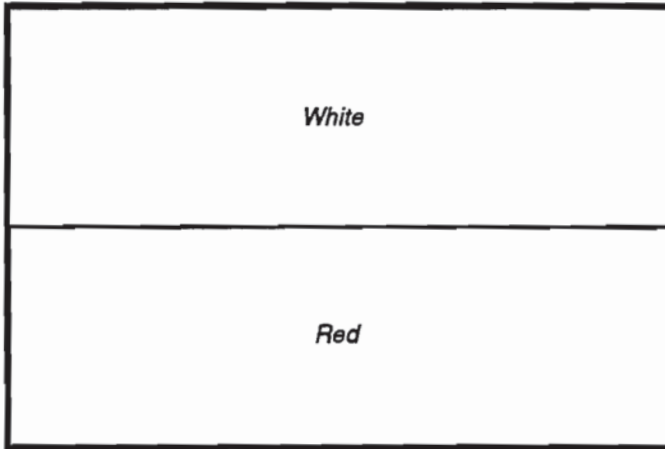


## Background Information on Poland

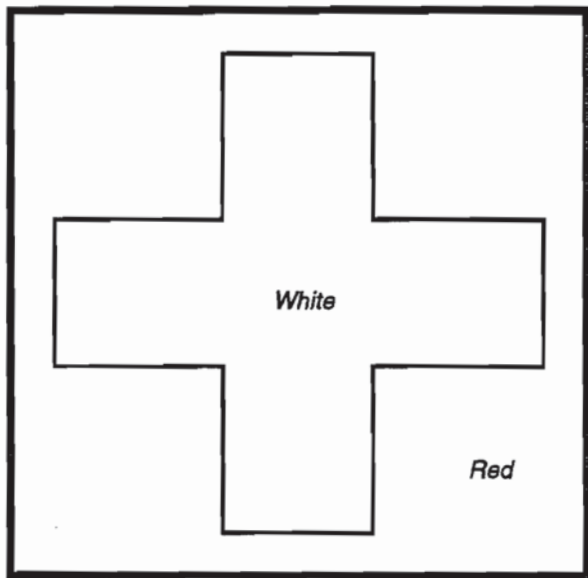


In 1919 the Versailles Treaty, which ended World War I between Germany and the Allies, created Poland as a landlocked country located between its traditional enemies, Germany and the Soviet Union. What little industry Poland had was destroyed in World War I, during which Poland lost over 800,000 soldiers and civilians. The Versailles Treaty gave Poland a strip of German land that gave it access to the Baltic Sea by way of the port city of Danzig. This strip also separated Eastern Germany from the main part of

Germany, which caused resentment among German nationalists. Poland was a largely agricultural, economically poor country that needed access to the sea for trade and defense against Germany and the Soviet Union. To counteract its difficult geographic position, Poland signed treaties with France and Great Britain. The rise of the Nazis made Germany a more dangerous enemy, so the Poles relaxed their position toward the Soviet Union and signed a defense agreement with the Soviets in 1934. Poland's main foreign policy goal became to defend itself against Germany.



## Background Information on Switzerland



In 1815 Switzerland's traditional neutrality (policy of not supporting any side or fighting in a war) was guaranteed by the leading powers of Europe at the Congress of Vienna. Switzerland did not participate in World War I, and its boundaries were unchanged as a result of the war. Switzerland is a confederation of 22 *cantons*, or states, situated high in the Alps between France, Germany, and Italy. Despite the fact that most Swiss are ethnically French, German, or Italian, Switzerland was able to maintain peace, neutrality, and independence during the traumatic events in neighboring European countries in the 1930s and 1940s. During this time, Switzerland was a wealthy country, with a traditionally

democratic society and an economy based on banking, commerce, and international diplomacy. Switzerland's main foreign policy goal was to continue to maintain its neutrality.



## Background Information on France

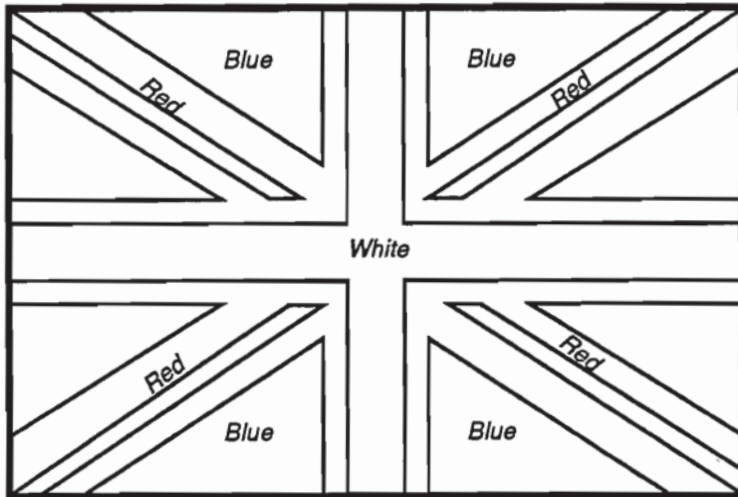
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France suffered greatly because of World War I, losing more than a million lives and 10 million acres of farmland, which was destroyed in the fighting. France also borrowed billions of dollars to help pay for the war. And four years of horrible warfare had an intense psychological effect on the French public. All these factors contributed to France's chief foreign policy goal after World War I, which was to avoid another war with Germany. To do this they

