrease in troop size should be implemented.
Activities

1. Divide the class into small teams. Give them twenty minutes to formulate opinions on the following issue: Should the U.S. military remain stationed in Okinawa and why? Have each group present their ideas to the class.

2. Ask students to act as newly-appointed cultural advisors to the president of the United States. Their first assignment will be to write a letter to the president attempting to explain why a great number of Okinawan citizens do not want American soldiers stationed on their island anymore. The compositions should include advice to the president on the cultural and political concerns of maintaining troops on the island.

3. Stage a mock hearing. Divide the class into three groups; one group will act as “witnesses” and “experts” supporting U.S. troops on Okinawa while another group will do the same in opposition to an American presence. Remind students to apply what they have learned from the lesson to create realistic testimonials. The third group will listen to both sides and make a decision regarding the future of the U.S. troops.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you feel if foreign soldiers lived in your town?

2. How do you think the situation in Okinawa influences the way Japanese people think of Americans?

3. When people of different cultures come in contact, they sometimes form a blended culture. Why do you think Okinawan and American citizens do not blend well?

4. Do you think American troops should remain stationed in Okinawa?
EFFECTS OF THE BOMB ON NAGASAKI AND HIROSHIMA

JAPAN

NAGASAKI

HIROSHIMA
The After-effects of the A-Bomb
By Joseph Ahuna

I wonder what the scene was like
If I were riding through Hiroshima
on an old ‘45 bike.
The culture and life must have changed
Once the ‘little boy’ went *ka-bang*!
With bodies all around
And with nothing but weeping as the sounds
‘Who could have ever done such a thing?’,
Would be the only thought that would ring.
In war there is no loser and there is no winner,
For all the destruction comes to us sinners.
With much to improve and with much to find
I guess in the end love is the only thing that will bind.