

**WORLD WAR II
(1939-1945): GERMAN
INVASION OF POLAND
1939**



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Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, including radio broadcasts from the BBC and various video sources from the time, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the German invasion of Poland on 01 Sep 1939, how the Germans were able to achieve such a complete victory over the Poles, and how the Western Allies (Britain and France) responded to Hitler's moves against their Polish allies.

Subjects

European History, World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

180 minutes

Tour Links

- [Warsaw Nike Monument](#)
- [Warsaw Ghetto Monument](#)

Essential Questions

- Why did Germany invade Poland on 01 Sep 1939?
- What was the role of the different German armies in the Polish Campaign?
- What resistance did the Poles put up against the German invasion?
- How did Britain and France respond to Germany's invasion of Poland?

Academic Summary

Proclamation by Chancellor Hitler to the German Army, 01 Sep 1939

The Polish State has refused the peaceful settlement of relations which I desired, and has appealed to arms. Germans in Poland are persecuted with bloody terror and driven from their houses. A series of violations of the frontier, intolerable to a great Power, prove that Poland is no longer willing to respect the frontier of the Reich.

In order to put an end to this lunacy, I have no other choice than to meet force with force from now on. The German Army will fight the battle for the honor and the vital rights of reborn Germany with hard determination. I expect that every soldier, mindful of the great traditions of eternal German soldiery, will ever remain conscious that he is a representative of the National-Socialist Greater Germany. Long live our people and our Reich!

Excerpts from an Address by Chancellor Adolph Hitler before the Reichstag, 01 Sep 1939

Deputies, if the German Government and its Leader patiently endured such treatment Germany would deserve only to disappear from the political stage. But I am wrongly judged if my love of peace and my patience are mistaken for weakness or even cowardice. I, therefore, decided last night and informed the British Government that in these circumstances I can no longer find any willingness on the part of the Polish Government to conduct serious negotiations with us. These proposals for mediation have failed because in the meanwhile there, first of all, came as an answer the sudden Polish general mobilization, followed by more Polish atrocities. These were again repeated last night. Recently in one night there were as many as twenty-one frontier incidents: last night there were fourteen, of which three were quite serious. I have, therefore, resolved to speak to Poland in the same language that Poland for months past has used toward us. This attitude on the part of the Reich will not change.

The other European States understand in part our attitude. I should like here above all to thank Italy, which throughout has supported us, but you will understand that for the carrying on of this struggle we do not intend to appeal to foreign help. We will carry out this task ourselves. The neutral States have assured us of their neutrality, just as we had already guaranteed it to them. When statesmen in the West declare that this affects their interests, I can only regret such a declaration. It cannot for a moment make me hesitate to fulfill my duty. What more is wanted? I have solemnly assured them, and I repeat it, that we ask nothing of those Western States and never will ask anything. I have declared that the frontier between France and Germany is a final one. I have repeatedly offered friendship and, if necessary, the closest co-operation to Britain, but this cannot be offered from one side only. It must find response on the other side. Germany has no interests in the West, and our western wall is for all time the frontier of the Reich on the west. Moreover, we have no aims of any kind there for the future. With this assurance we are in solemn earnest, and

as long as others do not violate their neutrality we will likewise take every care to respect it.

This night for the first time Polish regular soldiers fired on our territory. Since 5.45 A.M. we have been returning the fire, and from now on bombs will be met by bombs. Whoever fight with poison gas will be fought with poison gas.

Whoever departs from the rules of humane warfare can only expect that we shall do the same. I will continue this struggle, no matter against whom, until the safety of the Reich and its rights are secured.

