

Steps to War

MAIN IDEA

The rise of dictators in Europe and Asia led to World War II.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Aggressive rulers still threaten peace today.

TERMS & NAMES

fascism	Axis
Adolf Hitler	appeasement
Nazi Party	Lend-Lease Act
Joseph Stalin	Pearl Harbor

ONE AMERICAN'S STORY

One of George Messersmith's duties as a U.S. diplomat in Austria in the 1930s was to watch events in Central Europe closely. What he saw happening in Germany worried him.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

The National Socialist [Nazi] regime in Germany is based on a program of ruthless force, which program has for its aim, first, the enslavement of the German population to a National Socialist social and political program, and then to use the force of these 67 million people for the extension of German political and economic sovereignty over South-Eastern Europe—thus putting it into a position to dominate Europe completely.

George Messersmith, quoted in *The Making of the Second World War*



Adolf Hitler in a Harvest Festival crowd, 1937

As you will read in Section 3, Messersmith's predictions would prove true.

The Rise of Dictators

By the mid-1930s, dictators, or absolute rulers, had seized control in several countries—Italy, Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Their rise to power was due to economic and political factors that dated back to the end of World War I.

The treaties that ended the war had left many nations feeling betrayed. Japan and Italy, for example, had helped to win the war. However, both were dissatisfied by the peace treaties. Italy gained less territory than it wanted. Japan felt ignored by the European powers. Of the losing countries, Germany was treated the most severely. The winners stripped Germany of more than 10 percent of its territory and all of its overseas colonies. The winners also forced Germany to disarm. And they made Germany pay for war damages and accept responsibility for the war.



Taking Notes

Use your chart to take notes about conflicts leading to World War II.



Connections TO SCIENCE

GERMAN SCIENTISTS

Many scientists left Germany or gave up their German citizenship after the Nazis took power. The most famous German scientist to do so was the physicist Albert Einstein (below).

Einstein, a German Jew, was visiting the United States when Hitler took control of Germany in 1933. Einstein announced he would not return home. "I shall live only in a country where civil liberty, tolerance, and equality of all citizens before the law prevail," he said. Einstein played a key role in convincing President Roosevelt to support research that would lead to the development of nuclear weapons.



Meanwhile, World War I had left the economies of Europe in ruins. Both sides emerged from the war heavily in debt. There was some economic growth in the 1920s. But the world economic situation collapsed with the Great Depression of the 1930s. Mass unemployment caused widespread unrest. Many Europeans turned to new leaders to solve these problems.

Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin

One new leader was Benito Mussolini of Italy. Shortly after World War I, Mussolini began a political movement known as **fascism** (FASH•IZ•uhm). Fascists preached an extreme form of patriotism and nationalism that was often linked to racism. They oppressed people who did not share their views. In 1922, Mussolini became prime minister of Italy. In 1925, he established a dictatorship and took the title *Il Duce* (eel DOO•chay), or "the Leader."

In Germany, **Adolf Hitler** led the fascist National Socialist German Workers' Party, or **Nazi Party**. Throughout the early 1930s, the Nazis gained power by preaching German racial superiority. They also promised to avenge the nation's defeat in World War I. In 1933, the Nazis won control of the government. Hitler then overthrew the constitution. He called himself *der Führer* (duhr FYUR•uhr), or "the Leader."

In the Soviet Union, the Communists tightened their grip on power during the 1920s and 1930s. V.I. Lenin, who led the Communist takeover of Russia in 1917, died in 1924. His successor was **Joseph Stalin**. Under Stalin, the government tried to control every aspect of life in the nation. It crushed any form of opposition.

Dictators Seek to Expand Territory

While dictators were gaining power in Europe, the military was gaining increasing power in Japan. By 1931, the Japanese military pushed the island nation to grab more land and resources. That year, the Japanese attacked Manchuria, a province in northern China rich in natural resources. They conquered the region within months.

Both Italy and Germany also sought new territory. In 1935, Italy attacked Ethiopia, one of the few independent African nations. Italian troops roared in with machine guns, tanks, and airplanes. By the spring of 1936, *Il Duce* had his first conquest.

That same year, Hitler moved troops into the Rhineland, a region of Germany along the French border. Under the Treaty of Versailles, the Rhineland was to remain free of German forces. The French government was outraged by the treaty violation. However, it took no action. Nor did the League of Nations.

ReadingHistory

A. Finding Main Ideas What factors led to the rise of dictators after World War I?

Vocabulary

avenge: to get revenge

Background

In theory, Communists and fascists have opposing ideas about government and society. Despite these differences, Stalin and Hitler were both brutal dictators.



Background

Some Americans went to Spain to fight against the fascists. They were known as the Abraham Lincoln Battalion.

