

**INTERWAR EUROPE  
(1919-1939) - AUSTRO-  
GERMAN ANSCHLUSS  
OF 1938**



# INTERWAR EUROPE (1919-1939) - AUSTRO-GERMAN ANSCHLUSS OF 1938

## Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938, how Hitler's NAZI party orchestrated the union, and why the Austrians came out in support of Hitler's annexation.

## Subjects

European History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- Vienna, Austria
- Berlin, Germany
- Monument Against War and Fascism, Vienna

## Essential Questions

- What was the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938? Why did it happen?
- Did the Austrians want union with Germany in 1938? Why or why not?
- How did the Western Allies respond to Germany's moves in Austria in 1938?

# Academic Summary

## Primary Sources

### Treaty of Versailles (1919) – Article 80

Germany acknowledges and will respect strictly the independence of Austria, within the frontiers which may be fixed in a Treaty between that State and the Principal Allied and Associated Powers; she agrees that this independence shall be inalienable, except with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations.

### Treaty of St. Germain (1919) – Article 88

The independence of Austria is inalienable otherwise than with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations. Consequently Austria undertakes in the absence of the consent of the said Council to abstain from any act which might directly or indirectly or by any means whatever compromise her independence, particularly, and until her admission to membership of the League of Nations, by participation in the affairs of another Power.

### Adolph Hitler, Mein Kampf (1925), Chapter 1: In the Home of my Parents

It has turned out fortunate for me to-day that destiny appointed Braunau-on-the-Inn to be my birthplace. For that little town is situated just on the frontier between those two States the reunion of which seems, at least to us of the younger generation, a task to which we should devote our lives and in the pursuit of which every possible means should be employed. German-Austria must be restored to the great German Motherland. And not indeed on any grounds of economic calculation whatsoever. No, no. Even if the union were a matter of economic indifference, and even if it were to be disadvantageous from the economic standpoint, still it ought to take place. People of the same blood should be in the same Reich. The German people will have no right to engage in a colonial policy until they shall have brought all their children together in the one State. When the territory of the Reich embraces all the Germans and finds itself unable to assure them a livelihood, only then can the moral right arise, from the need of the people to acquire foreign territory. The plough is then the sword; and the tears of war will produce the daily bread for the generations to come.

### From the Second order concerning plebiscite and election for the greater German Reichstag, 24 Mar 1938

On the basis of par. 4 of the Second Decree regarding the Reichstag election law of 18 March 1938 the following is decreed in supplement to pars. 8 and 32 of the First Decree of 22 March 1938 for the people's vote and for the election to the Greater German Reichstag:

#### Article 1

1. The ballot is printed as follows:

PEOPLE'S VOTE AND THE GREATER GERMAN REICHSTAG BALLOT

Do you agree with the accomplishment, on 13 March 1938, of the

REUNITING OF AUSTRIA WITH THE GERMAN REICH

and do you vote for the list of our Fuehrer ADOLF HITLER?

YES O NO o

#### Article 2

1. The ballot for soldiers of the former Austrian Army (par 32 section 2 of the First Decree) is printed as follows:

PEOPLE'S VOTE ON THE 10 APRIL 1938 BALLOT

Do you agree, German Soldier, with the ratification on the 13 March 1938 of the

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YES O NO o

### **Secondary Summary**

At first light on the morning of 12 March 1938, thousands of German Wehrmacht troops crossed the border with Austria and began the annexation of the Austrian Republic. This was no invasion, however, it was a liberation. Radio broadcasts went out all over Germany and Austria proclaiming the Anschluss (Union). Within minutes, thousands of people took to the streets in small towns and big cities, not in protest, but rather in joy and excitement. Adolph Hitler, Chancellor of the German Reich, had done what previous leaders in Germany and Austria had failed to do a generation earlier. He had defied the Western powers. He had thrown out the treaties of Versailles and St. Germain. He had created a true German Reich, one that would last forever. One where Germans could stand together tall and proud.

