**World War II Causes

Directions:** In class today you will be creating a chart explaining the Causes of WWII. On this mind map you will be describing the causes of WWII using the following categories: Treaty of Versailles, Great Depression, Effects of WWI, Hitler’s Actions, Failure of Appeasement, and Failure of the League of Nations.

World War Two began in September 1939 when Britain and France declared war on Germany following Germany's invasion of Poland. Although the outbreak of war was triggered by Germany's invasion of Poland, the causes of the war are more complex.

**Treaty of Versailles**In 1919, Lloyd George of England, Orlando of Italy, Clemenceau of France and Woodrow Wilson from the US met to discuss how Germany was to be made to pay for the damage world war one had caused. Woodrow Wilson wanted a treaty based on his 14-point plan which he believed would bring peace to Europe. Georges Clemenceau wanted revenge. He wanted to be sure that Germany could never start another war again. Lloyd George personally agreed with Wilson but knew that the British public agreed with Clemenceau. He tried to find a compromise between Wilson and Clemenceau. Germany had been expecting a treaty based on Wilson's 14 points and were not happy with the terms of the Treaty of Versailles. However, they had no choice but to sign the document.

**The main terms of the Treaty of Versailles were:
War Guilt Clause** - Germany should accept the blame for starting World War One
**Reparations** - Germany had to pay for the damage caused by the war
**Disarmament** - Germany was only allowed to have a small army and six naval ships. No tanks, no air force and no submarines were allowed. The Rhineland area was to be de-militarized.
**Territorial Clauses** - Land was taken away from Germany and given to other countries. Anschluss (union with Austria) was forbidden.

The German people were very unhappy about the treaty and thought that it was too harsh. Germany could not afford to pay the money and during the 1920s the people in Germany were very poor. There were not many jobs and the price of food and basic goods was high. People were dissatisfied with the government and voted to power a man who promised to rip up the Treaty of Versailles. His name was Adolf Hitler.

**Great Depression**

In one sense, the origins and causes of World War II can be summarized in the person of Adolf Hitler, and for good and obvious reason. The outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, Germany, and Hitler cannot be separated. But, on the other hand, the origins of the war in Europe can be attributed to different starting points. One would be the result of World War I (not the Versailles Treaty or the general provisions of the Versailles settlement, but the actual result of the conflict), and the other would be the Great Depression that followed in the wake of the stock market crash of October 29–November 13, 1929. The Great Depression aided in bringing Hitler to power and hastened the demise of democracy not just in Germany but throughout Europe through the focus of European citizens that former government and economic systems had let them down. By 1938, there was but one democracy (other than Denmark) east of the Rhine.

In 1931, Japan was also hit badly by the depression. Just as in Europe, the people lost faith in the government and turned to the army to find a solution. World War I, through the reduction of European presence had left Japan with a marked local superiority. The Great Depression, the collapse of its overseas trade, and the widespread distress throughout the countryside after 1929 served to encourage those within the Japanese military who saw conquest and acquisition— specifically of Manchuria, Mongolia and northern China—as necessary for Japan's political, social, economic, and military survival. These areas would provide Japan with the raw materials and markets essential to its survival as a great power.

**Effects of World War I**

In a wider sense, however, World War II followed from World War I in one sense that is seldom properly defined. In the aftermath of Germany's defeat, the victorious powers attempted to create a new international order on the basis of increasingly fragmented nationalism. Two of the great multinational empires—Austria-Hungary and Turkey— disappeared. The third great multinational empire, Russia, was held together by the Bolshevik victory in the civil war but was nonetheless obliged to shed Finland, the Baltic States, and part of Poland. The point, however, was that in Europe the increase in the number of states was not matched by economic, demographic, and military credibility on the part of these new states. The general peace of Europe after 1919 was good just as long as there was no real threat to it. France, by virtue of its massive military advantage over a largely disarmed Germany and its series of alliances with Belgium, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, dominated Europe throughout the 1920s. It is often asserted that the whole process of German revenge was based on a reaction to Versailles, but by 1939 the Versailles settlement was dead: Germany had absorbed Austria and had acquired the Sudetanland, and in terms of physical size it was greater than in 1914. The war that came in 1939 was not the result of Versailles, but in some measure the reality of Germany's defeat in 1918—which German nationalism wished to reverse—and to a larger extent the product of that ideological perversion that is called Nazism. Hitler did not want war in 1939; he wanted victory. He wanted victory in a series of campaigns that would be but the prelude to the real war—the struggle for racial purity within the German master race.

**Hitler's Actions**Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in January 1933. Almost immediately he began secretly building up Germany's army and weapons. In 1934 he increased the size of the army, began building warships and created a German air force. Required military service was also introduced. Although Britain and France were aware of Hitler's actions, they were also concerned about the rise of Communism in Russia and believed that a stronger Germany might help to prevent the spread of Communism to the West.

