

**GREAT WAR  
(1914-1918) - TREATY  
OF VERSAILLES 1919**



# GREAT WAR (1914-1918) - TREATY OF VERSAILLES 1919

## Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles 1919, how different articles reflected the positions of the “Big Three” at the peace conference (Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau), and how the Allies ultimately forced the Germans into signing such a harsh treaty.

## Subjects

European History, World History, US History

## Grade Level

11-12

## Duration

90 minutes

## Tour Links

- [Hall of Mirrors, Versailles](#)

## Essential Questions

- What was the Treaty of Versailles? What were its major provisions?
- What did each of the major powers want from the treaty? How did these aims often conflict? How did the final treaty incorporate all three positions?
- Why were the Allied Powers able to convince German representatives to accept such a harsh treaty?

## Academic Summary

### **From the *Treaty of Versailles (1919)***

#### **The Covenant of the League of Nations**

THE HIGH CONTRACTING PARTIES, In order to promote international co-operation and to achieve international peace and security by the acceptance of obligations not to resort to war by the prescription of open, just and honorable relations between nations by the firm establishment of the understandings of international law as the actual rule of conduct among Governments, and by the maintenance of justice and a scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations in the dealings of organized peoples with one another Agree to this Covenant of the League of Nations.

**Article 1.** The original Members of the League of Nations shall be those of the Signatories which are named in the Annex to this Covenant and also such of those other States named in the Annex as shall accede without reservation to this Covenant. Such accession shall be effected by a Declaration deposited with the Secretariat within two months of the coming into force of the Covenant Notice thereof shall be sent to all other Members of the League. Any fully self-governing State, Dominion, or Colony not named in the Annex may become a Member of the League if its admission is agreed to by two-thirds of the Assembly provided that it shall give effective guarantees of its sincere intention to observe its international obligations, and shall accept such regulations as may be prescribed by the League in regard to its military, naval, and air forces and armaments. Any Member of the League may, after two years' notice of its intention so to do, withdraw from the League, provided that all its international obligations and all its obligations under this Covenant shall have been fulfilled at the time of its withdrawal.

**Article 22.** Certain communities formerly belonging to the Turkish Empire have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognized subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a Mandatory [i.e., a Western power] until such time as they are able to stand alone. The wishes of these communities must be a principal consideration in the selection of the Mandatory.

**Article 42.** Germany is forbidden to maintain or construct any fortifications either on the left bank of the Rhine or on the right bank to the west of a line drawn 50 kilometers to the East of the Rhine.

**Article 45.** As compensation for the destruction of the coal mines in the north of France and as part payment towards the total reparation due from Germany for the damage resulting from the war, Germany cedes to France in full and absolute possession, with exclusive right of exploitation, unencumbered and free from all debts and charges of any kind, the coal mines situated in the Saar Basin....

**Article 51.** The territories which were ceded to Germany in accordance with the Preliminaries of Peace signed at Versailles on February 26, 1871, and the Treaty of Frankfurt of May 10, 1871, are restored to French sovereignty as from

the date of the Armistice of November 11, 1918. The provisions of the Treaties establishing the delimitation of the frontiers before 1871 shall be restored.

**Article 119.** Germany renounces in favor of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers all her rights and titles over her overseas possessions.

**Article 160.** By a date which must not be later than March 31, 1920, the German Army must not comprise more than seven divisions of infantry and three divisions of cavalry. After that date the total number of effectives in the Army of the States constituting Germany must not exceed 100,000 men, including officers and establishments of depots. The Army shall be devoted exclusively to the maintenance of order within the territory and to the control of the frontiers. The total effective strength of officers, including the personnel of staffs, whatever their composition, must not exceed four thousand....

**Article 231.** The Allied and Associated Governments affirm and Germany accepts the responsibility of Germany and her allies for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allied and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.

**Article 232.** The Allied and Associated Governments recognize that the resources of Germany are not adequate, after taking into account permanent diminutions of such resources which will result from other provisions of the present Treaty, to make complete reparation for all such loss and damage. The Allied and Associated Governments, however, require, and Germany undertakes, that she will make compensation for all damage done to the civilian population of the Allied and Associated Powers and to their property during the period of the belligerency of each as an Allied or Associated Power against Germany.

At exactly 11:00 am on 11 Nov 1918, after over four long years of war, carnage and bloodshed on a scale never before seen, guns fell silent along the Western Front. A cease-fire went into effect. Around the world, citizens poured into the streets in solemn remembrance of the millions who had died in the most destructive war the world had ever seen up to that point. In the trenches, men on both the Allied and German sides broke down in tears, some wailing like little children as they realized that they had survived.