The idea of Greater Germany (Grossdeutschland) had been a dream for over 1000 years, going back to the earliest days of the Holy Roman Empire. Religious and political differences among the Germans themselves had ultimately led to a "Little Germany" (Kleindeutschland), created under Prussian leadership in 1871. The problem had always been Austria. Although the Austrians themselves were German, until 1918 they lived within the Hapsburg Lands, an old multi-national empire going back to the medieval period. Austro-Germans comprised only 20% of the Hapsburg population before the Great War. German intellectuals and business leaders tried to create a unified Germany after the 1848 Revolutions, but the question of what to do with Austria ultimately led to the meeting's failure. When the Hapsburg Empire crumbled in 1918, however, Austrians created their own state and looked immediately to Germany for union and protection.

With images of the Western Front still fresh on their minds, allied leaders would have none of it, and refused to allow any union between Germany and Austria. Under the Versailles Treaty, Germany was forced to respect and acknowledge Austria's independence. The Treaty of St. Germain, signed between the Allies and Austria, reiterated this idea. The last thing France wanted in 1919 was a Germany that was potentially stronger coming out of the war than it had been going in.

Like many other provisions in both treaties, Adolph Hitler would exploit these clauses to rally the people on both sides of the border, saying that they had been betrayed by their leaders in 1919. When the Nazi party formed in the days following the war, it published a 25-point platform stating its beliefs and plans. Point #1 called for the Anschluss with Austria. Hitler's book, *Mein Kampf*, published a few years later in 1925, began with a chapter on his Austro-German heritage and called on the two German states to unify as one.

After Hitler came to power in 1933, other European states relied on Italy to keep Austria independent, especially after Mussolini and the Fascists came to power in Rome. The Duce saw Austria as a potential ally and needed Austrian independence. Both were Catholic countries, a fact that gained more importance when the Vatican came out in support of the Duce's regime in 1929 after the signing of the Lateran Accords. In August 1933, when Berlin began making some noise about a possible Anschluss, Mussolini issued a public statement guaranteeing Austrian independence. The following summer, when Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss (a good friend of the Duce and the leader of the Fascist Party of Austria) was murdered by right wing thugs possibly linked to the Nazis in Germany, Mussolini ordered Italian troops into the Brenner Pass and sent a message to Berlin that Italy was ready to go to war with Germany to defend Austria's independence. Hitler backed down, choosing instead to focus on consolidating his own power before dealing with the Austrian question.

By 1938, however, things were very different. In October 1935, Italian forces invaded Ethiopia. Although Mussolini felt that Italy's claim to Ethiopia was legitimate under an 1884 treaty that divided up Africa among the European powers, none of the western powers supported his moves. Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian leader, made an impassioned speech before the League of Nations, garnering public support. In the end, the League (which had almost no authority by that point) ended up doing nothing about Italy's occupation, but the affair caused a serious split

with the western powers. On 01 November 1936, Mussolini announced from Milan that Italy and Germany had entered into an informal military “axis.” Austria’s fate was sealed. Hitler knew that the Duce would not interfere in Austro-German affairs and that he was free to plan for the Anschluss. Eighteen months later the union was complete. After taking a grand victory tour of Austria, Hitler entered Vienna on 15 March. Addressing a wildly enthusiastic crowd (estimated at over 200,000), he announced that the “oldest eastern province of the German people” was now the newest province of the German Reich. Men cheered. Women swooned. The people cried in joy and ecstasy.

Vienna sparkled before Hitler that day as never before. In preparation for the celebration and in an ominous foreshadowing of what would be the horrors to come, Nazi soldiers had cleaned up the city by rounding up Jews and forcing them to scrub the streets and sidewalks before Hitler arrived. In early August 1938, prisoners from the Dachau concentration camp were sent to northern Austria to create what would become the Mauthausen camp. It would operate until the end of the war.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938, how Hitler’s Nazi party orchestrated the union, and why the Austrians came out in support of Hitler’s annexation.

