

Reading Essentials and Study Guide



World War II and the Holocaust, 1939–1945

Lesson 5 World War II Ends

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Why do political actions often lead to war? How does war impact society and the environment?

Reading HELPDESK

Academic Vocabulary

ideological based on a set of beliefs

assure to make certain of something; to guarantee

Content Vocabulary

partisan a resistance fighter in World War II

Cold War the period of political tension following World War II and ending with the fall of Communism in the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s

TAKING NOTES: *Listing*

ACTIVITY As you read, use a table like the one below to list three of the major military events that brought an end to World War II and where they took place.

Event	Location

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IT MATTERS BECAUSE

The Allies had strengthened their positions and strategies by 1943. They had stopped the advances of both the Germans and the Japanese. Germany surrendered on May 7, 1945, and Japan surrendered on August 14 of the same year. The war ended, but political tensions, suspicions, and conflicts of ideas led to a new struggle—the Cold War.

Last Years of the War

Guiding Question *How did the tide of battle turn against Germany, Italy, and Japan?*

Germany, Italy, and Japan had started losing ground by the beginning of 1943. Axis forces in Tunisia surrendered on May 13, 1943. The Allies then crossed the Mediterranean Sea. They took the war to Italy, which Winston Churchill, prime minister of Great Britain, called the “soft underbelly” of Europe. First the Allies took control of the island of Sicily. Then they invaded mainland Italy in September.

The European Theater

After Sicily fell, Italy’s King Victor Emmanuel III arrested Mussolini, the prime minister. However, Mussolini escaped. The Germans liberated him in a daring air raid. German troops moved in and occupied much of Italy. Mussolini was then made the head of a German puppet state in northern Italy.

The Germans set up defense lines in the hills south of Rome. The Allies advanced up the Italian peninsula. Many soldiers were killed, but the Allies took Rome on June 4, 1944. By then, the Italian war had become secondary. The Allied forces focused on opening a long-awaited “second front” in western Europe.

The Allies had planned an invasion of France since the autumn of 1943. They would leave from Great Britain and cross the English Channel to northern France. On June 6, 1944, Allied forces under U.S. General Dwight D. Eisenhower landed on France’s Normandy beaches. It was history’s greatest naval (from the sea) invasion and became known as D-Day. The Allies fought their way past hidden underwater mines, dangerous barbed wire, and horrible machine gun fire.

The Germans responded slowly because they believed the invasion at Normandy was a diversion, or a military trick. They thought the real invasion would happen somewhere else. This gave the Allied forces time to set up a beachhead, or an area large enough to land soldiers and supplies. As a result, the Allies were able to land 2 million men and 500,000 vehicles in 3 months. Allied forces then began pushing inland. They broke through German defensive lines in France.

Allied troops liberated Paris by the end of August 1944. In December, Allied aircraft had been grounded because of bad weather, and Germans took the chance to launch a counter-offensive, an attack made in response to enemy attacks. They hoped to regain the seaport of Antwerp in Belgium. The Battle of the Bulge resulted. It was named for the “bulge,” or round area that the German attack caused in Allied lines of troops as German soldiers moved forward and Allied soldiers moved back. Both sides had suffered heavy losses by January 1945, but the Allied lines held. In March 1945, the Allied forces crossed the Rhine River and advanced into Germany. Allied armies in northern Germany moved toward the Elbe River at the end of April 1945. There they linked up with the Soviets, who were invading Germany from the east.

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The Soviets had come a long way since the Battle of Stalingrad in 1943. They accomplished these actions:

- The Soviets defeated the German forces at the Battle of Kursk (July 5–12), which became known as the greatest tank battle of World War II. Soviet forces now began a steady advance westward.
- The Soviets had reoccupied the Ukraine by the end of 1943.
- They had moved into the Baltic States (the nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) by early 1944. Soviet troops continued advancing along a northern front.
- They occupied Warsaw in January 1945.
- They entered Berlin in April. At the same time, Soviet troops along a southern front swept through Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria.

Allied forces liberated the concentration camps and death camps as they advanced into Nazi-occupied Europe. The Nazis tried to destroy some of the evidence of their horrifying acts before the Allies arrived. Even so, the Allies witnessed the Nazis' crimes against humanity.

By January 1945, Adolf Hitler had moved into a bunker, or underground shelter, which was 55 feet (almost 17 m) under Berlin. Hitler was consistent to the end in his anti-Semitism. In his final political statement, he blamed the Jews for the war. He wrote to German leaders, ordering them to continue the fight against the Jews.

On April 28, 1945, Italian **partisans**, or resistance fighters, shot Mussolini. Hitler committed suicide two days later on April 30. On May 7, 1945, Germany surrendered. The war in Europe was finally over.

The Asian Theater

The war in Asia continued. During 1943, U.S. forces were on the offensive and advanced across the Pacific. They and their allies continued their island-hopping campaign. (The campaign was to move closer and closer to Japan going from island to island.) At the beginning of 1945, the Allies advanced on the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. The control of these two islands would allow the Allies to get even closer to the main Japanese islands. Iwo Jima and Okinawa were of great strategic importance. Iwo Jima was essential to the air war on Japan. The small island had two airfields, which the Japanese used to attack Allied aircraft and to support their naval forces. The capture of Iwo Jima would lessen, or decrease, the Japanese threat. It could also aid in the invasion of the Japanese mainland. The Allies hoped that controlling Okinawa would provide them with a base near the mainland of Japan.