In 1936, Hitler and Mussolini formed an alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis. After this treaty, Germany, Italy, and their allies became known as the **Axis**. That year, a civil war erupted in Spain. The conflict pitted Spain's fascist-style military against the country's elected government. Hitler and Mussolini supplied the fascist forces with troops, weapons, and aircraft. In April 1939, Spain's army declared victory over the government and established a dictatorship.

In 1938, Hitler invaded Austria, home to mostly German-speaking peoples. He insisted that the Austrians wanted to be part of Germany. Many residents of Austria and Germany welcomed the unification.

HISTORY through ART

Spanish artist Pablo Picasso expresses the horrors of war in his painting *Guernica* (GUAHR•nih•keh), shown above. Picasso created this work after German planes destroyed much of the Spanish town of Guernica in April 1937, during the Spanish Civil War. Through Picasso's painting, the town became a symbol of the destructiveness of air warfare.

What characteristics of war does the painting bring out?

Appeasement at Munich

After taking over Austria, Hitler set his sights on the Sudetenland. This was a region of Czechoslovakia where many people of German descent lived. Czechoslovakia, though, did not want to give up the region.

France and Russia pledged their support to Czechoslovakia if Germany attacked. Suddenly, Europe teetered on the brink of another war. Britain's prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, stepped in. He met with Hitler in an attempt to calm the situation. But their talks made little progress.

On September 29, 1938, Hitler and Chamberlain met in Munich, Germany. By the next day, the two sides had made a breakthrough and signed an agreement. Germany gained control of the Sudetenland. In return, Hitler promised to stop seeking any more territory.

The Munich Agreement was an example of the British and French policy known as **appeasement**. Under this policy, they met Germany's demands in order to avoid war. Chamberlain returned home from Munich and triumphantly announced that he had achieved "peace in our time."

Others, however, disagreed with appeasement. Winston Churchill reportedly wrote of the agreement: "[Britain and France] had to choose between war and shame. They chose shame. They will get war, too."

ReadingHistory

B. Analyzing Points of View
What were the different points of view about the policy of appeasement?

Germany Starts the War

Hitler soon broke the promise he had made in Munich. In March 1939, his troops moved in and conquered the rest of Czechoslovakia. The *Führer* then declared his intent to seize territory from Poland. Britain and France warned that an attack on Poland would mean war.

Britain and France assumed they had an ally in Stalin. After all, the Soviet Union and Germany were bitter enemies. However, in August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a nonaggression pact. In it, they agreed not to declare war on each other. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Great Britain and France declared war on Germany two days after the invasion of Poland. World War II had begun.

The Germans introduced a new method of warfare known as *blitzkrieg* (“lightning war”). It stressed speed and surprise in the use of tanks, troops, and planes. German forces drove deep into Poland. As Germany conquered western Poland, the Soviet Union invaded from the east. In less than a month, Poland fell to the invading armies.

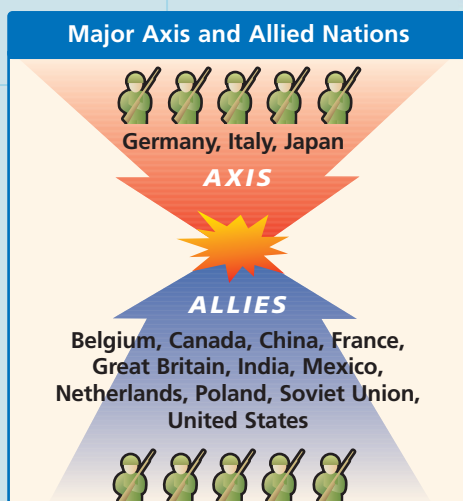
In April 1940, Hitler conquered Denmark and overran Norway. A month later, Germany launched a *blitzkrieg* against Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. British and French troops could do little to stop the advancing Germans.

ReadingHistory

C. Making

Inferences Why do you think Stalin signed a nonaggression pact with Hitler?

World War II in Europe, 1939–1941



GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER

Interpreting Maps

- 1. Movement** In which direction did the Germans attack in 1940? in 1941?
- 2. Place** Which European nations were neutral in World War II?



As each nation surrendered, British soldiers retreated to the French seaport of Dunkirk on the English Channel. Under heavy German bombardment, British vessels evacuated nearly 340,000 British, French, and Belgian troops.

In June 1940, the Germans launched a major offensive against France. In less than two weeks, they reached Paris. Days later, France surrendered. Hitler believed that Great Britain would seek peace after France fell.

