War Without Limits

The invasion of the Soviet Union and Nazi policy in the east

SS24.HOS.11b "Evaluate the significance of the German invasion of the Soviet Union and how the "Commissar Order" reflected an extension of Nazi racial policies.*"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two ways the invasion changed Germany's war, circle what the Commissar Order told troops to do, and number two details that connect the order to Nazi racial policy.

The Eastern Front

1. On June 22, 1941, German forces crossed into the Soviet Union in an invasion called Operation Barbarossa. The attack broke the 1939 nonaggression pact between the two countries. Hitler expected a quick victory and access to Soviet land, food, and raw materials. Early advances captured vast territory and hundreds of thousands of Soviet soldiers. Yet the attack opened an enormous eastern front while Britain still fought Germany in the west. German supply lines stretched across long distances, and Soviet forces kept fighting. What looked like a rapid conquest became a costly struggle that Germany could not finish before winter.

2. Before the invasion, Nazi leaders issued the Commissar Order to German troops. It directed them to identify captured Soviet political commissars, officials assigned to promote Communist Party loyalty in military units, and execute them rather than treat them as prisoners of war. The order did not say to shoot every Soviet prisoner. Nazi leaders portrayed communism as a deadly enemy and falsely linked it to Jews in their propaganda. They also regarded many Slavic people as racially inferior. By treating certain captives as enemies who could be killed outside normal prisoner-of-war protections, the order carried Nazi ideological and racial persecution into the invasion.

3. The order was one part of a wider war of conquest and mass violence in the east. Behind the advancing German army, Nazi killing units murdered Jewish civilians and others. German policies also caused the deaths of millions of Soviet prisoners of war through starvation, exposure, and shootings. Soviet troops and civilians faced a fight for survival, not just a dispute over borders. The Soviet Union moved factories east and drew on vast reserves of soldiers, making Germany's quick-victory plan fail. Years of fighting on the eastern front drained German forces and helped bring about Nazi Germany's defeat in 1945.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did opening the eastern front threaten Germany's plan for a quick victory, even after its early advances?

2. How does the Commissar Order show that the invasion was more than a conventional fight between armies?

3. The order targeted a political role. How did Nazi racial beliefs help make it part of a wider policy of persecution?

4. What evidence shows that the war in the east brought both wider violence and a costly struggle for Germany?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 90 to 115 word museum label for an exhibit called "A War Without Limits." Make a claim about why the invasion and the Commissar Order should be remembered together; contrast Germany's plan with the outcome, and distinguish commissars from all Soviet prisoners.

ANSWER KEY

War Without Limits

HIGH SCHOOL · SS24.HOS.11b

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two ways the invasion changed Germany's war, circle what the Commissar Order told troops to do, and number two details that connect the order to Nazi racial policy. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did opening the eastern front threaten Germany's plan for a quick victory, even after its early advances?	**Germany had to fight across a vast front with stretched supply lines while Britain was still fighting and Soviet forces kept resisting.**
2	How does the Commissar Order show that the invasion was more than a conventional fight between armies?	**It ordered troops to execute captured political commissars instead of protecting them as prisoners of war.**
3	The order targeted a political role. How did Nazi racial beliefs help make it part of a wider policy of persecution?	**Nazi propaganda falsely linked communism to Jews, and Nazi leaders viewed many Slavs as inferior. Those beliefs helped turn political enemies into targets for killing.**
4	What evidence shows that the war in the east brought both wider violence and a costly struggle for Germany?	**Nazi forces murdered Jewish civilians and others, and German policies killed millions of Soviet prisoners. Soviet resistance and relocated factories helped prevent the quick victory Germany expected.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Hitler expected the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union to bring a quick victory and new resources. Instead, Germany faced a huge eastern front, long supply lines, and Soviet resistance. The Commissar Order told German troops to execute captured Soviet political commissars rather than protect them as prisoners of war. It did not order the shooting of every Soviet prisoner. Nazi propaganda falsely tied communism to Jews, while Nazi leaders viewed many Slavs as inferior. The invasion and order belong together because the order carried political and racial persecution into the war. Along with mass killings of civilians, it showed that conquest in the east meant persecution as well as battle.

Accept varied claims that connect the invasion's military significance to Nazi violence in the east. Students should not claim that the Commissar Order directed troops to execute every Soviet prisoner or that it targeted commissars solely because of race.