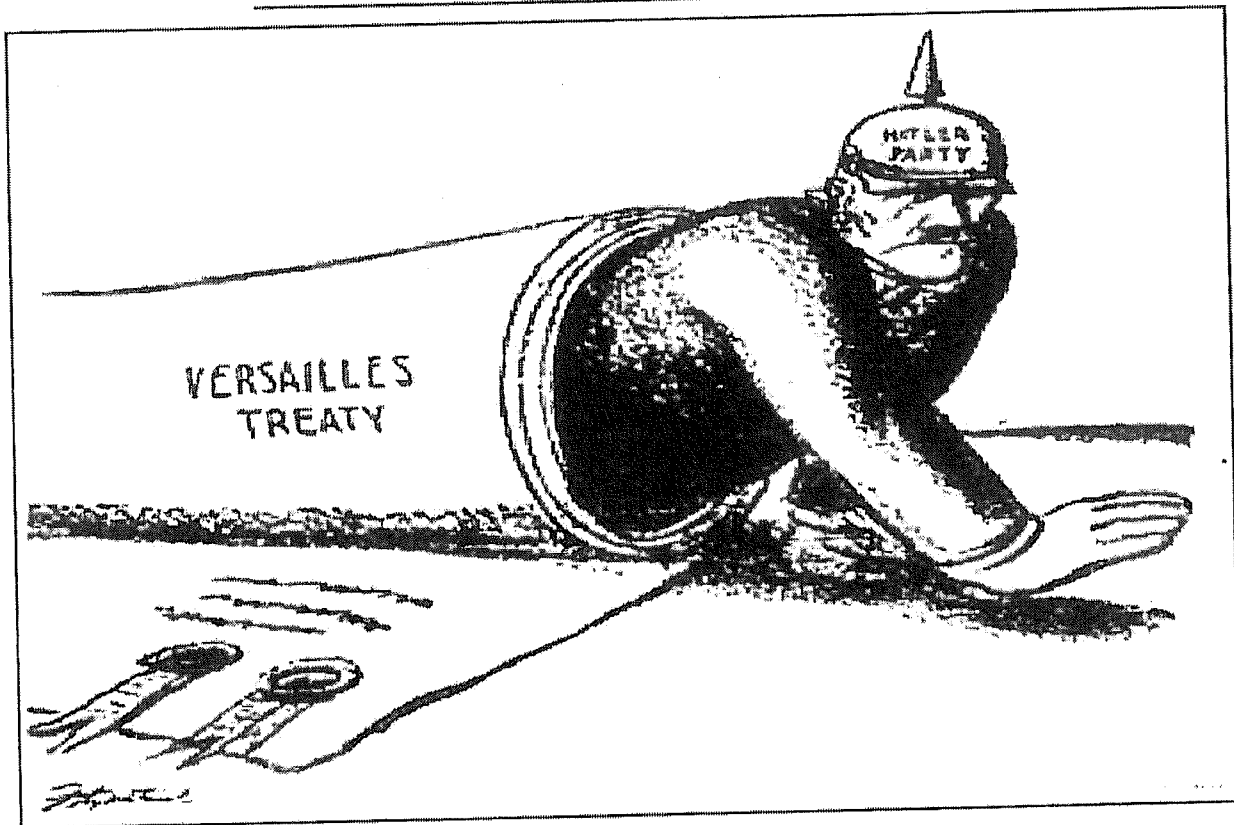


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# How Did the Versailles Treaty Help Cause World War II?

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Daniel Fitzpatrick, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 19, 1930.

**Overview:** On June 28, 1919 – seven and a half months after the horrific fighting of World War I ended in November 1918 – the Versailles Treaty was signed by the victorious Allied nations of Great Britain, France, and the United States and by a defeated Germany. The framers of the treaty hoped that it would stabilize Europe and ensure that another catastrophic war would never happen again. But just over two decades later, the flames of war consumed Europe. This Mini-Q examines the ways in which the treaty contributed to the Second World War.