Excerpt from the Communication from the German Government to Britain, 03 Sep 1939

The German Government, therefore, reject the attempts to force Germany, by means of a demand having the character of an ultimatum, to recall its forces which are lined up for the defense of the Reich, and thereby to accept the old unrest and the old injustice. The threat that, failing this, they will fight Germany in the war, corresponds to the intention proclaimed for years past by numerous British politicians. The German Government and the German people have assured the English people countless times how much they desire an understanding, indeed close friendship, with them. If the British Government hitherto always refused these offers and now answer with an open threat of war, it is not the fault of the German people and their Government, but exclusively the fault of the British Cabinet or of those men who for years have been preaching the destruction and extermination of the German people. The German people and their Government do not, like Great Britain, intend to dominate the world, but they are determined to defend their own liberty, their independence and above all their life. The intention, communicated to us by order of the British Government by Mr. King-Hall, of carrying the destruction of the German people even further than was done through the Versailles Treaty is taken note of by us, and we shall therefore answer any aggressive action on the part of England with the same weapons and in the same form.

On 01 Sep 1939, the first German panzer divisions crossed the Polish border at 4:40 a.m. Luftwaffe dive bombers struck at various Polish towns. By 5 a.m., German battleships had opened up on Polish vessels and forts. The Second World War had begun. The Poles had no chance. Poland's government, created only twenty years earlier by the Allied powers through the Treaty of Versailles, was hardly able to stand on its own against the German Reich. The Polish army, although filled with loyal and determined soldiers, was fighting with old, antiquated weapons against an enemy well equipped with the newest and most powerful weapons of the time. Poland had been receiving some modern weapons over the previous two years from its western allies, but it was not enough to repel the might of the German army. As German mechanized vehicles and tanks rolled thorough Western Poland, Polish cavalry divisions on horseback rode out to meet them, only to be cut to shreds despite their valiant gallantry. Hitler knew that any invasion of Poland would necessitate a British and French response. On 31 May 1939, after the Germans violated the Munich Agreement and

occupied all of Czechoslovakia, British and French foreign ministers issued a joint statement guaranteeing Polish independence and promising to intervene if the Poles were invaded. Hitler did not fear the British and the French. What he feared was a two-front war with Germany caught in the middle between an Anglo-French alliance and the Soviet Union. That same strategy had doomed German war efforts twenty-five years earlier. Hitler knew he would eventually go after all three, but he needed to do it piecemeal. Securing his eastern flank in the upcoming war with Poland was priority #1 to the Nazi leader. A week before the invasion of Poland, however, a non-aggression pact with the USSR had been signed.

True to their commitments, Britain and France declared war on Germany on 03 September, but neither could help Poland in her hour of need. German dominance over the Polish military was immediate and decisive. Warsaw held out until the 28th and by the end of the month Hitler was in Danzig proclaiming that Poland would never rise again. The last elements of the Polish army surrendered on 06 October.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, including radio broadcasts from the BBC and various video sources from the time, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the German invasion of Poland on 01 Sep 1939, how the Germans were able to achieve such a complete victory over the Poles, and how the Western Allies (Britain and France) responded to Hitler's moves against their Polish allies.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the German invasion of Poland on 01 September 1939.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Germans were able to achieve such a complete victory over Poland so quickly.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the Western Allies (Britain and France) responded to Hitler's moves against their Polish allies in Sep 1939.

Procedure

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How was Poland created in 1919 by the Allies at Versailles? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Invasion of Poland (20 min)
- Video – Invasion of Poland in color (10 min)
- Audio Recordings (see links below) on the Invasion of Poland (45 minutes)
- Suggestion: Imagine that students are living in London listening to the radio in 1939.
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Invasion of Poland, 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 primary sources.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Invasion of Poland. (20 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the German invasion of Poland on 01 Sep 1939, how the Germans were able to achieve such a complete victory over the Poles, and how the Western Allies (Britain and France) responded to Hitler's moves against their Polish allies.
- Alternate Assessment – Imagine you are living in London in early September 1939 and your only source of news is the daily BBC radio broadcast. How would you react to the invasion of Poland and the British government's response? Is it worth going to war?

Extension

On tour: Monument to the Heroes of Warsaw (also known as the “Warsaw Nike”)

While on tour, students in Warsaw can see the monument dedicated to Polish patriots who died in the occupied city during the war with Germany, especially those who fought during the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. The monument was unveiled in 1964 in Theatre Square (now the Jablonowski Palace).

