

Name _____ Date _____

The Cold War

"USA v. USSR"

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. The Cold War was a different type of war than World War II, which had just ended in 1945. The difference between WWII and the Cold War is like the difference between a fistfight and giving someone the silent treatment. Both are ways that people show they are mad, but one is a lot more heated. Compared with the violence of World War II, the Cold War was far less violent and destructive. In fact, the superpowers of the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or Soviet Union, never actually had any direct battles (though there were some very close calls). Instead, they competed to see who could have the biggest and most lethal weapons. Both countries owned nuclear weapons powerful enough to create mutually assured destruction, or the end of all human life on Earth. This arms race lasted for over 40 years—from the end of World War II all the way until 1989.

Notes

2. The United States and the Soviet Union worked together, along with France and England, to defeat the Axis Powers during World War II. The democratic US and communist Soviet Union were able to get over their differences in beliefs to fight together against Hitler's Nazi regime. But when the war ended, the Allies had to divide up the land that the Axis Powers had controlled.

Notes

The United States helped set up democratic and capitalist governments in Western Europe, while the Soviet Union set up communist governments in Eastern Europe. In 1946, former British Prime Minister Winston Churchill gave a speech in which he said, "an iron curtain has descended across" Europe. He considered the "iron curtain" a symbol for the extreme differences in beliefs that now separated the Soviets and their previous allies. He was among the first people to consider the Soviets enemies, rather than friends. Without the Nazis as a common enemy, the relationship between democratic and communist countries started to sour.

3. During the Cold War, democratic countries were also called the Free World. Democratic countries joined together in 1949 to form the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, more commonly known as NATO. NATO's mission was communist containment, or stopping the spread of communism. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union spread its communist ideas to nearby countries. These satellite states had governments but were controlled by the Soviets. They included Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and East Germany. The Soviet Union and its satellite states were known as the Eastern Bloc.

Notes

4. After the terrible, devastating effects of World War I and World War II—and the invention of nuclear weapons—people knew that if another world war occurred, the planet might not survive to see the end of it. So in 1945, countries of the world joined together to found the United Nations (UN). The goal of the organization is to keep the peace between countries by holding dialogues rather than battles. The organization worked to prevent violent battles during the Cold War, and it still exists today.

Notes

5. After Hitler's fall and the end of the Second World War, the Allies divided up Germany. The United States, France and England got parts of West Germany, and the Soviet Union got East Germany. Although Berlin, Germany's capital, was located in the east, the city was divided in half between the powers. People from both sides began to fight for control of the city. When the Soviets blocked food to West Berlin in 1948, the United States flew in supplies on airplanes. This was known as the Berlin Airlift.

Notes

Tensions continued to rise in Berlin. In 1961, almost overnight, the Soviets built a wall that separated West and East Berlin. Guards with guns made sure that nobody could cross the wall in either direction. Thousands of people illegally tried to cross the wall, and hundreds were killed in the process. Some families were split in half and not allowed to visit each other. The Berlin Wall not only physically separated the city, but also stood as a symbol of the separation of communists and capitalists until it was taken down in 1989.

6. Just as Soviets were afraid to let their citizens be exposed to democratic ideas, people in democracies were also afraid of communists. Part of the fear came from the trial of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. This communist American couple was arrested—and ultimately executed—for giving secrets about how to make nuclear weapons to the Soviets. Afterward, Americans feared that anyone who was a communist might be a spy, and therefore communists were targeted. This fear was called the Red Scare because red was the color of the Soviet flag. Ironically, the Red Scare, led by Senator Joseph McCarthy, was an attack on American liberty and freedom of speech. If someone said you were a communist, you could be prevented from working or even put in jail. The Red Scare kept the nation on edge and ready to fight.

Notes

7. Many consider the 1961 Cuban Missile Crisis to be the closest the world has come to World War III. It started in Cuba, just 90 miles south of Florida. Fidel Castro had just led a communist revolution in Cuba, overthrowing the dictator Fulgencio Batista. The United States disagreed with Castro's communist decisions, so they attempted to destroy the Cuban economy. The United States launched an attack in the Bay of Pigs in Cuba to overthrow Castro, but the Cuban army quickly defeated the Americans.

Notes

At this point in the Cold War, any enemy of the Americans was a friend of the Soviets. To help prevent another American attack, Castro enlisted the help of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Castro agreed to hold Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba, and this decision set off a huge alarm! Nuclear missiles were now close enough to the United States that they could destroy major cities in a single hit. During several weeks of tense decision making and negotiations, people across the world feared for their lives. Luckily, Kennedy and Khrushchev made a deal that they would both withdraw nuclear weapons, and that the United States would not attack Cuba again.

8. As anger between the United States and the USSR continued throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the Soviet Union's economy got worse and worse. When Mikhail Gorbachev came to lead the USSR in 1985, he created a new policy called perestroika, which moved the Soviet economy away from communism and closer to capitalism. With signs that Gorbachev was open to discussion with the outside world, President Reagan reached out to him and famously said in a speech in Berlin, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!" Finally, on November 9, 1989, after months of protests, guards opened the gates and the wall fell. After nearly 40 years of separation, people from both sides could rejoice together. The reunification of Germany signaled the end of the Cold War.

Worldwide changes followed the fall of the wall. The USSR dissolved in 1991, and many countries within the Eastern Bloc became independent. With the fall of Soviet power, the United States and Russia began to disarm, or get rid of many of their nuclear weapons. Citizens of the world were able to rest a little easier about the threat of nuclear annihilation.