sought to limit the strength of Germany. France pushed to have the Versailles Treaty be as severe as possible against Germany, hoping to weaken its main enemy. In case Germany did become a threat, France constructed along the Franco-German border an elaborate system of defensive structures called the Maginot Line. France also signed defense treaties with Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Britain, to counter any rise in German power.



## Background Information on Great Britain

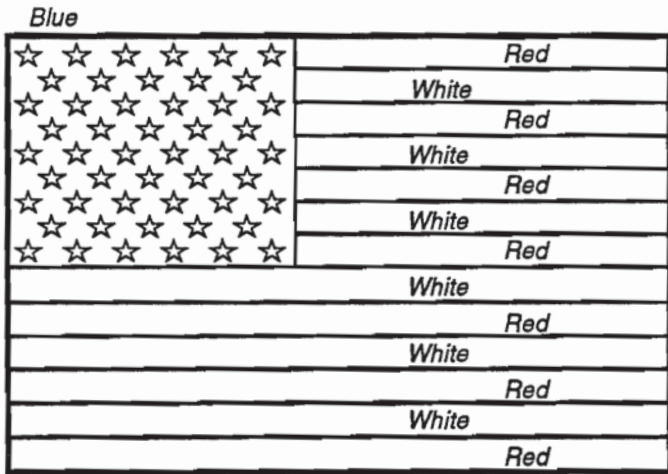


Great Britain suffered severe economic loss because of World War I. Britain's economy was based on overseas trade, but the British had lost nearly 40 percent of their merchant ships during the war. Other nations like the United States and Japan had begun to trade in Britain's place during the war, and after the war Britain faced new competition, which hurt British trading. Britain owed American businesses billions of dollars in war loans, and British unemployment rates

more than doubled in the early 1920s. To counter all of these harsh results of World War I, Britain felt it needed to protect its empire, the chief source of its economic riches. As a result, Britain's main foreign policy goal was to avoid another war like World War I. To do so, Britain maintained a strong navy, protected its colonies, and maintained strong ties with France, its last major European ally since Russia's government had fallen to the communists in 1917. Britain was happy to stay out of European problems if possible.



## Background Information on the United States

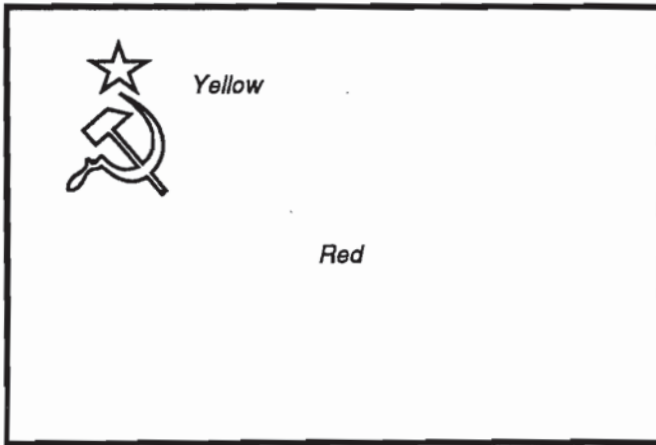


The United States had suffered the least of all the Allied countries in World War I. France and Great Britain lost more troops in a single battle than the United States lost in the whole war. And while European countries suffered economically from the war, the United States had benefited. During the first three years, while the United States was neutral, American businesses and banks loaned millions of dollars, and sold billions of dollars worth of war materials, to both the Allies and the

Central Powers. Unlike in Europe, the 1920s were a time of great economic success in the United States, and Americans wanted nothing to do with Europe and its troubles. This was reflected in the chief U.S. foreign policy goal of this era, called *isolationism*, which was to avoid involvement in another European war. Isolationist feelings increased in the early 1930s when the United States experienced a severe economic depression. The United States maintained relations with its ally Britain, but avoided any dealings with European problems.



