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DOCUMENT-BASED ACTIVITIES ON WORLD WAR II: THE WAR IN EUROPE

TEACHER INTRODUCTION

Description:

In this unit, students investigate various aspects of the European theater of World War II on a military, civilian, and political level. They use primary sources to develop a general concept of the war and its impact on world history. First-person accounts, speeches, and documents provide a variety of sources for students to analyze.

Unit Objectives:

Knowledge: students will

- understand the causes and major events of World War II in Europe
- evaluate how World War II affected Europe
- assess military and political strategies used by different countries during the war

Skills:

- analyze, evaluate, and interpret primary source documents
- discuss and debate issues
- use relevant and adequate evidence to draw conclusions

Prior Knowledge Required:

Students should have a basic knowledge of the major events of the 1930s and 1940s and know the political, social, and economic causes of World War II. They should know the principal leaders in the war, and have a basic knowledge of World War II.

Lesson Format:

Each lesson consists of two parts: a teacher page containing an introduction, objectives, URL(s) used in the lesson, teaching strategies, wrap-up questions, and an extension activity; and a reproducible student page with a brief introduction which sets the context for the lesson, URL(s) used, and questions to be answered about the source.

Note: This unit does not include any material on the Holocaust. An entire unit focusing specifically on the Holocaust is also available from Social Studies School Service.

Assessment:

Based on the time available, you may want to select which answers you want to assess in each activity. Most questions require short answers. Others will require a response of anywhere from a paragraph to a full page (or longer if preferred).

Suggested rubrics are included in the Appendix.

Additional Sources:

The Appendix contains answer keys, primary source documents, an annotated list of Web sites on World War II, rubrics, and supplementary materials available from www.socialstudies.com.

OVERVIEW: THE WAR IN EUROPE

In 1918, the Central Powers and Allies reached an armistice that ended World War I. Within a year, when the Allies met in the Hall of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles, they crafted a treaty which, rather than meeting Woodrow Wilson's goal of making the war "a war to end all wars" instead inflicted harsh punishment on the losing nations. Germany was stripped of its military capability as well as some of its territory. The Germans were also required to pay huge "indemnities," or war debts, to the Allies as part of the treaty. Germany looked for a way to regain its former glory and exact revenge.

Ironically for the Germans, the man who they came to see as their "savior" came in the guise of an Austrian-born German corporal who was a veteran of the "Great War." Adolf Hitler quickly rose through the ranks of the National Socialist German Workers Party (the Nazis), became the head of the party, leveraged the party's growing political power to get himself named chancellor, then used the machinery of the state to establish a dictatorship. By the mid-1930s he had become known simply as "der Fuehrer" (the leader). Hitler promised a new German Empire (a "Third Reich") and also promoted a "master race of supermen," which he called the Aryan race. To this end, he began to persecute minorities considered "undesirables," including Jews, homosexuals, gypsies, handicapped persons, and others.

Hitler moved to rearm Germany, which he saw as one of the most important steps in returning the nation to its former glory. Time after time, he violated provisions of the Versailles Treaty, and the Allied nations, who were weary of war and eager to prevent more conflict from breaking out, did nothing. Hitler forced Austria into an "Anschluss" (or union) and bluffed the Allies into giving him the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia (which itself was a nation created as a result of the Versailles Treaty). Later, he simply seized the rest of Czechoslovakia. Again, the Allies merely watched. Hitler also allied Germany with Italy under Mussolini and Japan under Hirohito in what would be called the "Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis." After entering into a "Non-Aggression" treaty with Germany's historic enemy, the Soviet Union, Hitler was now free to expand his territory eastward.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. France and England responded by declaring war on Germany, and World War II began. Early in the war, the German *blitzkrieg* (“lightning war”) was unstoppable. Within weeks, Hitler’s forces controlled most of central Europe, and had invaded France. Six weeks later, the French government declared Paris an “open city”, and French leaders surrendered in the same railroad car in which Germany had signed the armistice ending World War I in 1918. British troops in France were barely able to escape German capture due to a remarkable naval evacuation at Dunkirk led by a flotilla of civilian ships.

The capture of France was the high point for the Third Reich. Hitler’s next moves would not be as successful. First, he planned to subdue the British Isles with an air campaign followed by a land-based invasion. However, the Royal Air Force defeated the German Luftwaffe, and the invasion of Britain never materialized. An unconquered Britain provided air bases for Allied bombing missions against Axis targets, and also provided a jumping-off point for the Allied invasion of France, known as D-Day. Next, Hitler violated the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Treaty and invaded the USSR in June, 1941. Certain that German troops could defeat the Soviet Army in a matter of months, his army instead got bogged down near Moscow and was decimated by the severe Russian winter. Nearly 100,000 German soldiers died in the Russian campaign, also known as “Operation Barbarossa.”