Even though France had fallen, the British had no intention of quitting. Churchill, the new British prime minister, declared, “We shall defend every village, every town, and every city.” Hitler soon made plans to invade Britain. To do so, however, he needed to destroy Britain’s Royal Air Force, often called the RAF. In the summer of 1940, the German air force, or Luftwaffe (LUFT•VAHF•eh), and the RAF fought in the skies over Britain.

German planes also unleashed massive bombing attacks on London and other civilian targets. By September, however, the Battle of Britain had left Hitler frustrated. The RAF was holding off the Luftwaffe. And despite constant bombing, the British people did not surrender.



British civilians sleep in a subway station being used as an air raid shelter during the Battle of Britain in 1940.

Germany Attacks the Soviet Union

While Hitler’s forces conquered Western Europe, Stalin’s troops invaded Finland in November 1939. The Soviets then seized the countries of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania along the Baltic Sea. Despite their partnership, Hitler and Stalin distrusted each other. Hitler feared Soviet ambitions in Europe. He also wanted Soviet wheat and oil fields.

As a result, Hitler invaded the Soviet Union in June 1941. German forces moved easily through the giant country. They inflicted heavy casualties on Soviet troops. Then Hitler made a major mistake. He decided not to concentrate all his forces against Moscow. Instead, he reinforced his armies heading north toward Leningrad and south toward the Crimean Peninsula. The Germans tried to capture Leningrad from September 1941 to January 1944. About one million citizens died, many from starvation. But the city never fell to the Germans.

As German troops approached Moscow in December 1941, they ran into the harshest Russian winter in decades. Many German soldiers suffered frostbite. German tanks and weapons broke down in the cold. The Nazi advance had ground to a halt, and Soviet forces drove the Germans back.

ReadingHistory

D. Making

Inferences

Why did Hitler attack the Soviet Union just months after signing the non-aggression pact?

The United States Aids the Allies

While the Nazis advanced, President Roosevelt tried to help the Allies by supplying them with arms and other materials. “We must be the great arsenal of democracy,” he declared. He proposed the **Lend-Lease Act** to address this issue. This measure allowed the United States to lend or lease raw materials, equipment, and weapons to the Allied nations. Congress approved the act in 1941. Under Lend-Lease, the United States sent about \$50 billion worth of war goods to the Allies.

America's HERITAGE

U.S.S. ARIZONA MEMORIAL

The U.S.S. *Arizona* suffered extensive damage during the attack on Pearl Harbor. The ship sank, and 1,177 of its crew died. The nation chose not to raise the ship. Instead, officials created a memorial (shown below) that sits above the sunken hull.

The names of all the crewmen who perished aboard the ship are carved on the memorial. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the attack, President George Bush visited the site and dropped flowers in the water above the ship.



Japan Attacks Pearl Harbor

In 1940, Japan joined the alliance with Germany and Italy. In 1941, an even more warlike government came to power in Japan. Its leader was Hideki Tojo (HEE•deh•kee TOH•JOH), an army general. The Tojo government made plans to invade the Dutch East Indies—a source of oil—and Asian territories.

In the eyes of Japan's rulers, only one thing stood in their way—the United States Navy. On December 7, 1941, Japanese warplanes bombed the huge American naval base at **Pearl Harbor** in Hawaii. Before the day was over, about 2,400 Americans—both servicemen and civilians—died. Many of the American warplanes and ships were destroyed or damaged.

President Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. He called December 7, 1941, “a date which will live in infamy.” The nation quickly united behind him. On December 11, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. In the next section, you will read about U.S. participation in the war in Europe.

ReadingHistory

E. Analyzing Causes What was the main source of conflict between Japan and the United States?

Section 1 Assessment

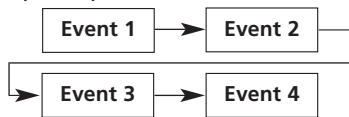
1. Terms & Names

Explain the significance of:

- fascism
- Adolf Hitler
- Nazi Party
- Joseph Stalin
- Axis
- appeasement
- Lend-Lease Act
- Pearl Harbor

2. Using Graphics

Use a diagram to review events that led to American participation in World War II.



Which of these events do you think was the most important? Why?

3. Main Ideas

- Who were the main Axis powers? Who were the main Allied powers?
- Why was Hitler unable to conquer Great Britain?
- What event prompted U.S. entry into the war?

4. Critical Thinking

Analyzing Causes Why do you think dictators such as Hitler and Mussolini were able to gain such power in the years before World War II?

THINK ABOUT

- the peace treaties of World War I
- the worldwide depression

ACTIVITY OPTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS GEOGRAPHY

Imagine that you are a citizen of one of the countries invaded by Germany. Write a **journal entry** describing the invasion or draw a **map** of the invasion route.