## Background Information on the Soviet Union



By 1917 Russia was losing World War I to the Germans, and Russians on the home front were suffering horrible economic hardships (problems). In the spring of 1917 life became so difficult that Russian society disintegrated into chaos. The result was a revolution by the Bolsheviks, a radical group of Russian communists, who overthrew the government. A civil war ensued (followed) between the Bolsheviks, known as Reds, and the supporters of traditional Russian society, known as the Whites. The Reds won, and

the Bolsheviks began the long process of making the Soviet Union, as Russia became known, an industrial power—a difficult task because Russia was the least developed major nation in Europe. The leader of the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin, worked hard to build Soviet industry and economy. He realized that the rise of Hitler in Germany signaled the coming of another war. Stalin's primary objective was to avoid involving the Soviet Union in a major war until the country's economy was stronger. To do so he attempted to help European countries that were against Germany in order to delay the war and allow Soviet society to modernize itself.



## Event 1: The Czechoslovakia Crisis

When Czechoslovakia was created at the end of World War I, some 3.5 million ethnic Germans had been placed within its borders in a mineral rich, naturally defensible region known as the Sudetenland. In 1938 Hitler demanded the return of the Sudetenland to the Reich, or German government. He claimed that the Czech government was mistreating Germans in this region. Czechoslovakia turned to its ally France for support against Hitler's demand, and France turned to its ally Britain for consultation. At this point, Britain and France decided not to go to war over the Sudetenland, and on September 18 informed Hitler they would support self-determination (right to choose one's government) for Sudeten Germans. Hitler then decided that this was not enough; on September 22, he demanded complete annexation and military occupation of the Sudetenland.

**Critical-Thinking Question A:** How do you think your country responded to the Czechoslovakia Crisis?



A. Unconditionally supported Germany's demands



B. Proclaimed neutrality (not supporting either side)



C. Negotiated an agreement with Hitler that allowed Germany to take the Sudetenland if he promised to make no more demands on Czechoslovakia



D. Opposed Germany's demands but did not threaten to declare war on Germany if it tried to take the Sudetenland



E. Threatened to declare war on Germany if it tried to take the Sudetenland

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because

## Event 2: The Violation of the Munich Pact

To address the Czechoslovakia crisis, Britain, France, Germany, and Italy met in Munich, Germany, on September 29 for the Munich Conference. Britain and France wanted to strike a deal with Hitler to avoid war. They based this plan on a policy called *appeasement*, or making concessions to an aggressor to preserve peace. When Hitler agreed to the proposal that he exchange the right to occupy the Sudetenland for a promise that this would be his “last territorial demand in Europe,” the four nations signed a document known as the Munich Pact. Germany occupied the Sudetenland in October. But soon thereafter Hitler began pressuring Czech leaders, demanding that a new Czech government sympathetic to Germany be put in charge. Hitler threatened the Czech government with all-out war if it did not agree to his demands. The Czechs did not meet the demands, and on March 15, 1939, Germany broke the Munich Pact and occupied Czechoslovakia, annexing it the following day.

**Critical-Thinking Question B:** How do you think your country responded to the violation of the Munich Pact?



A. Supported Germany’s annexation of Czechoslovakia



B. Declared war on Germany for breaking the Munich Pact



C. Continued to rely on appeasement, hoping that Germany had finished its territorial aggression



D. Attempted to negotiate with Germany to pull out of Czechoslovakia



E. Proclaimed neutrality



F. Proclaimed neutrality, but prepared for a defensive war in case of invasion

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because



## Event 3: The Invasion of Poland

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia, Hitler turned his attention to the Polish Corridor, a strip of German land given to Poland in 1919. This strip split Germany into two parts and provided Poland with its only access to the sea. In the spring of 1939 Hitler began making demands for the return of the territory to Germany. Fearing this aggression, Poland reinforced its defense agreements with France, Britain, and the Soviet Union. But on August 23, 1939, the world was shocked by the news that the hateful rivals Hitler and Stalin had signed a Nonaggression Pact, pledging not to attack one another in the case of war and rendering the Soviet-Polish defense agreement useless. Two days later, Neville Chamberlain, Britain's Prime Minister, signed a formal guarantee of British support of Poland; France promised that if Germany started a war in Poland, France would attack Germany 15 days later. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland.

