

REIMAGINING THE PAST

To create a series about the greatest race against time in the history of science, the writers of *Manhattan* had to look closely at the time period – the culture, the events, the mood of early 1940’s America – to understand how The Manhattan Project evolved and how it changed the lives of those who made it a success. In the process, they discovered that many of the social pressures that shaped those times can still be felt in American society today.

DISCOVERY

Here is some background on the main characters of *Manhattan*. You can learn more about their personalities by watching the series. Then use the resources provided in Activity 1 to research the history behind these fictional creations.



Robert Oppenheimer
The scientific director of The Manhattan Project, Oppenheimer is a brilliant theoretical physicist whose reputation and reserve allow him to manipulate the ambitions of the scientists under him and deflect the demands of his military superiors.



Colonel Emmett Darrow
Darrow joins *Manhattan* for Season 2 as the commanding officer at Los Alamos. He is a man with strong religious convictions who feels compelled by God to bring about the atomic age.



Frank Winter
Leader of the team tasked with developing an implosion technique for detonating the atomic bomb, Frank is a scientific genius driven by conviction whose personal code of duty can place him in conflict with authority.



Liza Winter
Frank’s wife, Liza holds a Ph.D in botany. She is concerned about whether living in Los Alamos is healthy and if the residents are in physical danger.



Charlie Isaacs
The youngest scientist at Los Alamos, Charlie leads development of a rival method for detonating the bomb until he is suddenly assigned to lead Frank’s team and placed in charge of the program.



Abby Isaacs
Charlie’s wife, Abby is accustomed to suburban Boston and regrets their move to Los Alamos with its invasive security measures and petty professional jealousies. But she takes a different view when Charlie takes charge of the program.

How does *Manhattan*’s Robert Oppenheimer compare to the real historical figure? How does Colonel Darrow compare to the real military commander of Los Alamos, General Leslie Groves? Compare Frank Winter and Charlie Isaacs to the real leader of the implosion team, Seth Neddermeyer, and the scientist who was appointed to replace him, George Kistiakowsky. Use your research to explore how reimagining history as drama can bring the feel and feelings of the past back to life.

DISCUSSION

Based on the information you have gathered, analyze and debate the following topics:

- Los Alamos was a secret community. Discuss the toll secret-keeping had on the married couples in Los Alamos. What was its toll on friendships between the scientists working on the project? On relationships between the scientists and their military colleagues? Can secrecy ever strengthen the bonds between members of a social group?
- Hundreds of women played a part in The Manhattan Project, including several who worked on development of the bomb at Los Alamos. Consider how women were treated at Los Alamos. Was this on par with how they were treated by American society as a whole during World War II?
- Some historians regard The Manhattan Project as the first example of what has come to be called “big science” — that is, large-scale scientific research funded and directed by government. How involved should the government be in terms of overseeing scientific research? What pressures does government place on scientists? Is there room for intellectual freedom in government-funded research?
- How were individuals who had been involved in The Manhattan Project received by their fellow Americans when they returned to mainstream society? How would you have treated people involved in the creation of the atomic bomb?

MANH(A)TTAN

HOW MUCH EVIL DOES IT TAKE TO DO GOOD?

SEASON 2 PREMIERES ON WGN AMERICA TUESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 9PM/8C

