Causes of World War II

Japan was growing quickly in the period before World War II. But as a small island nation, their land and limited natural resources could not sustain that growth. As a result, they invaded Manchuria (1931) and China (1937). They had also taken over Korea before World War II began.

Furthermore, in the chaos that had been left behind by World War I, some countries had been taken over by fascist dictators who wanted to expand their own empires. For example, Italy was under the dictatorship of Mussolini, whom Hitler would later use a model for taking over Germany. Spain was also under the control of a Fascist dictator named Franco.

Hitler and the Nazi Party rose to power in Germany on the promise that they would heal the German economy and restore national pride. Hitler became "Fuhrer" (leader) and thus dictator of Germany in 1934. Unwilling to comply with the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles, which required Germany to "accept the responsibility" of the damages the Allies had suffered in the war by paying a large amount of money called reparations, Hitler began to build back up Germany's arms. He also formed an alliance with Mussolini and Italy. He took over Austria in 1938. When that action went unchecked, he took over Czechoslovakia in 1939. Other countries, still weary from World War I, followed a policy of appeasement: they thought that if they made Germany happy, they could prevent another war. It wasn't until Germany invaded Poland that Great Britain and France responded by declaring war on Germany and World War II began.