

Balance of Power After World War II Teacher Pages

Overview

This activity is designed to reinforce and expand students' prior knowledge of events in Europe after the end of World War II. After an introduction, students orient themselves with a polar outline map of Europe, the Soviet Union, and North America. Next, in a series of steps, students identify the countries that were members of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and the Warsaw Pact and check their answers from the digital map. They then discuss how events after World War II led to the formation of NATO, and how this, in turn, led to the formation of the Warsaw Pact. Students are then assessed on what they learned from the map activity. The lesson provides options for individual or group work and assessment and is designed to reinforce and expand upon prior knowledge.

Time Required

30–50 minutes

National History Standards

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

Historical Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

United States Era 9, Standard 2A: Evaluate the “flawed peace” resulting from World War II and the effectiveness of the United Nations in reducing international tensions and conflicts.

National Geography Standards

Standard 1: How to use maps and other geographic representations, tools, and technologies to acquire, process, and report information from a spatial perspective

Standard 2: How to use mental maps to organize information about people, places, environments in a spatial context

Standard 13: How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

Enduring Understanding

The formation of alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Warsaw Pact resulted from increased tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States and its allies after World War II.

Essential Question

Why were the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances formed?

Procedure

Note: The following directions are written for a whole-class activity. If you wish, you may instead use the student handout and have students work individually or in small groups on the activity.

1. Hand out the outline version of the map to students. Have students look carefully at the map's configuration. Ask them why this map looks different than most world maps they've seen.
2. Ask students to do the following:
 - Locate the center point of this map and label it.
 - Label the hemisphere this map shows.
 - Label the Soviet Union, Canada, the United States, and Europe.
3. Next, ask students to identify which were the dominant countries at the end of World War II. Ask them to label these countries on their map. Ask them if they can recall the political systems of the Soviet Union and the U.S. Remind students that the Soviet Union was a communist nation and that the United States was a capitalist one. Also remind students that the Soviet Union had been an ally of the U.S. during World War II, but relations between the two countries had cooled after the war.
4. Read the "Historical Context" section to the class to set the stage for the activity. Make sure students understand the words and terms in bold.
5. Using a whiteboard, projector, or another display device, show the class the "Balance of Power After World War II" map, but with all layers turned off except the "Title/legend," "Rivers/lakes," and "Nations" layers.
6. Have students outline or color the countries that originally belonged to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Turn on the layer for the "NATO members in 1948" and have students check the accuracy of their outlines on their individual maps.
7. Have students outline or color with a different color those nations that weren't original NATO members, but that had joined by 1955. Turn on the layer for the "NATO members by 1955" and have students check the accuracy of their outlines on their individual maps.
8. Have students use another color to outline or color the Warsaw Pact members as of 1955. Turn on the "Warsaw Pact members" layer and have students check the accuracy of their outlines. To reinforce that the rest of the world were neither aligned with NATO or the Warsaw Pact, turn on the "Non-aligned nations" layer.
9. Turn on the "Inset map" layer, which brings up a map called "Communist Control in Eastern Europe," and have students look closely at it. Ask them to look at the dates when many of these countries came under communist control. Ask students what relationship they see between the formation of NATO and these countries falling under Soviet control.
10. Ask students to speculate as to why the Soviet Union organized the Warsaw Pact after the formation of NATO, then ask them to speculate why other nations (such as West Germany and Turkey) joined NATO by 1955.

Historical Context

Though the United States and the Soviet Union were **allies** during World War II, relations soon **soured** after the war as both countries tried to rebuild Europe in their own **political image**: the United States helped set up **capitalistic democracies** and the Soviet Union established **communism** in the countries of eastern Europe. The Soviet Union had suffered greatly during the war and wanted to make sure its neighboring countries would never again be a threat. The U.S. had been reluctantly drawn into the war after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor and wanted to make sure that America and its allies were protected from any further **aggression** by any country. This need for **national security** led to the formation of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)** and the **Warsaw Pact**.

Assessment

Based on what they've learned from the map, have students write a paragraph on the developing tension between former allies the United States and the Soviet Union after World War II. Have them explain why the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances formed.

Extensions

1. Have students turn their map assessment into a timeline with brief explanations of each country's entry into either NATO or the Warsaw Pact.
2. Have students look into the reasons for the Soviet Union's takeover of eastern Europe. What were some of the historic and strategic reasons for this? Why did the United States and its allies feel that these Soviet actions posed a threat? How did these events lead to the Cold War?