

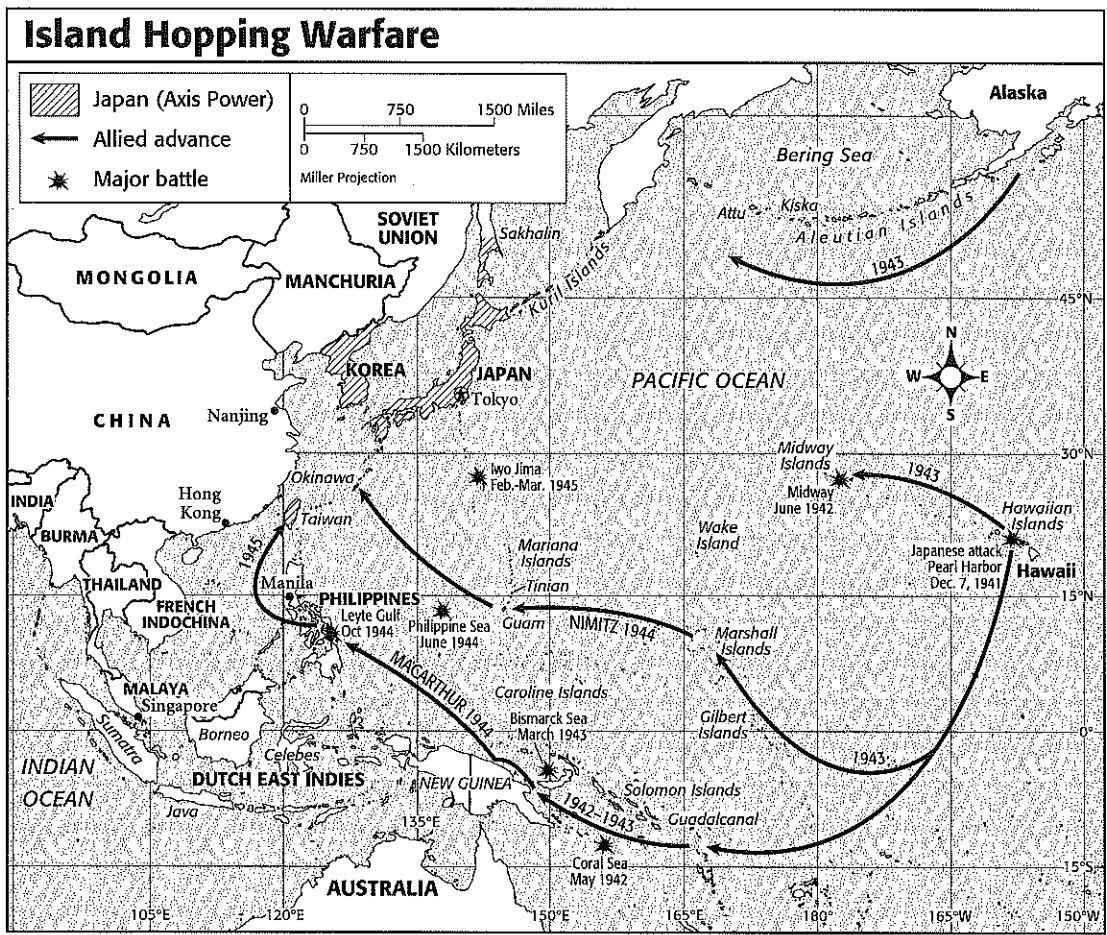
CHAPTER 32

Critical Thinking Activity
The Pacific Islands

World War II in the Pacific and The Battle of Midway

The United States entered World War II on December 8, 1941. In a surprise attack the day before, Japanese planes had bombed the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Three days after the United States declared war on Japan, Japan's allies, Italy and Germany, declared war on the United States. Read the information below, study the map, then answer the questions which follow.

The war in the Pacific began with a string of Japanese victories. Thus, the Japanese waged their war with little opposition, quickly seizing Hong Kong and Singapore and invading the Philippines. In Southeast Asia, Japanese armies marched into Thailand and then Burma until they nearly reached India. To the south, they overran the Dutch East Indies north of Australia.



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At this point, the Japanese advance in the Pacific finally stalled. In June 1942, Japan attacked Midway Island, a strategic naval base in the Pacific Ocean. Midway, a U.S. base named for its mid-Pacific location, guarded Hawaii. The Japanese invasion armada was the main prong of a colossal offensive aimed at destroying American power in the Pacific. Japanese strike forces, spread across 2,000 miles of ocean, were to invade Midway and two islands in the Aleutians, the bleak archipelago curving westward from the Alaska mainland. Japanese strategists expected to draw the U.S. Pacific Fleet from Pearl Harbor and into a decisive battle. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander in chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet and architect of the Pearl Harbor attack, believed that his plan would smash the enemy fleet, forcing the Americans to a negotiated peace.

Spearheading the Japanese operation were four aircraft carriers: the *Akagi*, *Kaga*, *Hiryu*, and *Soryu*. Surrounding them was a screen of destroyers, battleships, and cruisers. The other forces included transports for the 5,000 troops who would invade Midway. As the Japanese fleet steamed toward Midway Yamamoto hoped the advantage of surprise was still on his side. But he was thwarted by the incredible performance of U.S. code breakers. Three U.S. carriers—the *Yorktown*, *Hornet*, and *Enterprise*—with their attendant destroyers and cruisers, were waiting to pounce on an enemy they knew was coming.

The American Navy crippled the Japanese fleet. After the Battle of Midway, the World War II Allies began to force the Japanese to retreat. The strategy, or military plan of attack, the Allies used was called island-hopping. Capturing one island at a time, the Allies took over the Pacific and slowly closed in on Japan itself.

1. What is the latitude and longitude of Japan?

2. What islands were “stepping stones” for the Allies as they closed in on Japan?

3. Iwo Jima and Okinawa are tiny islands. Why did Japan and the Allies fight for them?

4. Why did the Japanese plan on attacking the Aleutian Islands?

5. Using classroom reference sources, find out what Midway Island is used as today.
