Activity Introduction

Hey, my name is (NAME) and today we’re gonna be talking all about the year nineteen-forty-two. The year the Allies turned the tide against the Axis powers in World War Two.

Video 1 – Introduction

In the early years of World War Two, things did not look good for the Allied powers.

The Germans were dominating in Europe and Japan was dominating in the Pacific. And all the while the Italians were wreaking havoc in North Africa!

The Allies knew that in order to win they would have to reverse the course of the war, but that's easier said than done. So watch this video and see how the Allied powers set out to turn the tide of the war.

Video 1

As the Eastern Front developed, Stalingrad became a symbol for both the Germans and Soviets. By taking the city that had Stalin’s name, the Germans would be able to dominate the caucuses and deny central supplies to the Soviet War effort. By holding the city, the Soviets would demonstrate their ability to defeat the infamous German military and inspire their country to greater sacrifice. German forces had been pushing in to the U.S.S.R. since 1941 when they got hit with the famous Russian winter, which prevented them from making progress in Russia. But in August of 1942, Hitler, who was in direct command of the German forces, decided to concentrate those forces in the South to reach the Volga River where Stalingrad was located. Stalingrad was identified by both sides as strategically and symbolically important. Both Stalin and
Hitler demanded victory at any cost and so it became a battle of not only soldiers and machines, but of wills.

The German military had almost 300,000 men and 500 tanks in the 6th Army, specifically for the assault. At first, Stalingrad was defended by fewer than 200,000 Soviet soldiers. In the beginning of the Battle of Stalingrad, Germany had more men, aircraft and tanks. German soldiers overran Soviet defenders in the initial attack and almost reached the Volga River. However, the fighting was reduced to house to house mini battles.

The Soviets rushed reinforcements little by little in to battle, sometimes sending unarmed and untrained recruits to the front lines. Often, Soviet soldiers were sent in to battle without guns and told to take rifles from the bodies of dead comrades. By early 1943, Germany had committed more than one million men to the battle, compared to their previous 300,000. They also had more than 600 tanks and 1600 aircraft. The Soviets eventually committed more than 1.1 million soldiers, compared to their original 200,000 and more than 1400 tanks. The Soviet T34 tank proved superior to most German tanks and the Soviets had the advantage because they could resupply more easily, since they were in their own country.

After almost three months of house to house combat, the German advance was stopped and turned back short of the Volga River. Hitler, however, refused to allow the 6th Army to withdraw from Stalingrad. He continued to attempt to reinforce his troops and by the end of the battle, he had replaced most of his direct advisors. Hitler believed he had made a serious mistake the previous year in not concentrating all his efforts on taking Moscow and he refused to make the same error at Stalingrad. This gave the Soviets time to build up enough strength to launch a counter offensive. They encircled
the 6th Army that was outside of Stalingrad, more than 200,000 German and Axis soldiers, and finally defeated them. The Battle of Stalingrad has been called one of the bloodiest battles in history. The Soviet forces suffered more than 750,000 casualties, men killed or wounded, and Germany suffered approximately 740,000. More than 40,000 civilians, meaning non military people, were killed in the battle. That's a total of more than 1.5 million people.

Stalingrad was the last great German offensive of World War Two and this loss led directly to the massive German defeat at the Battle of Kursk when the Soviets counterattacked in mid 1943. Stalingrad was a clear example of the fact that Germany was getting weaker as the war continued and the U.S.S.R. was growing stronger. The battle highlighted that even though Germany had more advanced technology and weapons, the Soviets had more people and that's what helped them to win. In 1943, both Soviet leadership and technology were slowly catching up with Germany.

The Battle of Stalingrad was one of the most important battles in World War Two. If Germany had won, Hitler would've had access to a huge amount of land, resources, people, almost everything he needed. However, it is important to remember how many people died, soldiers and citizens alike, simply because neither Hitler, nor Stalin were willing to give up.

Video 1 – Recap

Whoa, things looked pretty tough for the Allies at first.

Luckily, though, the Allies had more resources and manpower, therefore the longer the war went on, the more it began to shift in their favor.

But you'll learn more about all of that as we get further into this activity.

Reading Passage Introduction
In the initial months after the attack at Pearl Harbor, Japan was clearly winning the war in the Pacific.

