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The League of Nations

Directions: Use the readings and the primary source shorts provided to address the task provided throughout the module.

Step #1: President Wilson’s Desires for the League of Nations

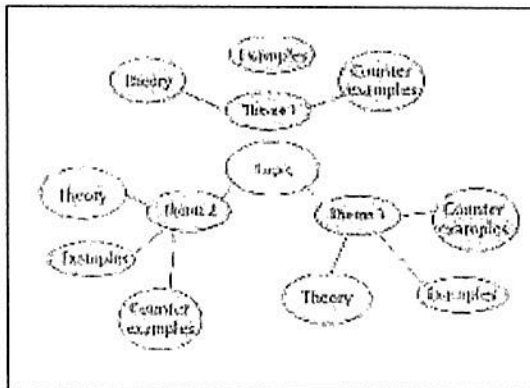
The League of Nations was set up because President Wilson wanted this more than anything else. He wanted the League to be a kind of ‘world parliament’, where nations would sort out their arguments. He hoped this would stop wars. But Wilson wanted to do more than just stop war; he wanted to make the world a better place. He wanted the League to do things to improve people’s lives and jobs. He wanted to improve public health, and to end slavery. Wilson also hoped that the League would persuade the nations to agree to disarmament – to put down their weapons. That would make war impossible. Finally, Wilson thought that the League of Nations could enforce the Treaty of Versailles, and persuade countries to keep the promises they had made.

But when Wilson got back home to the United States, the American Senate refused to join the League. Americans did not want to get dragged into other countries’ problems. This damaged the League a lot.

Source A

It is not enough just to win the war. We must win it in such a way as to keep the future peace of the world.

President Wilson, talking in 1918.



EXAMPLE

Task

Draw a spidergram of the FOUR aims of the League of Nations. Were the League's aims impossible, do you think?

Step #2: Strengths & Weaknesses

Forty-two countries joined the League at the start. In the 1930s about 60 countries were members. This made the League seem strong. However, the most powerful countries in the world were not members. The USA did not want to join. The Russians refused to join – they were Communists and hated Britain and France. Germany was not allowed to join. Without these three big powers, the League was weak. Britain and France were the main members, helped by Italy and Japan; they were quite powerful countries. Also, the League had four powers it could use to make countries do as it wanted (see Source A). Theoretically, the League was allowed to use military force, but the League did not have an army of its own – so if a country ignored it, in the end, there was nothing the League could do. The main strength of the League was that it had been set up by the Treaty of Versailles, and agreed by everybody at the conference. The biggest weakness was that the League's organization was a muddle (see Source B). The different parts of the League were supposed to act together; but in a crisis, no-one could agree.

Source A – Powers

1. **Covenant** (in the League's Covenant, especially Article 10, all members had *promised* to keep the peace).
2. **Condemnation** (the League could *tell* a country it was doing wrong).
3. **Arbitration** (the League could *offer* to decide between two countries).
4. **Sanctions** (*stopping trade*).



↑ Source A

A British cartoon of 1925 shows Greece and Bulgaria fighting – like Tweedle-dum and Tweedle-dee in the story *Alice in Wonderland*. The League, like the dove of peace, stops the fight.

Tasks

1. Using the seven sentences **in bold** in the passage above, sort out the League's 'strengths' and 'weaknesses'. *above* Compare the two lists. *Create a list.*
2. People at the time used all these phrases to explain how they thought the League would influence countries:
 - Collective Security
 - Community of Power
 - Moral Persuasion.For each, discuss what you think people meant.
3. Did the League have any chance of keeping world peace?

Source B – Organisation

1. **Assembly** (the main meeting of the League – all members met once a year). Its main problem was that decisions had to be unanimous, which was very difficult to achieve.
2. **Council** (a small group of the more important nations – Britain, France, Italy and Japan plus some other countries – met 4–5 times a year).
3. **Agencies** (committees of the League):
 - Court of International Justice (for small disputes).
 - Health (to improve world health).
 - International Labour Organisation (to try to get fair wages).
 - Slavery (to end slavery)
 - Refugees.
4. **Secretariat** (was supposed to organise the League, but failed).

