

Overview of the Napoleonic Wars: Knowledge Organiser

1. Background:

- **French Revolution:** The Napoleonic Wars were a culmination of the upheaval caused by the French Revolution (1789-1799). Radical political changes, economic challenges, and social unrest led to the overthrow of the Bourbon monarchy and the establishment of the French Republic.
- **Rise of Napoleon:** Napoleon Bonaparte, a Corsican artillery officer, rose through the ranks of the French military. His military successes, such as the Italian and Egyptian campaigns, propelled him to power. In 1799, he led a coup that established the Consulate, making him First Consul.

2. Key Participants:

- **French Empire:**
 - **Grand Armée:** Napoleon's military force, characterized by its speed, mobility, and strategic innovation. Its discipline and organization contributed to Napoleon's successes.
 - **Client States:** Napoleon established satellite states across Europe, including the Kingdom of Italy, Confederation of the Rhine, and Duchy of Warsaw, often ruled by his relatives.
- **Coalition Allies:**
 - **United Kingdom:** Led by Prime Minister William Pitt and later Lord Liverpool, Britain's naval supremacy countered Napoleon's continental ambitions. The Royal Navy's victories, including the Battle of Trafalgar (1805), ensured British control of the seas.
 - **Austria:** The Habsburg Monarchy aimed to preserve its influence in Central Europe and counter French expansion.
 - **Russia:** Tsar Alexander I initially cooperated with Napoleon through the Treaty of Tilsit (1807), which divided influence in Eastern Europe. However, tensions arose over the Continental System and Russia's ambitions.

- **Prussia:** Defeated by Napoleon in 1806, Prussia underwent significant reforms under Baron von Stein and Gerhard von Scharnhorst, modernizing its army and society.

3. Major Battles and Campaigns

- **Austerlitz (1805):** Also known as the "Battle of the Three Emperors," Napoleon's tactical brilliance allowed the French to outmaneuver the Russian and Austrian forces. The victory solidified Napoleon's status as a military genius.
- **Peninsular War (1808-1814):** Napoleon's attempt to enforce the Continental System in Spain led to a protracted guerrilla war. British intervention, led by the Duke of Wellington, supported Spanish and Portuguese resistance.
- **Invasion of Russia (1812):** Napoleon's ambitious campaign aimed to force Tsar Alexander I to adhere to the Continental System. The Russian army's scorched-earth tactics, coupled with the harsh Russian winter, led to the near-total destruction of the Grande Armée.
- **Leipzig (1813):** The "Battle of Nations" marked the coalition's successful offensive against Napoleon's forces. It involved Austrian, Prussian, Russian, and Swedish troops. Napoleon's defeat led to his retreat from German territories.
- **Waterloo (1815):** Napoleon's last bid for power saw him return from exile and face the British and Prussian forces under the Duke of Wellington and Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher. The battle ended in Napoleon's final defeat.

4. Impact:

- **Congress of Vienna (1814-1815):** European powers convened to reestablish a balance of power and redraw borders after Napoleon's defeat. The Congress aimed to prevent further large-scale conflicts and promoted the principle of legitimacy, restoring legitimate monarchs.
- **Restoration of Monarchies:** The Congress sought to restore pre-Napoleonic monarchies, including the Bourbon dynasty in France, the Habsburgs in Austria, and the Bourbons in Spain. These attempts often clashed with nationalist sentiments.

- **Nationalism:** The wars and the disruption of traditional power structures fueled nationalistic movements as people identified with their linguistic and cultural heritage.

5. Legacy:

- **Napoleon's Exile and Death:** Exiled to Saint Helena, Napoleon wrote his memoirs and reflected on his career. His death in 1821 marked the end of an era.
- **Spread of Revolutionary Ideas:** The wars disseminated concepts of liberty, equality, and nationalism across Europe, influencing future political developments.