And the United States was stunned by the early defeats. The U.S., however, would not be down for long.

Read the following passage to find out how things began to turn around for the U.S. and the Allied powers in the Pacific.

**Reading Passage Introduction**

Another area of the world where the war was taking place was in North Africa.

This is where British forces took on Nazi General Erwin Rommel and his Axis army at the Battle of El Alamein in nineteen-forty-two.

Want to learn more? Of course you do, so go ahead and read the following passage on the Battle of El Alamein.

**Video 2 - Introduction**

While U.S. and British forces were fighting the Nazis in northern Africa, the Soviets were fighting them on the eastern front at the Battle of Stalingrad.

Initially it did not look good for the Soviets, but thanks to the harsh Russian winters things began to change.

To learn more about the Battle of Stalingrad watch this video.

**Video 2**

In early 1942, it seemed that the Axis powers, Germany and Japan were on the verge of victory. Germany had conquered much of Europe and overrun a great deal of the Western part of the Soviet Union, while Japan’s forces controlled most of the Pacific,
conquering the Philippines, Singapore, the Dutch East Indies and the islands of the Central Pacific. So let’s look first at what exactly was going on in the Pacific.

Now, as you know, the objective of the attack on Pearl Harbor was to completely disable the U.S. Navy fleet, but because this was not completely achieved, the Japanese were afraid that the U.S. would regain their power in the Pacific. In addition, Japan wanted to cut off Australia, New Zealand and the East Indies from reinforcements and support, since they were allies of the United States. Japan had a plan with two main goals. They wanted to separate Australia and the United States, which would leave Australia isolated and vulnerable. They also wanted to defeat the United States Navy once and for all. This would drive the Americans back to the West Coast and give the Japanese free reign of the Pacific.

The Japanese planned to accomplish these two goals by invading and taking control of several islands. The most important of these were New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Midway Island and the Aleutian Islands. While Japan and the U.S. were battling it out in the Pacific, Germany and Italy were taking on allied forces in North Africa and the U.S.S.R. In North Africa, German General, Erwin Rommel’s Afrikakorps combined with Italian forces to push the British out of Libya and back in to Egypt. And they managed to advance to within 200 miles of Alexandria.

Next, Italy and Germany wanted to threaten India by overrunning Egypt and cutting off the Suez Canal. You see, strategically this is very smart because they wanted to prevent the allies from getting more food and other supplies from India and without the Suez Canal, the allies would have to ship supplies all the way around Africa. In the U.S.S.R., German forces had been halted by the winter of 1941, but renewed the push eastward in the spring of 1942. Now remember, Germany’s objective was to crush the
U.S.S.R. by taking Moscow, Leningrad and the oil rich caucuses. Germany’s plans, however, were not confined to the Eastern Front. In early 1942, Hitler unleashed German submarines on U.S. shipping. In three months, German U-boats sank 216 vessels, many of them oil tankers. By June, 1942, 4.7 million tons of allied shipping had gone to the bottom of the ocean, much of it in U.S. coastal waters. Nazi submarines went so far as to sink ships in the harbors of New York City, Jacksonville Beach, Florida and Virginia Beach, Virginia, sometimes in broad daylight.

Conditions did not improve until the Navy adopted the convoy system, in which supply ships are escorted by other vessels for protection. Though the Fascist powers seemed on the verge of winning the war in early 1942, the allies were not without hope. The allies’ chief advantage was the industrial might of the United States. You see, the U.S. possessed enormous reserves of oil, coal, iron and other resources necessary for war, while the Axis powers had been using much of their resources during the early years of fighting. The U.S. was also about to mobilize a huge fighting force, while the Axis powers had already reached the limit of their manpower reserves. The allies’ glimmer of hope was soon to be realized in a string of victories. After one particularly memorable triumph, Winston Churchill described it as, “Not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end, but it is perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

Video 2 - Recap

Wow, the war was really beginning to shift in favor of the Allies by nineteen-fourty-three. The Battle of Stalingrad was a decisive victory and now the Nazis were on the run!

Perhaps Hitler should have learned a lesson from Napoleon. That of course being NEVER ever ever ever invade Russia!