## **Objectives**

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how Hitler’s Nazi party orchestrated the union between Austria and Germany.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why the vast majority of Austrians supported the Anschluss in 1938.

## Procedures

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Do the people of any nation have the right to self-determination? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Anschluss of 1938 (20 min)
- Video – The Anschluss (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Anschluss, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should focus on full text readings of the primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Anschluss. (20 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938, how Hitler's Nazi party orchestrated the union, and why the Austrians came out in support of Hitler's annexation.
- Alternate AP Assessment – Essay: Given what you know about the Austro-German Anschluss of 1938 and its aftermath, what responsibility, if any, do you believe the Austrians have for the Holocaust? Was Austria, as spelled out in the Moscow Declaration of 1943 (and the subsequent 1955 Austrian constitution), the victim of NAZI aggression or was the Anschluss simply a natural outgrowth of a 1000 year feeling of Germanic nationalism and a desire for the self-determination denied the German people by the Allied powers in 1919? Defend your answer.

## Extension

### On tour: Monument Against War and Fascism, Vienna

While on tour, students in Vienna can visit the Helmut Square in Vienna (it sits behind the Vienna Opera House). In the square is a four piece memorial to the darkest days of Austrian history called the Monument Against War and Fascism. It is the work of Austrian sculptor Alfred Hrdlicka. The monument consists of 4 separate pieces. The first is called the "Gates of Violence". It is made of granite taken from the quarry at the Mauthausen Concentration Camp (about an hour or so from Vienna). The second is called the "Street Washing Jew" and is a bronze representation of an infamous and highly photographed event in 1938 when the Jewish citizens of the city after the Anschluss were forced to scrub the streets in front of a jeering public. The "Stone of the Republic", a block of granite over 7 meters high and symbolizing Austria's rebirth in 1945, contains an inscription of the 1945 Austrian Declaration of Reestablishment of the Republic. The fourth element of the monument is a pale colored block of marble with a male figure carved into it called "Orpheus entering Hades". It represents those who died fighting the National Socialists. The monument was commissioned by the government of Vienna to be an outside walkable memorial. There is no fee to visit.

