

Innovation Lab Network Performance Assessment Project
Quality Criteria for Performance Assessments
Calculating the Costs: Atomic Bombs in 1945

Quality Criteria	Yes	Yes, with Slight Modifications	No	Rationale/Suggestions
1. Focus on Deeper Learning				
a. Does the task require the demonstration and/or application of complex skills (e.g., Critical Abilities, DOK Levels 3 and 4, 21 st century skills, Key Cognitive Strategies)?*	✓			This task requires substantial work analyzing documents, discussing them, synthesizing these discussions and analyses into a coherent argumentative essay that evaluates the varying perspectives presented in the documents and defends a clearly argued position. The task develops the following Critical Abilities: Research; Analysis of Information; Communication in Many Forms; Interpersonal Interaction and Collaboration.
b. Can students' responses to this task (what students are asked to produce) provide evidence of important college/career readiness skills and Critical Abilities (e.g., collaboration, research skills, evidence-based communication)?*	✓			The central student product for this task is an argumentative essay that asks students to read primary and secondary source documents and use evidence effectively from these sources to support a claim. Several mini-tasks within the overall project also require student collaboration.
c. Does the task address key concepts and skills in the discipline that are transferable to other contexts?*	✓			<p>The task focuses students on content of crucial significance in U.S. history. It asks students to source documents, interpret them and corroborate one document against another in assessing alternative points of view – all central and transferable skills in the discipline of history and social studies. The documents are relevant to the task. They provide a good deal of the historical context that students need to do the task assigned. (One additional, more recent document on the dropping of the bomb that might be included is Richard Frank, "Why Truman Dropped the Bomb." http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/005/894mnyyl.asp?nopager=1 This article deals more thoroughly with the "Magic" transcripts of Japanese communications that only became fully available in 1995.)</p> <p>There is one problem that could arise from the task's otherwise admirable stress on the skills of writing an</p>

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				argumentative essay. The pro/con framework of the assignment invites students to move rapidly from assembling evidence to taking a stand and making judgments. It may be that a lack of deep knowledge of historical context will encourage students to do this superficially. Perhaps more attention to helping students derive context knowledge out of the rich documents provided might help in avoiding this possibility.
2. Alignment to Standards				
a. Does the task measure key skills and major claims emphasized by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and/or NGSS? *	✓			The task instructions ("Calculating the Costs: Atomic Bombs in 1945") list several Common Core standards as well as other standards from Pennsylvania. The various mini-tasks and the central task entail using the skills identified in these standards.
b. Can students' responses to this task (what students are asked to produce) be scored using CCSS/NGSS aligned rubrics? *	✓			The task instructions and the sub-tasks detailed direct students to produce an argumentative essay that can meet all the CCSS standards for such a writing task.
c. Are the scoring criteria--rubrics, point scoring systems, checklists (if provided)--aligned to key expectations of the CCSS/NGSS?	✓			A rubric is provided for the argumentative essay. It does align adequately with the CCSS standards identified in the "Calculating the Costs" document. The rubric stresses key CCSS expectations regarding the writing of an argumentative essay, with specific attention to the formulation of a claim or thesis, the use of evidence in documentary sources, the comparison of sources, the consideration of counter-claims, the use of content background knowledge, and the effective organization of a well-reasoned essay.
d. Is the rigor of the task appropriately matched to the grade-level standards being assessed?	✓			The task and its supporting documents are very challenging for the 9th grade target group. However, the scaffolding for the sub-tasks is so detailed and rich it should make it possible for students to gain a great deal from the documents and do the task effectively.
3. Student Choice and Agency				
a. Does the task allow for a variety of responses and/or solution pathways? *	✓			The task is a delimited and carefully structured one – to write an essay dealing with a question already formulated. Within those constraints, this task leaves up to students what answer to give and how to extract,

