



## 9/11: How Did it Happen?

Tom Murphy, Elisabeth Irwin High School, New York, NY

**Grade level: 11-12**

**Number of class periods: 3 - 5**

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### Objective

To look at the U.S. government's awareness of the seriousness of the threat of an attack on the U.S. mainland prior to 9/11 and to review the facts of the attacks of September 11, 2001. These lessons will explore some of the information the U.S. government had prior to the attacks and encourage discussion on why the information may not have prompted a more rigorous security effort by the U.S. government in August 2001. Students will begin to understand why and how security and counterterrorism became major foci of government resources in the United States after 9/11.

### Common Core Standards

*Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.*

- Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies 1, 3, 4, 6, 9
- Writing Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies 9

### Resources

- [The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11, Lawrence Wright \(for teacher background\)](#)
- [The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation. Based on the Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colon](#)
- ["Bin Ladin Determined to Strike in US," CIA redacted memo sent to President August 6, 2001. Declassified and approved for Release, April 10, 2004](#)
- [Al Qaeda's Second Fatwa, February 23, 1998](#)
- ["Al Qaeda's International Terror Network Slowly Comes into Focus for U.S. Intelligence," Frontline](#)

### Preparation

Students are assigned to read *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation* for homework, p. 1-106.

### Activity

Class watches segments of Frontline film clip "al Qaeda's International Terror Network Slowly Comes into Focus for U.S. Intelligence." Discussion of attack on World Trade Center on February 26, 1993. Discussion of intelligence agencies investigations of terror suspects in years after 1993 as evidenced by this film clip. Who was involved in pursuing the threats to the United States? Were individuals who lived in countries overseas perceived as a threat to the mainland United States?

Students read CIA redacted document from August 6, 2001 in class. Students underline words that stand out or words about which they have questions. Students share the words and class discusses the meaning of the document. Class discusses what we know about how the President responded to this memo. Were airports put under additional security measures? Were airlines advised of this warning? Were passengers advised not to travel by air?

Students review timeline of events of the day of 9/11 based on their reading of *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. In discussion of the attacks, teacher separates al Qaeda, a terrorist network, as being distinct from Islam, a religion practiced by 1.6 billion people around the world.



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Teacher shares personal memories of day of 9/11.

Teacher discusses aim of the 9/11 Commission as stated in the Foreword to *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*:

“It was the goal of the Commission to tell the story of 9/11 in a way that the American people could read and understand. We felt strongly that one of the most important and tragic events in our nation’s history needed to be accessible to all. Our goal in *The 9/11 Commission Report* was not only to inform our fellow citizens about the history but also to energize and engage them on behalf of reform and change, to make our country safer and more secure.... The safety and security of our country require a well-informed public to hold its elected leaders to account. Have our leaders done all that they can and should to protect the American people? It is up to each of us to insist that they do. As we stated in our original preface to the Commission report, we hope that this graphic version will encourage our fellow citizens to study, reflect – and act.” Thomas H. Kean and Lee H. Hamilton, Chair and Vice Chair of The 9/11 Commission.

### Homework

- Continued reading of *The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation*. Pages 107 – 133.
- Chapter 11: Foresight and Hindsight
- Chapter 12: What to Do? A Global Strategy
- Chapter 13: How to Do It? A Different Way of Organizing the Government
- Postscript: December 5, 2001 9/11 Commission Report Card rating the actions of the President and Congress in their response to the Commission’s findings and recommendations.

### Assessment/Reflection

Students write reflection on how they think 9/11 changed our country. Since most students were too young to remember 9/11, it may be difficult for them to understand what has changed. Teacher can suggest that they ask their parents what they think has changed. Students conclude reflection by thinking about what they perceive as threats to security in the U.S. This initial writing for the course should prompt them to come up with wide range of ideas and to identify areas they think merit attention of government officials charged with providing security for the nation.

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### Common Core Alignments

*This lesson can be adjusted for use with other grade levels as well and aligns to the following standards:*

#### Reading Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies

##### Key Ideas and Details

Standard 1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

- Students will be using textual evidence from the graphic story of 9/11, from the Frontline Film Clip and from the redacted CIA document in order to analyze those texts and determine how the events of 9/11 came to be and whether the United States government should have acted differently.

Standard 3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.



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- Students will look at several different documents, including a film clip, which explore the question of how the events of 9/11 came to pass. They will need to acknowledge where the texts leave matters uncertain, most notably with the redacted CIA document which deliberately leaves questions unanswered. They will need to analyze these documents and evaluate the uses and limitations of each.

### **Craft and Structure**

Standard 4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text

- Students will be exploring particular words and phrases in the redacted CIA document and will be questioning, analyzing, and discussing how these particular words conjure certain associations and affect the meaning of the text as a whole.

Standard 6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

- Students will be looking at several documents which explore the history and impact of 9/11. They will need to evaluate and analyze how different documents treat the issue differently or explore different aspects of the issue and will need to challenge each source with other evidence.

### **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas**

Standard 9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

- Students will be integrating information about the history and impact of 9/11 from a variety of different sources including in-class documents, teacher discussions and discussions with their parents and adults who lived through 9/11. They will then be using all of that information to form a more coherent understanding of 9/11 and will explain, in writing, how they think 9/11 has changed the United States.

### **Writing Standards for Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects**

#### **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**

Standard 9: Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

- Students will be using a variety of texts, both in class and for homework, in order to support a reflective analysis of how the events of 9/11 came to be and how they impacted the United States.