

World War II

*A Half-Century of Crisis and
Achievement (1900–1945)*



War in Europe

Total war

War in the Pacific

The legacy of war

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Religion and thought



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will have learned about the war in Europe, and be able to answer the following key questions:

- What factors led to the outbreak of World War II?
- How did the alliances formed between Allied and Axis powers affect the course of the war?
- What strategies used by Hitler led to the fall of Europe?



In order to contextualize World War II, use this timeline to recap previous key historical events.

Either press on a date or drag the pointer along the timeline to find out information about what happened in each year.

Press **start** to begin.

start





The invasion of Poland

Beginning on September 1, 1939, the Poland Campaign was a joint invasion of Poland by Germany and the U.S.S.R. Claiming Polish troops engaged German forces in an area known as the Polish Corridor, Hitler seized the opportunity and invaded.

Within a month, Poland had been conquered and Polish territories were divided between the two conquering nations.



Having jointly promised to come to Poland's aid if it was invaded, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3. World War II had begun.



Can you match these wartime leaders
to their descriptions?

Press the information panels on the
right to see a photograph and a
quotation from each of them.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Following the declaration of war by Britain and France, Europe entered into a phase known as the **Phony War**, defined by a lack of military action on the part of the Allies.

Though minor skirmishes occurred, the only major action taken against the Germans was the dropping of leaflets in a propaganda war.

Meanwhile, the British and French focused on rearming and buying supplies from the U.S. who, at this point, refused to become embroiled in the conflict. Their **“Cash-and-Carry”** Neutrality Act allowed them to sell weapons to the Allies so long as the buyer paid cash and provided their own transportation.



Why did the U.S. require a “cash-and-carry” system?



The countries fighting in World War II were divided in the Axis powers (countries on the side of Hitler) and the Allied powers (countries opposing Hitler). How much do you know about the Allied and the Axis powers? Drag each name or fact to the correct box.
Press **start** to begin.

start





In a very short period of time, Germany was able to conquer the majority of mainland Europe. This was mostly due to their use of Blitzkrieg. Watch this animation to find out more about this type of warfare.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Why do you think Blitzkrieg was so effective?



The Phony war only lasted for about six months before the German offensive resumed. Watch this animation to learn about the early battles of WWII.

Press **start** to begin.

start





After the fall of their governments, many citizens throughout mainland Europe tried to rise up against Nazi occupation.

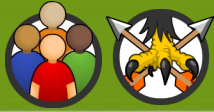


While their efforts were initially often disorganized and unsuccessful, as time went on, groups were able to devise systems of communication to share intelligence and launch attacks. Resistance organizations sprang up all over Europe.

Resistance groups targeted German lines of transportation and communication, and were crucial in disrupting German operations and supplying Allied forces with key information.

What was the difference between active resistance groups and passive resisters?





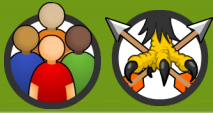
Operation Sea Lion



With the collapse of France, Hitler set his sights on Great Britain. The planned invasion of England was called **Operation Sea Lion**. Hitler ordered the **Luftwaffe** (the German Air Force) to commence a series of bombing raids, aimed at destroying the Royal Air Force and English infrastructure.

British citizens sprang into action, with thousands volunteering for the air force and the home guard. Actions were also quickly taken to change the face of the coastlines in order to prevent an invasion.





Look at this illustration of the changes that occurred on the home front during the Battle of Britain. See if you can identify the different changes, then press on the numbers to learn more.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Why do you think a British victory was so crucial?



The Battle of Britain

From August to October of 1940, the *Luftwaffe* bombarded British airfields, rail lines and military bases in an effort to weaken the U.K.'s ability to thwart an invasion.

The British, however, would not give in easily. Using their superior planes, the RAF impeded the Nazis' ability to successfully carry out bombing raids in what is known as the Battle of Britain.



Despite being outnumbered almost four to one, the RAF shot down far more planes than they lost and the Germans were unable to gain superiority over the British skies.