On tour: Monument to the Ghetto Heroes, Warsaw

While on tour, students in Warsaw can visit Monument to Ghetto Heroes, a memorial to the victims of the Nazi Holocaust. Located in a square in what was once the edge of the Warsaw Ghetto, the monument was raised in 1946 in tribute to over 400,000 Polish Jews who were executed in the Ghetto or sent to extermination camps during the Second World War. In April 2013, the Museum of the History of the Polish Jews was opened across the street from the monument. According to published sources, an estimated 2.9 million Polish Jews died during the Nazi occupation of Poland (approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ of all Jews killed in the Holocaust).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- www.winstonchurchill.org/learn/speeches/speeches-of-winston-churchill/127-war-speech
War Speech by Winston Churchill before the House of Commons (primary source) – from the Churchill Centre
- <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gp2.asp>
Address by Adolph Hitler before the Reichstag, 01 Sep 1939 (primary source) – from the Avalon Project at Yale University. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gp1.asp>
Proclamation by Adolph Hitler to the German Army, 01 Sep 1939 (primary source) – from the Avalon Project at Yale University. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gp3.asp>
Communication from the German Government to the British Government, 01 Sep 1939 (primary source) – from the Avalon Project at Yale University. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/gb1.asp>
Address by Neville Chamberlain to the House of Commons, 01 Sep 1939 (primary source) – from the Avalon Project at Yale University. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.
- www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/poland.htm
The Nazi Occupation of Poland (website)
- <http://acienciala.faculty.ku.edu/hist557/lect16.htm>
The coming of the War and Eastern Europe in World War II (lecture notes) – from Anna Cienciala, Professor Emeritus of History and Russian & East European Studies at the University of Kansas
- www.freemanpublicschools.org/pages/Sandy/WorldWar/POLAND.PPT/The%20German%20Invasion%20of%20Poland.ppt
Invasion of Poland (PowerPoint)
- 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.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7914.shtml
BBC News: Invasion of Poland (radio broadcast) – 15-minute radio broadcast from the BBC about the invasion of Poland 01 Sep 1939.
- www.bbc.co.uk/archive/ww2outbreak/7917.shtml
BBC News: Britain Declares War on Germany (radio broadcast) – 13-minute broadcast from the BBC featuring Prime Minister Chamberlain.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oGX2RvOL9c
Invasion of Poland: English Service Broadcast from Radio Warsaw (audio /

video) – 2 minute radio broadcast in English from Poland on 01 Sep 1939.

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=1oGX2RvOL9c
Blitzkrieg Invasion of Poland (video). This 55-minute BBC video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for out-of-class viewings, especially by AP/Advanced students.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=bpYpbilZDGw
World War II 1st of September 1939 Invasion of Poland in Color (video) – excellent primary source material of the invasion and how the Western Allies responded. This 10-minute video is appropriate for all in-class showings and is highly recommended for all students.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invasion_of_Poland
Invasion of Poland – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Opposing_forces_in_the_Polish_September_Campaign
Opposing forces in the Polish September Campaign – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – Nazi Invasion of Poland
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/auschwitz
Auschwitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/oskar-schindler-and-the-list
World War II (1939-1945) – Oskar Schindler: the List
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/winston-churchill-speeches-during-the-blitz
World War II (1939-1945) – Churchill's Speeches
- www.passports.com/lesson_plan/england/second-world-war-st-paul-stands
World War II (1939-1945) – St. Paul's Stands against the Blitz
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/world-war-ii-fall-of-france-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Fall of France 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/poland/nazi-invasion-of-1939
World War II (1939-1945) – German Invasion of Poland 01 Sep 1939
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/miracle-at-dunkirk-1940
World War II (1939-1945) – Miracle at Dunkirk 1940
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/world-war-ii-operation-barbarossa
World War II (1939-1945) – Operation Barbarossa: German Invasion of Russia
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/world-war-ii-stalingrad
World War II (1939-1945) – Stalingrad: Turning Point of the War

Key Terms

- Germany
- Hitler
- Mussolini
- Nazi
- Poland
- Reich

