Fire and Power

Trace how a crisis changed Germany's government

TOT.C.4.4.C "Reichstag fire"

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two confirmed events, circle the Nazis' claim about the fire, and number the two government actions that followed it in order. Use your marks to separate what happened from what was claimed and to track how power shifted.

The Fire and Its Aftermath

1. On the night of February 27, 1933, flames tore through the Reichstag building in Berlin, where Germany's parliament met. Police arrested Marinus van der Lubbe, a Dutch man found inside. He said he had set the fire, but historians still debate whether he acted alone. Adolf Hitler had become chancellor only weeks earlier. His Nazi Party quickly declared that the fire was the start of a Communist uprising. That charge helped create fear before a national election, but the fire itself did not prove that Communists had organized an uprising. The difference between an arrest and an accusation mattered.

2. The next day, President Paul von Hindenburg signed the Reichstag Fire Decree at Hitler's request. It used emergency powers in Germany's constitution to suspend protections for speech, the press, public meetings, and private communications. It also let the national government take greater control over German states. Police could detain people without the usual legal safeguards. Nazi leaders used the decree to arrest thousands of political opponents, especially Communists, and to silence newspapers that challenged them. The decree did not set a firm end date. Measures presented as a response to one night of danger became tools for lasting political repression.

3. Germany still held a national election on March 5, but the Nazis did not win a majority of seats on their own. Violence and arrests had made a fair contest impossible. On March 23, lawmakers passed the Enabling Act, which let Hitler's cabinet make laws without the Reichstag, even laws that departed from the constitution. Communist deputies could not take their seats, and Nazi intimidation surrounded the vote. Social Democratic deputies voted against the act, while other parties supported it. The fire did not itself end German democracy. Leaders used the emergency it created to remove rights and concentrate power.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What did police establish about the fire that night, and what question about it remains debated?

2. What did the Nazis claim the fire meant? Why does the passage say the fire did not prove their claim?

3. How did the Reichstag Fire Decree help Nazi leaders silence opponents? Give two details from the passage.

4. How did the Enabling Act change who could make laws, and what conditions surrounded the vote?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four- or five-sentence museum label explaining how the Reichstag fire became a turning point for German democracy. Connect the fire, the decree, and the Enabling Act, and warn readers not to treat an accusation as a proven fact.

ANSWER KEY

Fire and Power

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.C.4.4.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two confirmed events, circle the Nazis' claim about the fire, and number the two government actions that followed it in order. Use your marks to separate what happened from what was claimed and to track how power shifted. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What did police establish about the fire that night, and what question about it remains debated?	**Police found and arrested Marinus van der Lubbe inside the building, and he said he set the fire. Historians still debate whether he acted alone.**
2	What did the Nazis claim the fire meant? Why does the passage say the fire did not prove their claim?	**The Nazis claimed it marked the start of a Communist uprising. The fire itself did not establish that Communists had organized one.**
3	How did the Reichstag Fire Decree help Nazi leaders silence opponents? Give two details from the passage.	**It suspended protections for speech and the press and allowed detention without the usual safeguards. Nazi leaders used it to arrest opponents and silence critical newspapers.**
4	How did the Enabling Act change who could make laws, and what conditions surrounded the vote?	**It let Hitler's cabinet make laws without the Reichstag. Communist deputies could not take their seats, and Nazi intimidation surrounded the vote.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

A fire damaged the Reichstag in February 1933, and Nazi leaders claimed it signaled a Communist uprising. The fire did not prove that claim, even though a suspect was arrested inside the building. The next day's decree suspended freedoms and helped authorities jail opponents. Weeks later, intimidation and the absence of Communist deputies accompanied a law giving Hitler's cabinet power to legislate without parliament. Visitors should separate the accusation from the evidence to understand how fear helped leaders gain power.

Accept responses that distinguish the Nazi accusation from established events and explain the decree's and Enabling Act's different roles. Do not accept a claim that the fire proved a Communist plot.