

GEOGRAPHY: THE HINGE OF FATE

Purpose

In early 1942, the Axis powers looked invincible. Yet this moment of maximum expansion was also the moment the war began turning against them. Compare the major theaters of the Second World War and use geographic evidence to explain why the Axis powers failed.

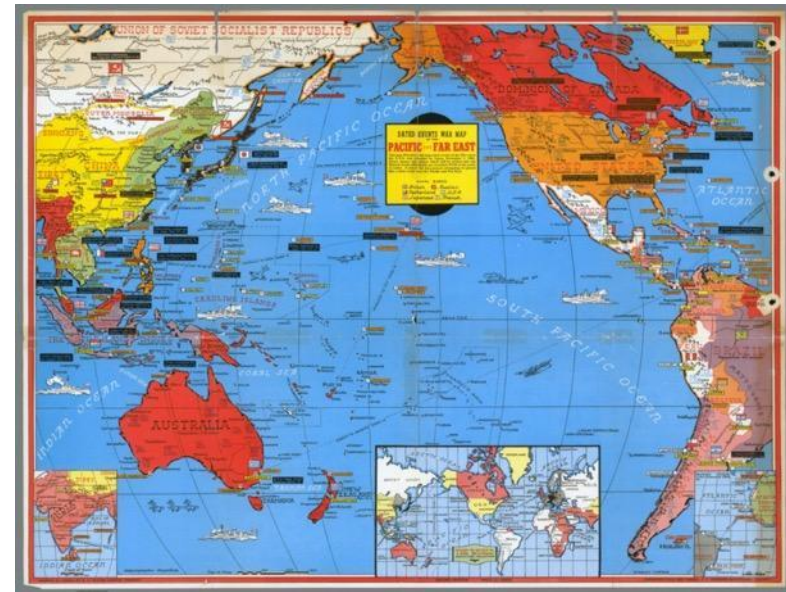
Process

1. In early 1942, artist Stanley Turner was hired to create maps of the world. This was just after the United States joined the war, so no one—including Turner—knew how the war would end. Your teacher will assign you one of these maps and a theater of the war to examine. As you read the map, look to see if the map has a legend, if there's explanatory text to help you understand the map, and if certain elements are labeled or colored.

[“Dated Events, World War Map”](#)



[“Dated Events, War Map of the Pacific and Far East”](#)



Both maps by Stanley Turner (1942). David Rumsey Map Collection, CC BY-NC-SA 3.0.

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2. After you've examined the map, answer these questions:

a. Why do you think Stanley Turner made this map?

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b. What words, colors, symbols, or illustrations reveal Turner's intended audience or point of view?

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3. Imagine that it's 1942, the year this map was made. You're a journalist and you don't know how the war will end. Circle the prediction below that you think is best supported by the map you were assigned:

- a. Axis victory appears likely.
- b. The outcome is too close to call.
- c. The Axis powers are overextended.

Now, write a newspaper headline announcing the situation in January 1942 as you predict it. Support your prediction with two details from the map.

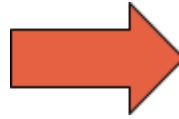
Headline:	
Prediction evidence:	1
	2

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4. Depending on which theater you were assigned, respond to the questions below, using the new maps:



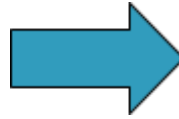
In Step 1: if you analyzed
[“Dated Events, World War Map”](#)



Use this new map: [World War 2 in Europe and North Africa Map](#) on this page.