The Allies were victorious in the battles for both islands. However, the victories came at a large cost. Casualties were high on both sides of the battles. Many people began to fear even more losses if the war in the Pacific continued. This left Harry S. Truman, who had become president after Roosevelt died in April, with a difficult decision to make. Should he use newly developed atomic weapons to bring the war to an end? Scientists, including Enrico Fermi, had been working on a top-secret project called the Manhattan Project. It led to development of the atomic bomb.

Truman and his advisers were convinced that American troops would suffer many casualties if they were to invade Japan. At the time, only two atomic bombs were available, and the effectiveness of atomic bombs was not known.

Truman decided to use the bombs. The first bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. As a result, 190,000 of the city's 350,000 inhabitants were killed. Some died immediately, and others died later from the effects of radiation poisoning. Three days later, the United States dropped a second bomb on Nagasaki. Both cities were totally destroyed. The devastation led Emperor Hirohito to accept the Allied forces' demands for unconditional surrender on August 14, 1945.

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World War II was finally over. Seventeen million had died in battle. Perhaps another 20 million civilians had died. Some estimates place total losses as high as 60 million lives.

The dropping of the atomic bombs in Japan marked the beginning of the Nuclear Age. The whole world had witnessed the deadly potential of nuclear energy. As a result, other countries raced to build their own nuclear weapons. The Soviet Union set off its first atomic bomb four years later in August 1949. They started an arms race with the United States that would last for 40 years.



Reading Progress Check

Identifying What was the strategic importance of the “second front” that the Allies opened in western Europe?

Peace and a New War

Guiding Question *What led to the Cold War?*

No real peace followed the total victory of the Allies in World War II. Instead, total war was replaced with a period of political tensions known as the **Cold War**. The Cold War was an **ideological** conflict (different ideas about government) between the United States and the Soviet Union. This conflict dominated world affairs until the end of the 1980s.

Stalin, Roosevelt, and Churchill were the leaders of the Big Three (the Soviet Union, the United States, and Great Britain) of the Grand Alliance. They had met at Tehran in November 1943 to discuss strategy of the war. Their major tactical decision concerned the final attack on Germany. They planned the American-British invasion through France in the spring of 1944.

The acceptance of this plan had important consequences, or results. It meant that Soviet and British-American forces would meet in defeated Germany along a north-south dividing line. Soviet forces would liberate Eastern Europe. The Allies also agreed to a partition, or division, of postwar Germany.

The Big Three powers had met again at Yalta in southern Russia in February 1945. By then, Germany’s defeat was **assured**. The Western powers once believed that the Soviets were in a weak position. Now they faced the reality of 11 million Soviet soldiers who were going to take possession of Eastern Europe and much of central Europe.

Stalin was deeply suspicious of the Western powers. He feared the possibility of future Western aggression, or military attack. Stalin wanted a buffer to protect the Soviet Union. This meant setting up pro-Soviet governments along the Soviet Union’s borders. Roosevelt, on the other hand, favored the idea of self-determination for Europe. That is, he wanted liberated Europeans to create “democratic institutions of their own choice” through free elections.

Roosevelt thought he needed Stalin’s military help against Japan. To gain that help, Roosevelt agreed to give Stalin Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands, which were controlled by Japan. He also agreed to give Stalin two warm-water ports and railroad rights in Manchuria.

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The creation of the United Nations was a major American concern at Yalta. Both Churchill and Stalin accepted Roosevelt's plans for the establishment of a United Nations organization. They set the first meeting for April 1945 in San Francisco.

The leaders were less decisive about what to do with Germany and Eastern Europe. The Big Three agreed to divide Germany into four zones, one each for the United States, Great Britain, France, and the Soviet Union. Each nation would occupy and govern its own zone. Stalin compromised and agreed to free elections in Poland. However, it was clear that Stalin might not honor this provision for other Eastern European countries. The issue of free elections in Eastern Europe caused a serious split between the Soviets and the Americans. This split became more evident when the Big Three next met at Potsdam, Germany.

The Potsdam Conference of July 1945 began in mistrust. President Harry Truman demanded free elections in Eastern Europe. Stalin claimed that the governments that resulted would be anti-Soviet. He refused Truman's proposition. Stalin sought absolute security for the Soviets. Free elections would threaten his goal of controlling Eastern Europe. Soviet troops had freed Eastern Europe, and they were in control of the area at the time of the conference. As a result, it was clear that only an invasion by Western forces would force Stalin to compromise, but very few supported invading the Soviet Union.

The Allies did agree that Nazi leaders should be tried in courts for their crimes against humanity during the war. In 1945 and 1946, many Nazi leaders were tried and condemned at trials in Nuremberg, Germany. Trials were also held in Japan and Italy.

As the world worked to recover from the war, a new struggle was already beginning. Many Westerners believed Soviet policy was part of a worldwide Communist conspiracy, or secret plot to spread communism. The Soviets viewed Western, especially American, policy as global capitalist expansionism.

In March 1946, former British prime minister Winston Churchill gave a speech to an American audience. In it, he declared that "an iron curtain" had "descended across the continent" of Europe. As a result, Europe was divided into two hostile groups. Stalin claimed Churchill's speech was a "call to war on the USSR." Only months after the world's most devastating conflict had ended, the world seemed to be bitterly divided once again.



Reading Progress Check

Identifying Central Issues What was the major disagreement between the United States and the Soviet Union at the conclusion of World War II?
