

# Background to WWII

www.SchoolHistory.co.uk

When examining the causes of the Second World War, it is important to look at the **legacy** of the First World War.

**Legacy -**  
something  
resulting from.

When WWI ended in 1918, there were millions of casualties on all sides and it cost nearly £38 billion. At the start of the war Britain and France were wealthy countries. By 1918 they were nearly bankrupt. Many on the winning side wanted to make Germany and her allies pay. They wanted revenge.

Some saw things differently though. They thought that treating Germany harshly might make the country bitter and could cause another war in the future.

## The Treaty of Versailles

In Paris in 1919, the leaders of the victorious countries met to discuss the peace settlement. They were dominated by 'The Big Three' who were Georges Clemenceau of France, the American President, Woodrow Wilson and David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of Britain. Germany was not invited to the peace conference.



**Georges Clemenceau**  
French PM

Make Germany pay!  
Stop Germany  
invading again.  
Revenge.



**David Lloyd George**  
British PM

Similar to French but  
worried that too  
harsh a treaty might  
cause more hostility  
in future



**Woodrow Wilson**  
US President

Put forward the use  
of 'the 14 points'  
designed to establish  
a lasting peace in  
Europe

At the treaty of Versailles, Germany agreed to:

1. Accept the new map of Europe.
2. Accept the decisions made by the new League of Nations.
3. Limit the size of its army and navy.
4. To give up its Empire.
5. To accept blame for the war and to pay reparations to countries that suffered damage.

## Reparations -

Money paid by the  
defeated countries to  
repair damage done to the  
victorious countries.

The treaty of Versailles treated Germany very harshly. President Wilson of the USA didn't like the treaty - he thought it was too harsh. Many historians argue that mistakes made at this treaty - by treating the Germans too harshly - actually caused World War II.

When Germany surrendered in 1918, many Germans couldn't believe it. They hadn't been told the truth about the war. They thought they had been 'stabbed in the back' and betrayed by their government.

QUESTIONS

Put the title - "Background to World War II" in your book and answer the following questions in **full sentences**:

1. How many died in the First World War and how much did the war cost?
2. Why were Britain and France in trouble in 1918?
3. Clearly, many people wanted revenge. Why did some people think Germany should not be treated harshly? [CLUE - use the third paragraph]
4. What was the peace settlement of 1919 called?
5. Who or what were the 'Big Three'?
6. Copy and complete this table: [CLUE - use the table with the pictures]

Leader (Country)	How he thought Germany should be treated.
Georges Clemenceau (France)	
David Lloyd George (Britain)	
Woodrow Wilson (USA)	

7. Put the sub-title: Terms of the Treaty of Versailles

Create your own table with the five main things Germany had to agree to.

8. Which leader didn't like the treaty - and what did he think was wrong?
9. What do many historians think about the treaty of Versailles?
10. Why did many ordinary Germans feel they had been 'stabbed in the back' by their Government. Explain why 'stabbed in the back' is a good phrase to use.

## **BONUS**

**EXPLAIN IN AS MUCH DETAIL AS YOU CAN !**

1. What do you think - was the treaty too harsh? Using your list of the terms of the treaty, explain whether you think each term is **harsh** or **not**.
2. Imagine you are a German in 1919 - why might you want revenge?