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				arrange, and synthesize the evidence they will use to back up their answers. The class discussions, peer editing, and other small group activities offer opportunities for students to respond in various ways to the task materials and problems.
b. Does the task offer opportunities for student ownership and student choice (e.g., selecting a research question or topic; selecting sources; etc.)?			✓	Students do not have a choice of topic to write about or sources to select. However, a limited degree of choice is provided in that students can choose some of the pre-selected sources to focus on and not others. They can also choose among a limited number of options for organizing the essay's internal paragraphs.
c. Does the task require student-initiated planning and management of information/data and ideas (e.g., determining strategies for solving a problem; designing an investigation; deciding how to present findings; etc.)?		✓		Student-initiated planning and management is required by this task, but only to a limited degree. Students must assemble the elements of some carefully guided and structured sub-tasks into a final essay. They do choose a strategy for solving a problem – by choosing an organizational framework for answering a pre-set question and selecting among documents those to be stressed and interpreted in detail. Greater student-initiated planning might be incorporated into the task by asking students to research and find other documents aside from those selected for them, or by asking them to choose among a wider array of possible answers rather than the simple pro/con choice offered, etc.
4. Relevance and Authenticity				
a. Is task content represented in a way that is appropriately authentic (i.e., not overly hypothetical), relevant (i.e., relatable), and/or meaningful to students and the discipline (e.g., topic connects to students' lives, task simulates authentic purpose and audience)? *	✓			The task materials are vivid, rich in historical detail, and dramatic. The events described were real, not hypothetical. The issue, the use of nuclear weapons, is of vital significance and ongoing meaning for students now.
b. Is the task related to real world problems, contexts, and/or purposes?	✓			The question of the dropping of the bomb still has moral as well as historical relevance. It also relates to ongoing real-world problems having to do with nuclear weapons, nuclear proliferation, and nuclear power.
5. Suitable for Diverse Student Populations				

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a. Is the task, at its core, free of bias that might disadvantage specific student populations and free of stereotypes in language, content, and design? *	✓			
b. Does the task include, or allow for the use of, a variety of stimuli?	✓			The task makes use of written documents, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations, and video clips. In addition, several posters and other visual aids are used or created in the course of completing the task.
c. Does the task provide instructional scaffolds to support student learning and skill development toward successful completion of the task?		✓		<p>The Writer's Notebook for each student contains most of the handouts assigned in each component of the task. These are very helpful in guiding students in all key aspects of constructing an argumentative essay on an historical topic – from marking up and taking notes on readings, to defining terms, identifying pro and con views, constructing a central claim, writing an effective introduction, choosing among several alternative structures for writing the essay's internal paragraphs, selecting details and evidence to support the claim, responding effectively to counterclaims, and writing an effective conclusion.</p> <p>However, some of the scaffolding is confusing. Several variations of the Writer's Notebook are provided without clear explanation of what the differences are. The key difference appears to be the alternate approaches given in each Notebook to handling claims and counter-claims in the internal paragraphs of the essay. It is not clear why these options could not be incorporated into a single Writer's Notebook only. Also, the "Calculating the Costs" document links to some worksheets that are not in the Writer's Notebooks. Perhaps all worksheets could simply be provided once only in a single Writer's Notebook.</p>
d. Does the task include appropriate recommendations for accommodations and differentiation to provide access for diverse students?			✓	The task does not provide accommodations for diverse students except in one limited way. It provides three Writer's Notebooks and designates one as being a "full version (this would best be used with students who need additional support)." However, it differs only slightly from the other notebooks and does not alter the demands of

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				the task in any significant way.
6. Design of Student Task				
a. Is the overall task prompt clear (e.g., clear student directions, unambiguous graphics)? *	✓			
b. Is task information presented in an organized way?		✓		The "Calculating the Costs" document outlining the task is detailed and reasonably well-organized, yet it is also extremely complicated and confusing at points. It needs to be simplified. Specifically, <i>Section 2: What Skills?</i> seems unnecessary since all of its information is provided again in <i>Section 3: What Instruction?</i> Moreover, each sub-task described in that <i>Section 3</i> , the main section, is split into four columns. It is not clear what some of these add (The "Scoring Guide" column in particular, which does not seem to have much to do with scoring.) Only the one column on the right is really needed. The other information could be incorporated into it.
7. Curriculum-Embedded				
a. Is the task feasible for most school/classroom environments (e.g., access to necessary resources)?	✓			
b. Does the task include opportunities for independent work as well as interaction/collaboration with peers?	✓			Students collaborate at key points in pairs or small groups. They take part in all-class discussions. Otherwise they work independently in producing their final essays.

Task Materials	Yes	No	Comments
a. Is the task missing any referenced accompanying materials (resources, handouts, rubrics etc.)? If yes, please indicate which materials are missing.		✓	
b. Does this task contain topics/materials/texts that might be sensitive for some students? If yes, please explain.	✓		This is the case only in that the topic, the dropping of the atomic bombs, does entail some graphic descriptions of destruction that might be upsetting.

Comments: This is an excellent task that does an admirable job of guiding students in the construction of a well organized and thought-out essay. The only caveats are regarding the problem of complex and somewhat confusing organization and also the possible inadequate emphasis on ensuring students have adequate historical background knowledge to do the task in the most meaningful way.