Did the League stop wars in the 1920s?

The main aim of the League of Nations was to stop wars. In the 1920s, there were many small disputes between countries, which the League tried to solve. This spread looks at just two disputes (you will need to research other incidents). Did the League manage to stop wars in the 1920s? Decide if you think the League was a success or a failure.

Corfu, 1923

The Dispute:

An Italian general was killed while he was doing some work for the League in Greece. The Italian leader Mussolini was angry with the Greeks. He invaded the Greek island of Corfu.

The Greeks asked the League to help.

What the League did:

The Council of the League met. It condemned Mussolini, and told him to leave Corfu.

It told the Greeks to give some money to the League.

What happened:

Mussolini refused to accept its decision. He refused to leave Corfu.

The League changed its decision. It told Greece to apologise to Mussolini, and to pay the money to Italy.

The Greeks did as the League said. Then Mussolini gave Corfu back to Greece.

Bulgaria, 1925

The Dispute:

Some Greek soldiers were killed in a small fight on the border between Greece and Bulgaria. The Greeks were angry. They invaded Bulgaria.

Bulgaria asked the League to help.

What the League did:

The Council of the League met. It condemned the Greeks, and told them to leave Bulgaria.

What happened:

The Bulgarian government sent orders to its army not to fight back.

The Greeks did as the League said. They left Bulgaria.

Tasks

1. Discuss as a whole class:
 - a. Was the League successful in Corfu?
 - b. Was the League successful in Bulgaria?
2. In 1925, Greece complained that there seemed to be one set of rules for small countries such as Greece, and a different set of rules for big countries such as Italy. Do you agree?
3. Did the League's actions add to its standing, or detract from it, do you think?

Was the League successful in the 1920s?

This spread looks at the League's work: boxes a–m on this page describe some of the work done by the League in the 1920s. The League of Nations had four aims: Stop wars, Improve people's lives and jobs, Disarmament, Enforce the Treaty of Versailles. In the last spread, you looked at the League's work to stop wars.

*You will be able to decide if you think the League was a success or a failure.

The League of Nations had four aims:

Stop wars,

Improve people's lives and jobs,

Disarmament,

Enforce the Treaty of Versailles.

In the last spread, you looked at the League's work to stop wars..

You will be able to decide if you think the League was a success or a failure.

Tasks

- 1 Divide boxes a–m up into 'successes' and 'failure's. Overall, was the League a success or a failure in the 1920s?
- 2 Divide up the boxes again, this time into the four kinds of work done by the League.

- Stopping wars,
- Improving lives and jobs,
- Disarmament,
- Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

Share your answers as a whole class. Copy up notes on 'The Work of the League in the 1920s', under the four sub-headings. Colour the titles: one colour for the League's 'successes', another colour for its 'failures'.

a. Bulgaria (1925)

Greece obeyed the League's orders to pull out of Bulgaria in 1925.

b. Poland (1920)

Poland took land from Russia, breaking the Treaty of Versailles. The Poles ignored the League's order to stop

c. Slaves

The League attacked slave traders in Africa and Burma and freed 200,000 slaves.

d. Disease

The League worked to prevent malaria and leprosy.

e. Disarmament (1932)

Disarmament talks failed, because Germany demanded as many weapons as everyone else.

f. Prisoners of War

The League took home half a million World War One prisoners of war.

g. Reparations (1921)

When the Germans refused to pay, France and Britain invaded Germany and made them pay.

h. Jobs

The International Labour Organisation failed to persuade countries to adopt a 48-hour week.

i. Economic problems

The League sent economics experts to help Austria and Hungary.

j. Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928)

Sixty-five countries signed the treaty to end war – but just ignored it.

k. Refugees (1922)

The League set up camps and fed Turkish refugees.

l. Corfu (1923)

Mussolini ignored the League's orders to pull out of Corfu in 1923, and made Greece pay money to Italy.

m. Drugs

The League closed down four big companies which were selling drugs.