In addition, when the United States declared war against Japan after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hitler honored his alliance with Japan and declared war on the United States. Now the Germans not only had to fight the Soviet Army on the Eastern front, but also had to deal with the British and the Americans on the Western front. The addition of American military forces and materiel helped start to turn the tide of the war, and also provided resources for the D-Day invasion. More than 150,000 troops along with 4000 landing craft, 600 warships, and 11,000 planes participated in the largest land-sea-air operation in world history. Within weeks of the landing at Normandy, the Allies had liberated Paris, and the final push into Germany itself began. It was during this period that Italy surrendered to the Allies and Mussolini was executed by a mob of Italian partisans.

Slowed only by the Germans' final counterattack in the "bulge" of the advancing Allied lines, the Allies pushed further and further eastward. With the British and American armies along with the Free French pushing from the west, and the Soviet army advancing from the East, the Nazis were in a hopeless position. In order to smash German resistance and morale (as well as to facilitate the resupplying of Allied troops), the Allies ordered firebombing raids on several German cities, including nonindustrial cities such as Hamburg and Dresden that were not a large part of the German war effort.

American and Soviet troops finally met up at the Elbe River and celebrated; meanwhile, Hitler committed suicide in his *Fuehrerbunker* by taking poison and then shooting himself, rather than risk capture by the Soviet troops. His wife, Eva Braun, committed suicide by taking poison. According to most reports, officers doused both bodies with gasoline, and burned them. The Germans officially surrendered in May, 1945.

Allied troops also discovered horrifying evidence of the Nazis' "final solution" when they liberated concentration camps in Germany, Poland, and elsewhere. Nearly six million Jews as well as six million other "undesirables" had been placed in slave labor camps or exterminated in death camps throughout central Europe. Survivors liberated from the camps were in pitiful shape: soldiers found them weakened by disease and starvation and living in filthy conditions

Unprecedented trials to prosecute "crimes against humanity" were held in Nuremberg between 1945 and 1949. An international tribunal of jurists presided over trials in which several high-ranking Nazis were sentenced to death, while others were sentenced to long prison terms. Other Nazi leaders attempted to escape capture. Adolf Eichmann fled Germany and lived in Argentina for several years before being captured by an Israeli commando team, returned to Israel to stand trial for war crimes, and executed in the early 1960s.

A few months after the war in Europe ended, the Pacific war ended with the unconditional surrender of Japan after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and

Nagasaki. The total cost of the war was staggering. More than 70,000,000 people fought in World War II, and more than 55,000,000 military personnel and civilians died. The Soviet Union alone lost 22,000,000 people, while nearly eight million Germans and two million Japanese died. World War II marked the end of widespread fascism but witnessed the beginning of the Cold War, in which the former Allied nations (with the United States leading the charge) found themselves competing against the aims of the Soviet Union and communism in Europe and Asia.

Appeasement Teacher Page

Overview:

Throughout the 1930s, the government of Nazi Germany sought to redress what it perceived as wrongs perpetrated against it in the Treaty of Versailles. As Hitler gained control, he violated provisions of the treaty by rearming Germany and by forcing a union (an *Anschluss*) with Austria. The Allies did nothing to counter these moves. By 1938, Hitler had turned his attention to Czechoslovakia, a nation that had been created through the Treaty of Versailles from the old Austro-Hungarian empire. Most important to Hitler was the Sudetenland, a mountainous region that was inhabited by three million German-speaking people. Hitler threatened to seize the Sudetenland.

Great Britain and France had vowed to protect the Sudetenland from German aggression, and war appeared likely. However, Hitler invited British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Edouard Daladier to Munich to meet and settle the crisis. Eager to avoid war, and assured by Hitler that the Sudetenland would be his last territorial demand, Chamberlain and Daladier signed the Munich Pact, which gave Hitler the Sudetenland without a shot being fired. While many cheered Chamberlain's assertion that the Munich Pact represented "peace for our time," some, including Winston Churchill, believed the British had adopted a shameful policy of appeasement in which they gave up principles to pacify an aggressor. In Churchill's words, "Britain and France had to choose between war and dishonor. They chose dishonor. They will have war."

Churchill's statement turned out to be prophetic. Within weeks, Hitler tore up the Munich Pact and seized the rest of Czechoslovakia, then signed a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Britain and France responded by declaring war. World War II had begun.

Objectives:

Students will:

- read primary sources regarding appeasement and judge appeasement as a political strategy
- determine cause and effect regarding the Munich agreement and appeasement
- relate the effects of the Munich agreement to current events

Web Sites Used in this Lesson:

<http://library.byu.edu/~rdh/eurodocs/uk/peace.html> is a transcript of the speech British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made as he stepped off the airplane upon his return from Munich as well as remarks made in front of 10 Downing Street later that evening. (This is the famous "peace for our time" statement.)

