There are many causes of the war and some of them go back to the end of the First World War. The end of World War I and the peace that followed in 1919 changed the face of Europe and the borders of countries completely. New nations emerged. The countries that lost the war, especially Germany and Austria had to give up a lot of land. They also had to pay money to other countries for the damages that happened during the war.

**ECONOMIC PROBLEMS**

After the war many countries were in debt. The losers had problems paying reparations and the winners borrowed a lot of money from the United States which they could not pay back. Inflation in many countries left people without any savings. In the 1930s the Great Depression, starting out in the USA, spread to Europe and stopped the continent's recovery. Millions of people were out of work and poverty rose.

**POLITICAL MOVEMENTS**

The problems after the war made the governments in many countries weaker and weaker. Two movements became more and more powerful: Communism, known as the Left, called for a revolution of the working class. Fascism, known as the Right, wanted a strong national government.

**THE AXIS AND ALLIED POWERS**

Two groups of nations fought against each other during the Second World War.

During the 1930s Germany, Italy and Japan led a group of nations called the Axis. The leaders of these countries were dictators. They wanted their own countries to grow and others to become weaker. In the years before the beginning of World War II all three Axis powers had strengthened and modernized their armies.

In the 1930s the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany. In 1933 the party’s leader Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor and became known as der Führer. He promised to take revenge on the countries that had defeated Germany in the First World War and make Germany the most powerful country in the world. He also claimed that only Germans were the true race and wanted to get rid of Jews, Communists and other weaker people.

In Italy Benito Mussolini, known as the II Duce, became the leader of the Fascist Party, which gained many supporters. He promised to bring law and order to the country and help solve its economic problems.

The Axis Powers invaded other countries and expanded their territory. At the beginning of the 1930s Japan invaded Manchuria because it had a lot of raw materials. In 1938 it attacked China and later on expanded to Southeast Asia. In 1935 Italy took over Ethiopia. Germany started its conquest of foreign territories by invading Austria. Italy and Germany also sent soldiers to help another dictator, Francisco Franco, in the Spanish Civil War.

The Allies were made up of a total of 50 countries. They were led by Great Britain, the Soviet Union, France, China and the United States and opposed the Axis.
**THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR**

On September 30, 1938 Great Britain, France and Germany signed the Munich Agreement. It gave Germany the right to take over the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia. The two Allies hoped it would satisfy Hitler and keep them out of the war. The agreement, however, was broken and Hitler not only invaded the Sudetenland but took over all of Czechoslovakia.

It was clear that Poland, on Germany’s eastern border, would be the next target. Great Britain and France promised to help Poland if it were attacked. In August 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union signed a "non-aggression pact", in which they promised not to attack each other. Germany did this so that it would not have to fight on two fronts.

On September 1, 1939 Germany invaded Poland and World War II had begun.

**WORDS**

- **agreement** = when two people, groups or countries promise to do something
- **Allies** = the countries that fought against Germany in the Second World War
- **appoint** = to choose someone for apposition or job
- **Axis** = the countries who fought against the Allies in World War II
- **border** = the line that separates two or more countries
- **call for** = here: want to have
- **cause** = reason
- **chancellor** = the leader of a government in some countries
- **Civil War** = a war in which groups of the same country fight against each other
- **claim** = declare, to say in public
- **conquest** = take-over; to take control of a region by fighting
- **damage** = the harm that you do to something or someone
- **defeat** = to win against
- **economic** = everything connected with business and the economy; the buying and selling of goods
- **emerge** = come up
- **especially** = above all
- **expand** = grow
- **foreign** = from another country
- **gain** = get
- **get rid of** = lowered
- **government** = the group of people who rule a country
- **Great Depression** = period after the stock market crash of 1929; the time before the Second World War in which millions of people all over the world were out of work and many were poor
- **in debt** = when you owe someone money
- **inflation** = when prices go up and the value of money goes down
- **invade** = to take control of a country by sending an army into it
- **law and order** = situation in which people respect the law and follow the rules of a country
- **Manchuria** = part of China
- **modernize** = to make more modern
- **movement** = group of people who believe the same things and have the same ideas
- **Nazi** = short word for National Socialist
- **oppose** = to be against
- **peace** = opposite of "war"
- **poverty** = the situation of being poor
- **race** = group of people who have the same skin color
- **recovery** = to get better
- **reparation** = money which a country that loses a war has to pay for all the deaths and damages that it was caused
- **rise -rose** = go up, grow
- **satisfy** = to please, make happy
- **savings** = all the money that you have saved
- **sing** = to write your name on a document
- **solve** = work out, find an answer to a problem
- **spread** = to go to
- **strengthen** = to make stronger
- **supporter** = people who follow a leader and his group
- **take over** = to take control of
- **take revenge** = something you do to punish someone who has hurt you
- **target** = object of attack