In Step 1: if you analyzed
[“Dated Events, War Map of the Pacific and Far East”](#)

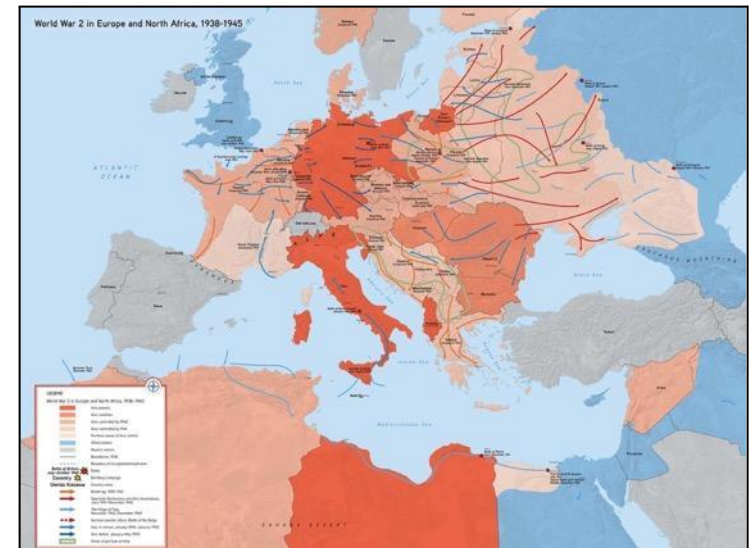


Use this new map: [“Map of World War 2 in the Pacific”](#) on the next page.

[World War 2 in Europe and North Africa Map](#)

- a. Follow the arrows showing Axis expansion between 1939 and 1942. Identify three territories or regions conquered by Axis forces.

- b. Find any battles from the map’s “Hinge of Fate” period (November 1942 to December 1943). Which one seems to have done the most to reverse Axis expansion?



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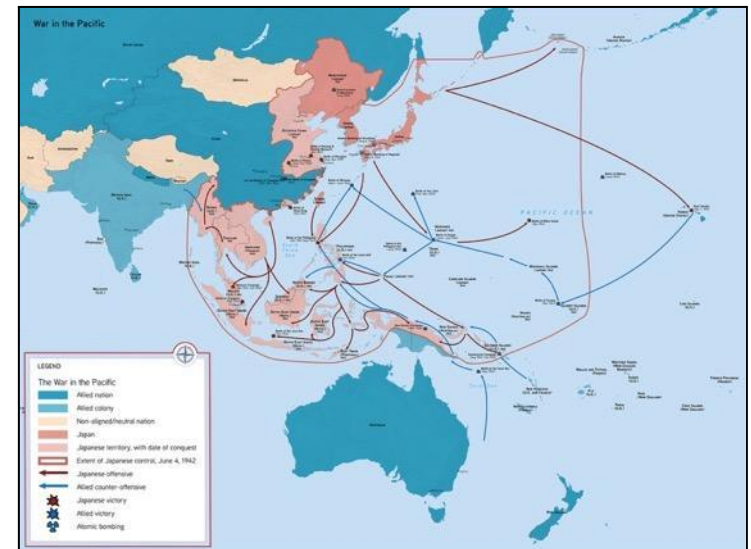
- c. When and where did the Allied counterattack begin?

- d. Identify one geographic advantage that helped the Axis powers expand and one geographic problem that made their empire difficult to defend.

Map of World War 2 in the Pacific

- a. Identify three territories invaded or occupied by Japan during the war. Who controlled the territory before Japan ([consult this map if needed](#))?

- b. Identify three battles or campaigns that slowed or reversed Japanese expansion. Which appears to have been the most important turning point?



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- c. When and where did the Allied counterattack begin?

- d. Describe the geographic extent of Japanese expansion. What challenges would Japan face supplying and defending its empire?

5. Work with another classmate or group who investigated the other maps. Take two minutes to present the story told by your maps. Then, answer the following questions together:

Connecting the theaters

- a. What patterns of Axis expansion and/or Allied counterattack appear in both theaters?

- b. How did geography make the war in these two theaters different from one another?

- c. Return to your original prediction headline. Revise it using what you know now.

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6. What is the *most important* reason the Allies eventually triumphed? Circle one of the following explanations and write a paragraph defending your claim:

- a. Geography favored the Allies.
- b. The Axis were fighting on too many fronts.
- c. The Allies had access to more people and resources.
- d. Allied strategy and victories in key battles shifted the war.
- e. Axis territory became too large to supply and defend.

Your paragraph should include:

- One piece of evidence from Europe or North Africa
- One piece of evidence from Asia or the Pacific
- One response to an alternative explanation