<http://138.110.28.9/acad/intrel/munich.htm> is a transcript of the Parliamentary debate regarding the Munich agreement. Students will need to scroll down the page to find remarks by Winston Churchill, who was a member of the House of Commons at the time.

Strategies:

Open the discussion by asking the class when compromise may be good and when it may not serve the best interests of a nation. Next, have the class discuss the Munich Pact, specifically in terms of why Germany felt the Sudetenland desirable and why the Allies responded to this demand in the manner they did. As part of the discussion, you may wish to show the historical map at

<http://sorrel.humboldt.edu/%7Erescuers/book/Chlup/chlupgif/czechmap2.html>, which shows the Sudetenland and how the rest of the partitioning of Czechoslovakia was accomplished.

Distribute copies of Chamberlain's speech upon his return from Munich as well as Churchill's speech along with the student questions, or have students go to the Web sites with these documents.

Student answers for questions one through six can be one or two sentences. Answers for question seven can range in length from a single paragraph to an entire page, depending on time available.

Wrap-Up:

Lead the students in a discussion of what the result might have been had Chamberlain not appeased Hitler at Munich, and had decided to declare war instead.

Extension Activity:

Either individually or in groups, have students research and report on instances where U.S. or world leaders have repudiated appeasement as a policy when dealing with a foe. (Two examples that might be used include the Gulf War and the Cuban Missile Crisis.)

Appeasement Student Worksheet

Introduction:

It's often good policy to work out disputes with an opponent by negotiation or compromise. In the American legal system, settlements are reached frequently without going to trial. Many schools also provide "peer mediation" services in which students help each other settle issues and arguments. However, at times compromise can be a dangerous tactic. A good example of this occurred with the 1938 Munich Pact, when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and French Premier Edouard Daladier gave in to the demands of Nazi Dictator Adolf Hitler in order to avoid war. They ceded a portion of Czechoslovakia called the Sudetenland to Germany in the hope that Hitler would not demand further territory. However, they were wrong: a few weeks later Hitler seized the rest of Czechoslovakia, then signed a non-aggression treaty with the Soviet Union. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, and Britain and France responded by declaring war. World War II had begun.

Directions:

"Peace for Our Time"

Go to <http://library.byu.edu/~rdh/eurodocs/uk/peace.html> and read the remarks of Prime Minister Chamberlain as he returned from Munich. Answer the following questions.

1. As he disembarked from the plane, Chamberlain said that "the method of consultation" would be used to deal with other questions that involved England and Germany. What do you think he meant by this?
2. Chamberlain goes on to say "we are determined to continue our efforts to remove possible sources of difference, and thus to contribute to assure the peace of Europe." Speculate on what sources of difference Chamberlain may have envisioned.
3. Chamberlain concludes by stating he "believes (the agreement) is peace *for our time*." Do you believe Chamberlain was overly optimistic, or that he had legitimate reason to believe that Hitler would follow the agreement? Explain your answer.

The British Parliamentary Debate on the Munich Agreement

Next, go to <http://138.110.28.9/acad/intrel/munich.htm> and read Winston Churchill's speech from the Parliamentary debate on the Munich agreement. (Note: it will be necessary to scroll down the page to find Churchill's speech.) Answer the following questions:

4. In the opening paragraph, Churchill states bluntly, "we have sustained a total and unmitigated defeat, and that France has suffered even more than we have." Later in the speech, he notes, "we are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude..." Do you think this statement was based on military or political facts, or was it partisan rhetoric said as a member of the opposition party? In a few sentences, defend your position.
5. At various parts of Churchill's speech, Viscountess Astor, who makes comments such as "Nonsense," and "Rude," interrupts him. Do you think members of the U.S. Congress would interrupt one another and say similar things during debate over a bill or treaty? Why or why not?
6. In other remarks, Churchill notes that with the Munich agreement "Britain and France had to choose between war and dishonor. They chose dishonor. They will have war." Based on what you have read in the Parliamentary debates, do you think Churchill's view was a popular view? Speculate on what political risks Churchill might have faced by making such statements.
7. Note that no representatives from the Czech government nor from the Soviet government were present at the Munich conference, nor did they sign the documents giving the Sudetenland to Germany. Do you believe it was fair for Britain and France to decide the future of Czechoslovakia without giving the Czechs a voice in the negotiations? Since it bordered Czechoslovakia, should the Soviet Union have been included in the talks? Write a "point-counterpoint" article discussing both sides of this issue. Be sure to include your own opinion as to whether the process was fair.