

## Why did World War II break out in 1939?

World War II (WWII) is the deadliest conflict in human history, leading to the deaths of over 70 million people. It lasted from 1939 to 1945 and involved nearly every country in the world. This worksheet will help you understand why WWII broke out in 1939 and what the causes of the war were.

### The Invasion of Poland

**Instructions:** Read the two paragraphs and answer the questions about them in your books.



Since Adolf Hitler had come to power in **1933**, Germany had been building up its military strength. Germany had also joined with Austria and occupied Czechoslovakia. As you will know from the **Appeasement** work-sheet, the UK and France (the **Allies**) did little to stop Germany. This encouraged Hitler to move onto his next target: Poland. He wanted to conquer Poland because some German-speaking people lived there and because he wanted more **Lebensraum** ("living space") for Germany. Realising Hitler needed to be stopped, on **31 March 1939** the UK and France guaranteed Polish independence - this meant they would declare war on Germany if they invaded Poland. Hitler did not take this promise seriously, and thought the UK and France would do nothing.

On **1 September 1939** German soldiers invaded Poland, starting WWII. Two days later the UK, France, Australia, New Zealand and India declared war on

Germany. They were unable to help Poland. Germany sent 1.5 million soldiers into Poland. Poland had an army of 1 million and their soldiers fought bravely, but they were caught by surprise and the Germans advanced rapidly. The Germans also had three times as many tanks and six times as many airplanes. To make matters worse, on **17 September 1938** the USSR invaded Poland from the east. Fighting ended on **6 October 1939**. Poland's territory was divided between Germany, Lithuania, Slovakia and the USSR.

1. Why do you think Hitler believed UK and France would do nothing if he invaded Poland? (1 sentence)
2. Why do you think it would have been difficult for the Allies to help Poland in 1939? (1 sentence - hint: look at the map)
3. Write down three reasons the Germans defeated Poland.
4. What four nations gained land after Poland was defeated?

**Challenge:** To what extent did the policy of **appeasement** contribute to the Invasion of Poland? (1-3 sentences)

### Militarism and Fascism

**Militarism** and **fascism** are two words it is important to understand. Read the boxes about them and answer the two questions underneath in your books.

#### MILITARISM is a belief in:

- Importance of a strong military (army, navy, air force)
- Aggressive use of military force against other countries, including invading them
- Use of military force (not discussion) to solve problems between countries

#### FASCISM is a belief in:

- Single strong ruler (**dictator**) with only one political party allowed and no democracy
- Government should closely control every part of people's lives
- Idea your nation/race is better/stronger than others (**ultranationalism**)

1. How would **militarism** make a country more likely to become involved in war? (1 sentence)
2. How would **fascism** make a country more likely to become involved in war? (1 sentence)

## Main Task: The Causes of WWII

### Instructions:

1. Read through the boxes below, which are about the causes of WWII
2. Using the boxes (and the information about the Invasion of Poland) make a timeline of events leading up to WWII in your books - make sure it is in **chronological** order. (Hint: all dates are in **bold**.)
3. Decide which causes were most important in starting WWII - for the 3 most important causes write \*\*\* above their boxes; for the next 3 most important write \*\* above their boxes; for the 3 least important write \* above their boxes.
4. Re-read the 3 causes you have decided were most important to starting WWII. For each of them explain in 1-3 sentences, in your books, why you thought it was important. (Hint: it could start: 'I think ... was an important cause of WWII because...')

**Challenge:** Imagine it is 1939. You are working for the British government. Write a one-paragraph report for the Prime Minister reflecting on why WWII started. You should mention the events and causes in this worksheet, as well as from the **Appeasement** one.

#### The Treaty of Versailles (1919)

- The Treaty was harsh on Germany, forcing it to take total blame for WWI, limit their military, pay reparations and lose territory
- This made many Germans want revenge
- Promising to 'tear up' the Treaty was one of the main reasons Hitler and the Nazis became popular and won power in Germany

#### Failure of the League of Nations

- The **League of Nations** was an international organisation founded in **1920**
- It aimed to make countries settle disagreements through peaceful discussion instead of warfare
- It was not very effective - one reason was that it did not have any way of forcing countries to listen to it
- As a result the League of Nations could do little to stop WWII

#### German Militarism

- Hitler built up Germany's military strength, increasing the size and power of its army, navy and air force
- He wanted to unite all German-speaking people under his rule
- He wanted to gain **lebensraum** ('living space') for the German people by conquering land in Eastern Europe

#### The Great Depression

- After the **Wall Street Crash (1929)** the world entered into the **Great Depression**
- During the 1930s millions of people across the world were unemployed - leading to many become homeless and going hungry
- Many people turned to **fascist** groups for solutions to their problems
- Instead of working together, countries began to look out for their own interests

#### Failure of Appeasement

- Appeasement was the policy UK and France followed to try and stop war breaking out with Germany and Italy
- French and British leaders did little to stop German and Italian aggression, hoping it would keep the peace - e.g. the **Munich Agreement (September 1938)**
- Appeasement may have just encouraged Hitler and Mussolini to carry on their aggressive actions

#### Italian Militarism

- Italy's fascist leader Mussolini wanted to make the country more powerful
- Italy conquered Ethiopia in **May 1936** and Albania in **April 1939**
- Italy signed an **alliance** (agreement to support each other) with Germany on **22 May 1939**
- Italy officially entered WWII (on Germany's side) in **June 1940**

#### Rise of Fascism

- During the 1920s and 1930s **fascist** rulers gained power many countries (including Italy and Germany)
- Fascist rulers were aggressive and willing to use military force to get their way, making war more likely

#### Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact

- This was an agreement between Germany and USSR made on **August 1939**
- It is named after the two men who negotiated it
- It was an agreement that they would not fight each other
- It meant that Germany could invade Poland without having to worry about USSR declaring war on them

#### Japanese Militarism

- Japan wanted to gain access to natural resources like coal, iron and oil
- To do this Japan invaded China in **July 1937** as part of their ambition to be the leading country in Asia
- In **September 1940** Japan entered into an alliance with German and Italy
- Japan officially entered WWII in **December 1941**