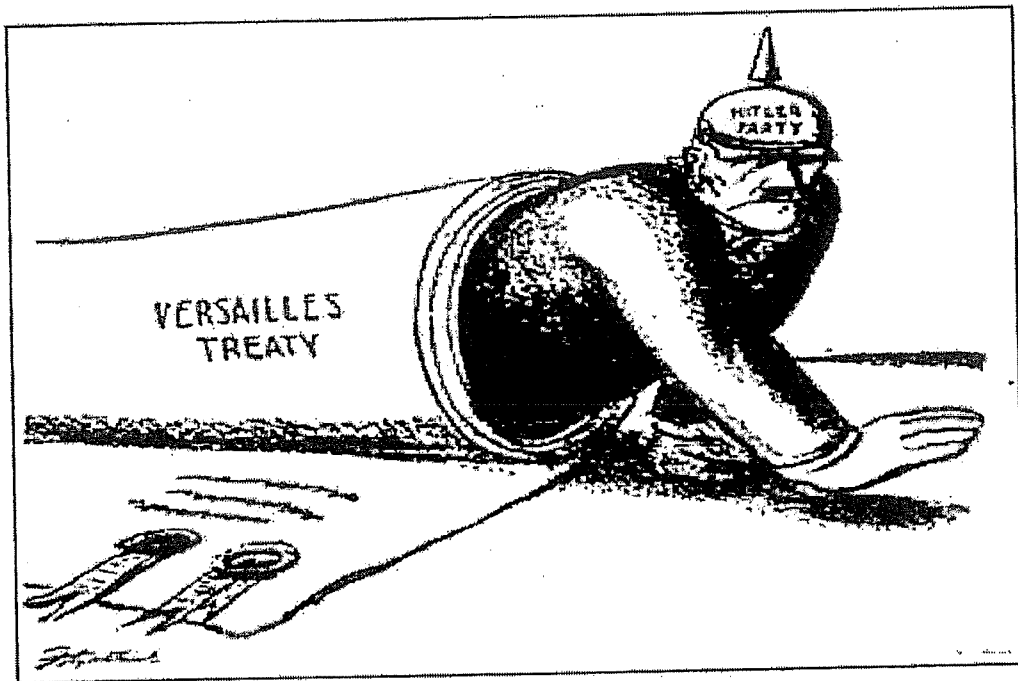
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## Hook Exercise: Analyzing a Political Cartoon

**Directions:** From August 1914 to November 1918 the major powers of Europe were at war. The war pitted Germany and Austria-Hungary against France, England, Russia, and, eventually, the United States. Known then as the Great War, and known today as World War I, this terrible conflict left an estimated 17 million soldiers and civilians dead. It finally ended with a German defeat. After the war a conference was held at the Versailles Palace just outside of Paris. The purpose was to write a treaty that would set the terms of the peace. The treaty was finally signed on June 28, 1919.

Below is a famous political cartoon. With a partner, examine the cartoon and answer the questions that follow.

**Source:** Daniel Fitzpatrick, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 19, 1930.



### Hook Exercise Questions:

1. During what years was World War I fought?
2. When was the Versailles Treaty signed?
3. When and in what newspaper did the cartoon appear?
4. Who is the figure crawling out of the treaty scroll? What is he wearing on his head?
5. What is the main idea of the cartoon?

## How Did the Versailles Treaty Help Cause World War II?

It is hard to say anything good about World War I. Fought mainly in western and eastern Europe, it was a war that took the lives of 10 million soldiers and seven million civilians, and wounded 10 million more. It was a war where men charged one another, again and again, through a storm of machine gun fire and **mustard gas** only to find themselves, months later, lying in the same God-forsaken trenches they had dug one year before.

The main **combatants** in this war included the major nations of Europe – Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey on the one side – France, England, Russia, and Italy on the other. The reason for the war was, at bottom, a struggle for economic and political power. It grew out of the scramble for overseas colonies, ethnic and national pride, and a tangle of alliances that said “I’ll help you if you help me.” It was a war coaxed into being by a huge military build-up. England was determined not be outdone by anyone else’s navy; Germany was determined not to be outgunned by anybody else’s army. By 1914 a tense Europe bristled with weapons.