At the time of the armistice, Germany was teetering on the brink of chaos. Kaiser Wilhelm II had survived the war, but he had abdicated on 09 Nov 1918 (two days before the armistice) and gone into exile in the Netherlands. German troops were still in France when the armistice went into effect, but supplies were low and morale was terrible. Sailors in the imperial navy had staged a general mutiny and there were uprisings across the Reich. Germany's ally Austria-Hungary, had collapsed and fragmented into what would become different independent republics. The war was lost, and Germans knew it (although Nazi leaders would later deny it).

The Allied Powers (France, Britain and the United States) each had different thoughts for the final peace treaty with Germany. Negotiations would be hammered out at a peace conference at the Palace of Versailles.

The conference opened on 18 Jan 1919. The main players were French Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George, and U.S. President Woodrow Wilson.

No allied nation suffered like France during the Great War. Its armies had been decimated (over 70% of its soldiers were killed, wounded or missing); much of its farmland was now an unusable wasteland; many of its cities were on the verge of collapse; much of its industry lay in ruins; the horrors of gas attacks, trench warfare and machine guns were ingrained on the psyche of an entire generation. Much of the war had been fought on its soil. The French were bitter. Twice in Clemenceau's lifetime, they had been attacked and had suffered at the hands of the German empire. Never again. In Clemenceau's opening address to the peace conference, he outlined the basic theme of France's position regarding Germany and the end of the war: blame, guilt and punishment.

Britain's position leaned towards that of the French. The empire had suffered heavy casualties during the war as well. Although the war itself had not been fought on British soil, the loss of men and materials had severely taxed the entire British imperial system. Royal naval commanders were also concerned about Germany's ability to challenge Britain for command of the seas. Lloyd George came to Versailles wanting to be a peacemaker, but facing pressure from the public at home to make sure Germany paid the price for war.

American President Woodrow Wilson was an idealist who saw the peace conference as an opportunity to change the course of world history. In January 1918, in a speech before the US Congress, Wilson had outlined his plan for peace. Known as the "14 Points", the plan called for self-determination across Europe and the creation of a new democratic Germany on par with the rest of the global community. Wilson's crowning jewel was to be the creation of a "League of Nations" where countries could settle their differences without killing each other. Copies of Wilson's speech had been distributed across Europe. He came to Paris hailed as a savior. He would leave the City of Light a sick, broken and utterly disappointed man. The final treaty would never get through the U.S. Senate and the U.S. would have to sign a separate treaty with Germany in 1921. The treaty took about six months to hammer out. In the end, it contained almost 450 clauses. Wilson got his League. The first 26 articles of the treaty spelled out how the organization was to be created and run, but the remainder of the treaty spelled out in great detail how Germany would be punished. The Reich lost about 1/3 of its territory, including industrial areas along the Rhine River that were critical to the German economy. The German armed forces were severely restricted. Germany also faced a harsh and unworkable reparations bill (it was to be paid off in 1999). Then there was Article 231. That paragraph forced Germany to accept complete and total blame for the war. Known as the "War Guilt" clause, opposition to Article 231 would be a major rallying cry for many Germans in the years after 1919, including members of an ultra-right-wing group of ex-soldiers led by former Corporal Adolph Hitler in Munich. Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles 1919, how different articles reflected the positions of the "Big Three" at the peace conference (Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau), and how the Allies

ultimately forced the Germans into signing such a harsh treaty.

## Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the basic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles 1919.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how different articles in the treaty reflected the positions of the “Big Three” at the peace conference (Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau).
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Allies ultimately forced the Germans into signing such a harsh treaty.

## Procedure

### I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Should victors in a war be able to punish the losing nations? If so, should there be limitations on how much to punish, or should the winners simply be able to dictate whatever terms they choose to impose on the losers? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

### II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Treaty of Versailles (20 min)
- Video – Treaty of Versailles (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Treaty of Versailles 1919, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework.
- Suggestion: AP / Advanced students should concentrate on the treaty itself.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Treaty of Versailles. (20 min)

### III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the basic provisions of the Treaty of Versailles 1919, how different articles reflected the positions of the “Big Three” at the peace conference (Wilson, Lloyd George and Clemenceau), and how the Allies ultimately forced the Germans into signing such a harsh treaty. Did the Versailles treaty sow the seeds for the next war?

