Steps Toward War

Trace German expansion and the widening war in Europe

SS24.HOS.11 "Summarize the events leading to the outbreak of World War II and how Germany's actions violated the Treaty of Versailles.* 11a Analyze Hitler's motivations for the annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland and the invasion of Poland..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline German actions that challenged the postwar settlement, circle Hitler's stated or pursued goals, and number the two details that show how the war changed in 1941.

From Versailles to the Eastern Front

1. After World War I, the Treaty of Versailles limited Germany's army, banned its air force, and kept German troops out of the Rhineland. It also barred a union of Germany and Austria. Hitler rejected these limits. Germany rebuilt its armed forces and sent troops into the Rhineland in 1936, testing whether Britain and France would resist. In March 1938, German troops entered Austria, and Hitler announced its annexation. He wanted to unite German-speaking people under his rule and gain Austria's people and resources. The annexation broke the ban on union, while German rearmament and the Rhineland move violated military restrictions.

2. Hitler next demanded the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia with many German speakers. He claimed to defend their right to join Germany, but the region also held border defenses and industry. Britain and France accepted the transfer at the Munich Conference in September 1938, hoping to avoid war. In March 1939, German forces occupied the rest of the Czech lands, exposing the limits of that agreement. Hitler then demanded the city of Danzig and a route across Polish territory. Seeking territory and power in eastern Europe, Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Britain and France declared war two days later.

3. In June 1941, Germany invaded the Soviet Union, breaking its 1939 nonaggression pact and opening a vast eastern front. Hitler sought land for German settlement and wanted to destroy communism; Nazi racial ideology also cast Slavic peoples as inferior. Before the invasion, the German army received the Commissar Order, which directed soldiers to shoot captured Soviet political commissars instead of treating them as prisoners of war. This order targeted officials identified with communism, not an ethnic group. Yet it fit a broader Nazi war that denied protection to people labeled enemies and brought mass killings, especially of Jews, across occupied Soviet territory.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Germany's actions in the Rhineland and Austria break different terms of the Treaty of Versailles?

2. Why did Hitler want the Sudetenland, and how did the occupation of the Czech lands change the meaning of the Munich agreement?

3. What did Hitler seek from Poland, and how did the invasion turn German expansion into a wider war?

4. Why was the invasion of the Soviet Union significant, and how did the Commissar Order fit Nazi policies without targeting an ethnic group?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write an 80 to 110 word museum label titled "From Treaty to Total War." Build a cause-and-effect chain using one violation of Versailles, Hitler's goals in two different territorial moves, and the significance of the 1941 invasion and Commissar Order. Explain how the order connected to Nazi racial policies without calling commissars an ethnic group.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.11

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline German actions that challenged the postwar settlement, circle Hitler's stated or pursued goals, and number the two details that show how the war changed in 1941. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Germany's actions in the Rhineland and Austria break different terms of the Treaty of Versailles?	**Sending troops into the Rhineland broke a military restriction. Annexing Austria broke the ban on union between Germany and Austria.**
2	Why did Hitler want the Sudetenland, and how did the occupation of the Czech lands change the meaning of the Munich agreement?	**Hitler claimed to defend German speakers, while the region's defenses and industry also made it valuable. Occupying the remaining Czech lands showed that the Sudetenland transfer had not ended German expansion.**
3	What did Hitler seek from Poland, and how did the invasion turn German expansion into a wider war?	**He demanded Danzig and a route across Polish territory and sought greater power in eastern Europe. After Germany invaded Poland, Britain and France declared war.**
4	Why was the invasion of the Soviet Union significant, and how did the Commissar Order fit Nazi policies without targeting an ethnic group?	**The invasion broke a nonaggression pact and opened a vast eastern front. The order called for shooting captured Soviet political commissars because of their role; it fit a broader Nazi war that denied protection to people labeled enemies.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

From Treaty to Total War

Germany's return to the Rhineland in 1936 defied Versailles and tested whether Britain and France would resist. Hitler annexed Austria to unite German speakers and gain resources. He then invaded Poland to expand German power in the east; this attack brought Britain and France into the war. In 1941, invading the Soviet Union broke a nonaggression pact, opened a vast eastern front, and served Hitler's aims of conquest and destroying communism. The Commissar Order demanded the shooting of captured Soviet political officers. Although targeted for their political role, they were denied protection in a war shaped by Nazi racial ideology.

Accept other accurate cause-and-effect chains grounded in the passage. Students should distinguish the political role targeted by the Commissar Order from the Nazi racial ideology that shaped the wider war.