In 1936 Hitler ordered German troops to enter the Rhineland. At this point the German army was not very strong and could have been easily defeated. Yet neither France nor Britain was prepared to start another war. Hitler also made two important alliances during 1936. The first was called the Rome-Berlin Axis Pact and allied Hitler's Germany with Mussolini's Italy. The second was called the Anti-Comitern Pact and allied Germany with Japan. Hitler's next step was to begin taking back the land that had been taken away from Germany. In March 1938, German troops marched into Austria. The Austrian leader was forced to hold a vote asking the people whether they wanted to be part of Germany. 

The results of the vote were fixed and showed that 99% of Austrian people wanted Anschluss (union with Germany). The Austrian leader asked Britain, France and Italy for aid. Hitler promised that Anschluss was the end of his expansionist aims and not wanting to risk war, the other countries did nothing.

Hitler did not keep his word and six months later demanded that the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia be handed over to Germany. Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister of Britain, met with Hitler three times during September 1938 to try to reach an agreement that would prevent war. The Munich Agreement stated that Hitler could have the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia provided that he promised not to invade the rest of Czechoslovakia.

Hitler was not a man of his word and in March 1939 invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia. Despite calls for help from the Czechoslovak government, neither Britain nor France was prepared to take military action against Hitler. However, some action was now necessary and believing that Poland would be Hitler's next target, both Britain and France promised that they would take military action against Hitler if he invaded Poland. Chamberlain believed that, faced with the prospect of war against Britain and France, Hitler would stop his aggression. Chamberlain was wrong. German troops invaded Poland on 1st September 1939.

**Failure of Appeasement**Appeasement means giving in to someone provided their demands are seen as reasonable. During the 1930s, many politicians in both Britain and France came to see that the terms of the Treaty of Versailles had placed restrictions on Germany that were unfair. Hitler's actions were seen as understandable and justifiable. When Germany began re-arming in 1934, many politicians felt that Germany had a right to re-arm in order to protect herself. It was also argued that a stronger Germany would prevent the spread of Communism to the west.

In 1936, Hitler argued that because France had signed a new treaty with Russia, Germany was under threat from both countries and it was essential to German security that troops were stationed in the Rhineland. France was not strong enough to fight Germany without British help and Britain was not prepared to go to war at this point. Furthermore, many believed that since the Rhineland was a part of Germany it was reasonable that German troops should be stationed there. In May 1937, Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister of Britain. He believed that the Treaty of Versailles had treated Germany badly and that there were a number of issues associated with the Treaty that needed to be put right. He felt that giving in to Hitler's demands would prevent another war. This policy, adopted by Chamberlain's government became known as the policy of Appeasement. The most notable example of appeasement was the Munich Agreement of September 1938. The Munich Agreement, signed by the leaders of Germany, Britain, France and Italy, agreed that the Sudetenland would be returned to Germany and that no further territorial claims would be made by Germany. The Czech government was not invited to the conference and protested about the loss of the Sudetenland. They felt that they had been betrayed by both Britain and France with whom alliances had been made. However, the Munich Agreement was generally viewed as a triumph and an excellent example of securing peace through negotiation rather than war.

When Hitler invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, he broke the terms of the Munich Agreement. Although it was realized that the policy of appeasement had failed, Chamberlain was still not prepared to take the country to war over "..a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing." Instead, he made a guarantee to come to Poland's aid if Hitler invaded Poland.

**Failure of the League of Nations**The League of Nations was an international organization set up in 1919 to help keep world peace. It was intended that all countries would be members of the League and that if there were disputes between countries they could be settled by negotiation rather than by force. If this failed then countries would stop trading with the aggressive country and if that failed then countries would use their armies to fight.

In theory the League of Nations was a good idea and did have some early successes. But, as Hitler’s invasion of Czechoslovakia and eventual invasion of Poland showed ultimately it was a failure. Further failure of the League of Nations can be seen through the failed prevention of Japan’s invasion of Manchuria and well as Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in East Africa.

**The main reasons for the failure of the League of Nations can be summarized into the following points:

Not all countries joined the League.**
Although the idea for the League of Nations had come from Woodrow Wilson, there was a change of government in the United States before the signing of the treaty and the new Republican government refused to join. As a punishment for having started World War I, Germany was not allowed to join and Russia was also excluded due to a growing fear of Communism. Other countries decided not to join and some joined but later left.

**The League had no power.**
The main weapon of the League was to ask member countries to stop trading with an aggressive country. However, this did not work because countries could still trade with non-member countries. When the world was hit by depression in the late 1920s countries were reluctant to lose trading partners to other non-member countries.

**The League had no army.**
Soldiers were to be supplied by member countries. However, countries were reluctant to get involved and risk provoking an aggressive country into taking direct action against them and failed to provide troops.