## Extension

### On tour: Versailles Palace, France

While on tour, students in France will visit the Palace of Versailles (about 30 miles east of Paris). The palace was home to the French monarchs before the Revolution of 1789. It was also where the German empire was declared into existence at the end of the Franco-Prussian War in 1871. French Prime Minister Clemenceau specifically chose the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles in 1919 as the place to “demolish” Germany.

## Web Links

### Lesson Plan Websites

- [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject\\_menus/versailles\\_menu.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/versailles_menu.asp)  
Treaty of Versailles 1919 (primary source) – full text from the Avalon Project at Yale. Highly recommended for AP/Advanced students.
- [www.historylearningsite.co.uk/treaty\\_of\\_versailles.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/treaty_of_versailles.htm)  
Treaty of Versailles (website) – from the History Learning Site (UK), this website goes through the basic and most important parts of the treaty. Highly recommended for all classes.
- [www.johndclare.net/peace\\_treaties2.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties2.htm)  
The Paris Peace Conference (website)
- [www.johndclare.net/peace\\_treaties3.htm](http://www.johndclare.net/peace_treaties3.htm)  
The Aims of the “Big Three” (website)
- [www.historyonthenet.com/WW1/versailles.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/WW1/versailles.htm)  
World War I – The Treaty of Versailles
- <http://urbachc.org/urb-versailles-political-cartoons.html>  
Versailles Political Cartoons (website)
- [www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/cms/lib/NC01001395/Centricity/Domain/1498/NF%20-%20WWI%20-%20Treaty%20of%20Versailles.ppt](http://www.wsfcs.k12.nc.us/cms/lib/NC01001395/Centricity/Domain/1498/NF%20-%20WWI%20-%20Treaty%20of%20Versailles.ppt)  
The Treaty of Versailles (PowerPoint) – from Winston-Salem / Forsyth County Schools (NC)
- [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=6YJfOZkriyk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6YJfOZkriyk)  
Make Germany Pay – Weimar, Extremists, Versailles (video) – this 10-minute video goes over most of the high points of the treaty and is appropriate for all classes.
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8uWgbRd8So](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L8uWgbRd8So)  
The Treaty of Versailles (video). This 60-minute video from the BBC, although probably too long for most in-class showings, is worth it nonetheless. Highly recommended for all students and teachers.

### Background Information

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty\\_of\\_Versailles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Versailles)  
Treaty of Versailles – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen\\_Points](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fourteen_Points)  
Fourteen Points – Wikipedia article
- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League\\_of\\_Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations)  
League of Nations – Wikipedia article
- [www.passports.com/group\\_leaders/on\\_the\\_road/france/le\\_chateau\\_de\\_versailles\\_walking\\_tour](http://www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/le_chateau_de_versailles_walking_tour)  
On the Road: Versailles Walking Tour – from Passports Educational Travel

### **Other Relevant Lesson Plans from Passports Educational Travel**

- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/austria/great-war-austrian-ultimatum-to-serbia](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/great-war-austrian-ultimatum-to-serbia)  
Great War – Serbian Front: Austrian Ultimatum of 1914
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-causes-of-the-war-1914](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-causes-of-the-war-1914)  
Great War – Lights Going Out in 1914
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-wilfred-owen](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-wilfred-owen)  
England and the Great War – Wilfred Owen: Dulce et Decorum Est
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-armistice-day-1918](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-armistice-day-1918)  
England and the Great War – Armistice Day 1918
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/great-war-clemenceau-views-at-versailles](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-clemenceau-views-at-versailles)  
Great War – France: Clemenceau's Aims at Versailles
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/great-war-battle-of-the-somme](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-battle-of-the-somme)  
Great War – Battle of the Somme 1916
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/battle-of-verdun-1916](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/battle-of-verdun-1916)  
Great War – Battle of Verdun
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/france/great-war-first-battle-of-the-marne-1914](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-first-battle-of-the-marne-1914)  
Great War – First Battle of the Marne 1914
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan)  
Great War – Germany: The Schlieffen Plan
- [www.passports.com/lesson\\_plans/russia/great-war-eastern-front-treaty-of-brest-litovsk-1918](http://www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/great-war-eastern-front-treaty-of-brest-litovsk-1918)  
Great War – Eastern Front: Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918

### **Key Terms**

- Clemenceau
- Great War
- Lloyd George
- Reparations
- Self-Determination
- Versailles
- War Guilt
- Woodrow Wilson



