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RH.6-8.2: Reading for Main Idea

**Debating the Treaty of Versailles** On June 28, 1919, the Big Four and the leaders of the defeated nations gathered in the Hall of Mirrors of the Palace of Versailles to sign the peace treaty. After four years of devastating warfare, everyone hoped that the treaty would create stability for a rebuilt Europe. Instead, anger held sway.

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<p>The Treaty of Versailles established nine new nations—including Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia—and shifted the boundaries of other nations. It carved five areas out of the Ottoman Empire and gave them to France and Great Britain as mandates, or temporary colonies.</p> <p>Those two Allies were to administer their respective mandates until the areas were ready for self-rule and then independence. The treaty barred Germany from maintaining an army. It also required Germany to return the region of Alsace-Lorraine to France and to pay reparations, or war damages, amounting to \$33 billion to the Allies.</p> <p>This treatment of Germany weakened the ability of the Treaty of Versailles to provide a lasting peace in Europe. Several basic flaws in the treaty sowed the seeds of postwar international problems that eventually would lead to the Second World War.</p> <p>First, the treaty humiliated Germany. It contained a war-guilt clause forcing Germany to admit sole</p>	<p>responsibility for starting World War I. Although German militarism had played a major role in igniting the war, other European nations had been guilty of provoking diplomatic crises before the war. Furthermore, there was no way Germany could pay the huge financial reparations. Germany was stripped of its colonial possessions in the Pacific, which might have helped it pay its reparations bill.</p> <p>In addition, for three years the Russians had fought on the side of the Allies, suffering higher casualties than any other nation. However, because Russia was excluded from the peace conference, it lost more territory than Germany did. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (or Soviet Union), as Russia was officially called after 1922, became determined to regain its former territory.</p> <p>Finally, the treaty ignored claims of colonized people for self-determination, as in the case of Southeast Asia, where the Vietnamese people were beginning to demand the same political rights enjoyed by people in Western nations.</p>
Main Idea:	

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<p>When Wilson returned to the United States, he faced strong opposition to the treaty. Some people, including Herbert Hoover, believed it was too harsh. Hoover noted, “The economic consequences alone will pull down all Europe and thus injure the United States.” Others considered the treaty a sell-out to imperialism because it simply exchanged one set of colonial rulers for another. Some ethnic groups objected to the treaty because the new national boundaries it established did not satisfy their particular demands for self-determination. For example, before the war many Poles had</p>	<p>been under German rule. Now many Germans were under Polish rule.</p> <p>The main domestic opposition, however, centered on the issue of the League of Nations. A few opponents believed that the League threatened the U.S. foreign policy of isolationism. Conservative senators, headed by Henry Cabot Lodge, were suspicious of the provision for joint economic and military action against aggression, even though it was voluntary. They wanted the constitutional right of Congress to declare war included in the treaty</p>
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<p>“The League of Nations was the world’s best hope for lasting peace.” President Wilson campaigned for the League of Nations as “necessary to meet the differing and unexpected contingencies” that could threaten world peace. Wilson believed that the League would create a forum where nations could talk through their disagreements. He also hoped it would provide collective security, in which nations would “respect and preserve as against external aggression the territorial integrity and existing political independence of all members of the League,” and thereby prevent devastating warfare.</p>	<p>Critics complained that membership in the League would limit American independence in international affairs. However, Wilson argued that League membership included “a moral, not a legal, obligation” that would leave Congress free to decide its own course of action. Wilson tried to assure Congress as well as the general public that the League was “not a straitjacket, but a vehicle of life.” It was also “a definite guaranty . . . against the things that have just come near bringing the whole structure of civilization into ruin.”</p>
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<p>“The League of Nations posed a threat to U.S. self-determination.” Senator William Borah was one of the foremost critics of the Treaty of Versailles because he objected to U.S. membership in the League of Nations. Borah feared that membership in the League “would draw America away from her isolation and into the internal affairs and concerns of Europe” and involve the United States in foreign wars. “Once having surrendered and become a part of the European concerns,” Borah wondered, “where, my friends, are you going to stop?”</p>	<p>Many opponents also feared that the League would nullify the Monroe Doctrine by limiting “the right of our people to govern themselves free from all restraint, legal or moral, of foreign powers.”</p> <p>Although Wilson argued that the League of Nations would have no such power of restraint, Borah was unconvinced. He responded to Wilson’s argument by asking, “What will your League amount to if it does not contain powers that no one dreams of giving it?”</p>
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<p>Wilson unwisely ignored the Republican majority in the Senate when he chose the members of the American delegation. If he had been more willing to accept a compromise on the League, it would have been more likely that the Senate would have approved the treaty. Wilson, however, was exhausted from his efforts at Versailles.</p> <p>Despite ill health, Wilson set out in September 1919 on an 8,000-mile tour. He delivered 34 speeches in about 3 weeks, explaining why the United States should join the League of Nations. On October 2, Wilson suffered a stroke (a ruptured blood vessel to the brain) and lay partially paralyzed for more than two months, unable to even meet with his cabinet. His once-powerful voice was no more than a thick whisper.</p> <p>When the treaty came up for a vote in the Senate in November 1919, Senator Lodge introduced a number of amendments, the most important of which qualified the</p>	<p>terms under which the United States would enter the League of Nations. It was feared that U.S. membership in the League would force the United States to form its foreign policy in accord with the League. Although the Senate rejected the amendments, it also failed to ratify the treaty.</p> <p>Wilson refused to compromise. “I will not play for position,” he proclaimed. “This is not a time for tactics. It is a time to stand square. I can stand defeat; I cannot stand retreat from conscientious duty.” The treaty again came up for a vote in March 1920. The Senate again rejected the Lodge amendments—and again failed to muster enough votes for ratification.</p> <p>The United States finally signed a separate treaty with Germany in 1921, after Wilson was no longer president. The United States never joined the League of Nations, but it maintained an unofficial observer at League meetings</p>
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