

“The World Wars” Reading Questions

WATCH: [Overview Video](#) (if internet access)

READ: [Overview Article](#)

Summary

The Second World War emerged from an era of economic instability and disillusionment with democracy. But it was also caused by people with an ideology that emphasized violence, blamed others for their problems, and were willing to kill and persecute others to achieve their goals. The eventual victory by the Allied powers may have addressed some of these problems, but did it resolve the underlying issues that had caused the war?

1. What were some atrocities and terrible events of the Second World War?
2. What does the author argue was the most dangerous impact of the First World War?
3. What were some events that the author points to as leading to the Second World War?
4. According to the author, what two countries emerged strongest from the war, and what was their relationship?

Evaluating and Corroborating

1. The author of this article argues that is really hard to read about the atrocities of the Second World War. Why is it worth doing so, anyway?

READ: [The Global Story of the 1930s](#)

Summary

When we talk about the 1930s, we often think about the Great Depression. There were other things happening in the world during that decade, however, a lot of it connected to the Great Depression. Societies around the world reacted to and were affected by the economic crisis in very different ways. Poor countries and colonies faced exploitation and economic crisis due to falling demand for the materials and goods they produced and distributed around the world. Communist and socialist systems rose in popularity. And some societies responded with less appealing alternatives. Ideas like eugenics developed and helped lay the foundations for racist ideologies.

1. Why did the Great Depression, which started in the United States, spread all around the world?
2. How did a credit boom make the Great Depression worse?
3. How did the Great Depression affect colonized people and poor nations?

4. Why does the author argue that socialism rose in popularity?

Evaluating and Corroborating

1. In what ways did the economic crisis of the Great Depression and the rise of new technologies interact with fascism to cause the horrors of World War II?

READ: [Appeasement](#)

Summary

The failure of European leaders to stop the aggression of Germany, Italy, and Japan is widely criticized today. English prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, is most well-known for failing to keep Adolph Hitler from starting World War II. Chamberlain wasn't alone in wanting to prevent war—many people in France and Britain really did not want to fight another world war. This article examines how appeasement was viewed in the 1930s and how its memory has been used since.

1. What does “appeasement” mean in the context of this article?
2. Why did Neville Chamberlain pursue the policy of appeasement?
3. How did the policy of appeasement shape Hitler's ideas about the leaders of Britain and France?
4. How has the memory of appeasement been used since the end of the Second World War?

Evaluating and Corroborating

1. Do you think there is anything that liberal democracies like France and Britain could have done to prevent a war with fascist Germany?
2. Based on the chart in the article, at what point do you think Neville Chamberlain should have declared war on Germany?