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [www.wien-vienna.com/anschluss.php](http://www.wien-vienna.com/anschluss.php)  
Anschluss: Austria's annexation by Germany (website). Site contains good basic info on the Anschluss and a short video clip (in German) showing the annexation. Highly recommended as a good starting place for all classes studying this topic.
- [www.yarok.biz/icons-multimedia/ClientsArea/HoH/LIBARC/ARCHIVE/Chapters/Towards/Foreign/LawReuni.html](http://www.yarok.biz/icons-multimedia/ClientsArea/HoH/LIBARC/ARCHIVE/Chapters/Towards/Foreign/LawReuni.html)  
Law for the reunification of Austria and the German Reich, 13 Mar 1938 (primary source)
- <http://learningon.theloop.school.nz/moodle/mod/page/view.php?id=18632>  
British Reaction to the German-Austrian Anschluss (primary source) – from Marlborough Boys College (New Zealand)
- <http://wwarii.com/blog/archives/tag/anschluss/>  
Podcast – Anschluss 1938 (primary source – audio file). BBC news report on the Anschluss.
- [www.historylearningsite.co.uk/austria\\_and\\_1938.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/austria_and_1938.htm)  
Austria and 1938 (website) – from the History Learning Site (UK)
- [www.spiegel.de/international/europe/march-12-1938-annexation-austrian-style-a-541044.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/march-12-1938-annexation-austrian-style-a-541044.html)  
Annexation Austrian Style (website) – from Spiegel Online, a German website. This article not only outlines the Anschluss itself, but also tries to answer the question of whether Austrians were really victims in 1938 and how that question leads to what responsibility (if any) Austria must accept (along with Germany) for the Holocaust. Excellent article and highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- [www.firstworldwar.com/source/julycrisis\\_kaiserscomments.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/julycrisis_kaiserscomments.htm)  
Kaiser William on Austria's Ultimatum, July 1914 (primary source). A series of telegrams between Baron Tschirschky, German ambassador to Vienna, and Kaiser William II regarding the July Crisis of 1914.
- [www.firstworldwar.com/source/austrianultimatum\\_letter.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/austrianultimatum_letter.htm)  
Explanatory Letter from Austria-Hungary regarding the Ultimatum, 23 July 1914 (primary source)
- [www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/anschluss.html](http://www.holocaustresearchproject.org/nazioccupation/anschluss.html)  
Anschluss & Extermination: The fate of the Austrian Jews (website) – from the Holocaust Education and Archive Research Team
- [www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005447](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005447)  
Austria (website) – from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
- [www.scrapbookpages.com/Austria/Anschluss01.html](http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Austria/Anschluss01.html)  
Austrian History: Der Anschluss (website)
- <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA04/wood/mot/html/austria.htm>  
The March Toward War: Austria (website) – from the University of Virginia
- [www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWanschluss.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/2WWanschluss.htm)  
Anschluss (website) – from Spartacus Educational (UK)
- [www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hitler-announces-an-anschluss-with-austria](http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/hitler-announces-an-anschluss-with-austria)  
This Day in History: Anschluss with Austria (website) – from the History Channel
- <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/03/12/uk-austria-nazis-anniversary-idUKBRE92B0NO20130312>  
Austria's president says Nazi past can't be forgotten (web article) – from Reuters News, UK edition
- [www.deanscommunityhighschool.com/uploads/20-09-2012-423704956505af00e1f24f\\_AnschlusswithAustria.ppt](http://www.deanscommunityhighschool.com/uploads/20-09-2012-423704956505af00e1f24f_AnschlusswithAustria.ppt)  
Anschluss (PowerPoint) – from Deans Community High School (UK)
- [www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1](http://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1)  
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly

recommended for teachers.

- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktfqiNxG7u8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktfqiNxG7u8)  
Austria becomes part of Germany (Anschluss 1938) (video). This 4-minute video, which uses primary source material from the Anschluss with English narration and subtitles, is appropriate for all classes.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR9TObQA-4M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WR9TObQA-4M)  
The Anschluss with Austria (video). Part of the 1997 BBC series, A Warning from History, this 3-minute video is appropriate for all classes.

## **Background Information**

- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anschluss](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anschluss)  
Anschluss – Wikipedia article
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heim\\_ins\\_Reich](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heim_ins_Reich)  
Heim ins Reich (Home to the Reich) – Wikipedia article on Hitler's foreign policy designed to create a Greater Germany for all Germans.
- [www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German\\_election\\_and\\_referendum,\\_1938](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_election_and_referendum,_1938)  
German election and referendum, 1938 – Wikipedia article

## **Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/czech/munich-accords-of-1938](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/czech/munich-accords-of-1938)  
Interwar Europe – Munich Accords of 1938
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/interwar-france-maginot-line](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/interwar-france-maginot-line)  
Interwar France – The Maginot Line
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/germany/interwar-europe-remarque-all-quiet](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/interwar-europe-remarque-all-quiet)  
Interwar Europe – Remarque: All Quiet on the Western Front
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/italy/interwar-europe-rome-berlin-pact-of-steel-1939](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/interwar-europe-rome-berlin-pact-of-steel-1939)  
Interwar Europe – Pact of Steel: The Rome-Berlin Axis Alliance
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/poland/interwar-europe-nazi-soviet-pact-of-1939](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/interwar-europe-nazi-soviet-pact-of-1939)  
Interwar Europe – NAZI-Soviet Pact of 1939: Dividing Poland

## **Key Terms**

- Anschluss
- Austria
- Chancellor
- Dollfuss
- Germany
- Hitler
- Mussolini
- Nazi
- Reich