An assassination in the Balkans triggered the actual fighting and the devastation followed. In 1917, after three years of indecision, the United States entered on the side of England and France and it was enough to tip the balance. By the summer of 1918 Germany was ready to give up. Ironically, little if any of the war had been fought on German soil. Most of the **carnage** had occurred on the **Western Front** in France and Belgium and on the **Eastern Front** near and in Russia. The result was that many of the German people, due to the government’s control of the press, had not known they were losing. Thinking that the war was no worse than a draw, they would not be prepared for a harsh peace.

The war ended on November 11, 1918. It was only a few months before leaders from around the world would meet at Versailles in France to hammer out a treaty. The major players were Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau of France, Prime Minister David Lloyd George of England, and Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States. Germany was given no voice. Russia, who had pulled out of the war in 1917, was not represented.

Woodrow Wilson wanted the treaty to guarantee independence for many of the national groups in Eastern Europe. He also wanted to create a **League of Nations** to settle future disputes and avoid war. But neither of these ideas was primary to Georges Clemenceau. France had suffered terribly in the war. Clemenceau wanted Germany to pay – in gold, in land, in resources, and in reduced military strength. His goal was that Germany should never rise again to threaten France or the rest of Europe. David Lloyd George agreed with Clemenceau. However, one of the English representatives, John Maynard Keynes, argued that the terms imposed on Germany were impossible for her to meet, and would lead to bitterness and future conflict. Wilson shared this thinking. In the end, Clemenceau and Lloyd George won out.

Keynes and Wilson were right about a future conflict. World War II, even more deadly than World War I, would arrive less than 20 years later. Modern historians have argued long and hard over the degree to which the Versailles Treaty sewed the seeds of World War II. In a Mini-Q it is not possible to explore the fullness of this argument. However, it is possible to look at several of the terms of the Treaty and consider how they might have been factors in the war to come. Examine the four documents that follow and answer the question, *How did the Versailles Treaty help cause World War II?*



## Step Two: Establishing the Context

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### Answers to Background Essay Questions

1. What were the years of World War I?

1914-1918

2. What were the military and civilian death totals of World War I?

10,000,000 military personnel died; 7,000,000 civilians died.

3. What were three causes of World War I?

Imperialism, nationalism, a tangle of alliances, military buildup

4. Why were the German people not prepared to accept the harsh peace terms of the Versailles Treaty?

The German press did not accurately report the course of the war. They believed the war had been closer to a draw. Also, little of the war had been fought on German soil.

5. Who were the three government leaders that shaped the Versailles Treaty?

French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States

6. What was Germany's role at the Versailles conference?

Germany had no meaningful voice.

7. How did the goals of Georges Clemenceau and Woodrow Wilson differ?

Clemenceau wanted Germany to be punished, to pay for the war, and be unable in the future to make war with France and the rest of Europe. Wilson was primarily interested in establishing political independence for deserving national groups and in creating a League of Nations that would work for world peace.

8. What was the concern of English treaty representative George Maynard Keynes?

The treaty contained harsh terms that Germany could not meet and that would cause bitterness and future conflict.

9. Define these terms:

mustard gas; one of several gases used in combat by both sides in World War I. About 4% of World War I military deaths are believed to have been from gas.

combatant: an individual or a nation that fights

carnage: massive, large-scale slaughter

Western Front: line of trenches in northeastern France where Germany and its allies faced off against the French and British and their allies.

Eastern Front: The war zone in Eastern Europe that stretched from the Baltic Sea in the north to the Black Sea in the south. It was much longer and more fluid than the Western Front.

League of Nations: Organization established by the Versailles Treaty whose main purpose was to promote world peace. It was not successful in stopping World War II and was replaced by the United Nations in 1945.

End of World War I & Rise of the Dictators in Europe  
Persuasive Paragraph

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Block: \_\_\_\_\_

After reviewing the end of WWI, the Treaty of Versailles, the War Guilt Clause, and understanding the positions of each nation at the end of a massive 4 year war, please answer the following question in a well-written paragraph on the space provided below. Be sure to include AT LEAST THREE specific examples to back up your opinion. You will be marked on your opinion and how well you support your opinion with facts & evidence.

"How did the Treaty of Versailles help cause WWII & the Rise of Hitler and the European Dictators?"