

The Trial of Mao Zedong

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Target Grade Level: Grades 9 and 10

This lesson plan accompanies the article **“Stories from the Revolution in Mao’s China: Teaching Students to Think about Socialism and Communism”** by Aminda Smith (*Education About Asia*, Volume 29:2, Fall 2026).

Since high school, I have had a deep interest in Asia, sparked by a summer trip to China in 1975, where I witnessed the lasting impacts of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. My passion led me to travel extensively across Asia, attending various seminars to deepen my understanding. For twenty-eight years, I served as a teacher and administrator at Evanston High School, where I taught Asian Studies, championed the Global Studies program and sponsored student trips to China in 1991 and Vietnam in 1995.

Objectives

- Analyze the nuanced legacy of Maoist China, moving beyond portrayals of Mao as a singular liberator of the peasantry and women to explore deeper historical complexities.
- Develop a comprehensive grasp of the Great Leap Forward and its tangible socio-economic consequences for the rural population.
- Examine the trajectory of the Cultural Revolution, investigating how an initial movement for urban-rural integration devolved into systemic incarceration and the purging of political dissenters.
- Evaluate the period’s systemic dismantling of traditional Chinese heritage, religious practices like Buddhism, and the specific impact of these policies on Tibet.
- Investigate the motivations and experiences of the Red Guard, focusing on the sociological drivers behind both recruitment and eventual disillusionment.
- Critically assess China’s evolving geopolitical standing, specifically regarding its shifting diplomatic relations with the United States and the Soviet Union.

Readings

In terms of assignments to students, I would assign small sections of the last three books.

- *Hungry Ghosts: Mao’s Secret Famine* (Jasper Becker)
- *Mao’s China and After: A History of the People’s Republic* (Maurice J. Meisner)
- *Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress* (Dai Sijie)
- *Wild Swans: Three Daughters of China* (Jung Chang)
- *Life and Death in Shanghai* (Cheng Nien)



**World History for Tomorrow:
People Who Changed the World**
Presents:

The Trial of **Mao Zedong**

Chinese Communist Leader: 1949-1976

The International Tribunal for Justice charges Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) with perpetrating **cultural genocide** upon the Chinese people. His crimes began in 1949 and extended until his death in 1976.

The **specific charges** include:

- Demolishing Chinese traditions and culture;
- Eliminating traditional (Confucianism, Daoism) and foreign religious thought;
- Destroying traditional family structure;
- Imposing political tyranny;
- Eliminating free expression;
- Harming the health and livelihood of the Chinese people;
- Diminishing China's stature in the world.

Working as a member of the Prosecution or Defense team, you will try and prove or disprove that Mao Zedong is guilty of the crimes as charged.

Period: _____

Tribunal Judges: _____

Mao Zedong: _____

The lead attorneys for the Prosecution are:

_____ & _____

Witnesses who **may be called** for the **Prosecution** may include, **but are not limited to:**

Religious follower (Christian/Buddhist
Daoist, etc.)
Peasant
Landlord
Factory owner (industrialist)
Artist
Teacher
Chiang Kai Shek (leader of the Nationalists)
Minority person

Tibetan (such as the Dalai Lama)
Opium addict
Victim of the Cultural Revolution
Participant in the Great Leap Forward
Elderly person
Red Guard
Foreigner (Russian or American)
Intellectual (writer)

Lead Attorneys for the Defense:

_____ & _____

Witnesses who **may be called** for the **Defense** may include, **but are not limited to:**

Peasant(s) (farmers)
Factory Worker
Intellectual (Artist)
Intellectual (writer)
Teacher
Student
Doctor/barefoot doctor/healthcare worker
Minority person

Chou (Zhou) En Lai, Mao's foreign minister
Woman married after 1950 Marriage Law
Red Guard
Elderly Person
Mao's wife, Chiang Ching (Jiang Qing)
Soldier – Member of the Red Army
Mao's advisor: Tian Jiaying

Responsibilities:

Mao: read as widely as you can about your goals, programs, results. Help defense prepare their case. Suggest evidence (documents, photographs, etc.) that can help prove you did not commit the charges against you. Write a 2-page overview of what you did for China.

Attorneys: read as widely as you can about Mao, prepare opening and closing remarks; choose and order your witnesses; interview witnesses so you know what they will

say; be ready to cross-examine opposing team's witnesses;

Witnesses: give yourself a Chinese name, write your 2 page biographical sketch as it pertains to living in Mao's China (place you lived, background, how Mao affected your life); prepare 5 questions that you want the attorneys to ask you while on the witness stand. Prepare evidence to support your case. The opposing team's attorneys will need to prepare questions on-the-spot.

Points: 25 points for preparation (your biography, material for the attorneys, etc.) ; 25 points for participation during the trial

Schedule: Preparation Tuesday - Friday; Trial - Monday and Tuesday

Period: _____

Witness Roles:

(To be completed by lead attorneys)

_____ & _____

Prosecution:

Name:

Role/Order of Appearance
on Witness Stand:

[illegible]

Period: _____

Witness Roles:

(To be completed by lead attorneys)

_____ & _____

Defense:

Name:

Role/Order of Appearance
on Witness Stand:

[illegible]