**Critical-Thinking Question C:** How do you think your country responded to the invasion of Poland?



A. Proclaimed neutrality



B. Proclaimed neutrality, but prepared for a defensive war in case of invasion



C. Provided financial aid to the Allies (all countries fighting against Germany and its allies, called the Axis powers)



D. Joined Germany in its invasion of Poland



E. Declared war on Germany, and hoped Germany would retreat from Poland, but did not actually fight



F. Declared war on Germany and sent troops to fight the Germans

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because

## Event 4: The Invasion of France

After the fall of Poland, Germany and the Allies did not fight for eight months. Journalists called this period the “phony war.” The phony war ended on May 10, 1940, when Germany invaded the Low Countries: Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium. Luxembourg fell on the first day, and the Netherlands surrendered after four days. Belgium, with the aid of French and British troops, held out until May 27, when it surrendered. Germany had invaded France on May 12, and now, with Belgium conquered, was able to turn its full attention to capturing Paris, the French capital. Hitler had long felt that if Paris could be captured, all of France would fall. Germany had 130 infantry (foot soldier) divisions and 10 tank divisions aimed at Paris, while the French had only 49 infantry divisions with which to defend the city. Since crossing the French border, Germany had already captured one million prisoners in two weeks, and had forced the evacuation of 560,000 Belgian, Dutch, British, and French troops to Great Britain. The French moved their government south as the occupation of Paris seemed imminent (about to happen).

**Critical-Thinking Question D:** How do you think your country responded to the threat of the fall of Paris?



A. Surrendered unconditionally to Germany



B. Surrendered on the condition that your government retained limited independence and control of some of your territory



C. Proclaimed neutrality



D. Proclaimed neutrality, but prepared defenses in case the war spread to your country



E. Fought Germany wherever possible



F. Supported Germany's invasion of France

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because

## Event 5: The Battle of Britain

On June 22, 1940, France surrendered to Germany, putting Hitler in control of all Western European countries hostile to him except Great Britain. Hitler hoped the new British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, would consider Britain's position hopeless and decide to surrender. Instead, Churchill said, "We shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender." Nonetheless, Hitler planned Operation Sea Lion, an invasion of Britain. This invasion was planned for the late summer of 1940, but it would have to be preceded by a massive air assault aimed at taking out Britain's vital air defenses, such as radar stations and air bases. On August 2, sporadic German bombing raids intensified into a massive bombardment known as the Battle of Britain. The battle intensified on August 8, when the Luftwaffe, or German Air Force, began attacking Britain with 1,500 planes a day.

**Critical-Thinking Question E:** How do you think your country responded to the Battle of Britain?



A. Surrendered to Germany



B. Fought against Germany's attack on Britain



C. Supported Germany's attack on Britain



D. Proclaimed neutrality



E. Proclaimed neutrality, but supported Britain with military supplies and money



F. Proclaimed neutrality, but prepared defenses in case the war spread to your country

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because

## Event 6: The Invasion of the Soviet Union

Victorious in Western and Southern Europe, Hitler chose the summer of 1941 to begin his long-anticipated invasion of the Soviet Union, called Operation Barbarossa. For both Hitler and Stalin, the Nonaggression Pact of 1939 had been nothing more than a pragmatic (practical) attempt to stall the inevitable battle between the two countries. Hitler used the treaty to insure a one-front war while he was fighting in the West, and Stalin wanted time to modernize his army before he was forced to fight the Germans. The Nazis believed that once they attacked the Soviet Union, it could be defeated within a few weeks. The false security of the Nonaggression Pact was broken on June 22, 1941, when Hitler unleashed a massive invasion across a long front stretching from the Baltic Sea to the Caspian Sea.

**Critical-Thinking Question F:** How do you think your country responded to the invasion of the Soviet Union?



A. Supported Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union



B. Fought against the German invasion of the Soviet Union



C. Proclaimed neutrality



D. Supported the Soviets by sending military supplies and materials but not troops



E. Surrendered to Germany



F. Opposed Germany's invasion by fighting Germans elsewhere

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because

## Event 7: Operation Overlord

Since December 1941, when the United States entered the war, American and British officials had been planning Operation Sledgehammer, the buildup of a massive force in Great Britain for an invasion of western Europe to fight Germany. The invasion was initially set for the fall of 1942, but the plan was changed when the Allies decided to attack the Axis powers in North Africa. The plan was further delayed when the Allies attacked German-controlled Italy in the summer of 1943. By 1944 the Allies were ready to launch Operation Overlord, the invasion of the Normandy coast of France. Germany was now in control of all of France, having ended the Vichy government in 1942 because some Vichy generals had conspired with the Allies. The Nazi leaders had for some time been expecting an invasion of France and had reinforced their defenses along the Normandy coast.

**Critical-Thinking Question G:** How do you think your country responded to the plan to launch Operation Overlord?



A. Participated fully in an invasion of the Normandy coast



B. Supported the Allies by sending some troops and supplies to Operation Overlord



C. Did not participate in Operation Overlord, but fought the Germans elsewhere



D. Provided financial support only to the Allies



E. Proclaimed neutrality



F. Proclaimed neutrality, but secretly assisted the Allies

We think our country responded with choice \_\_\_\_\_ because