

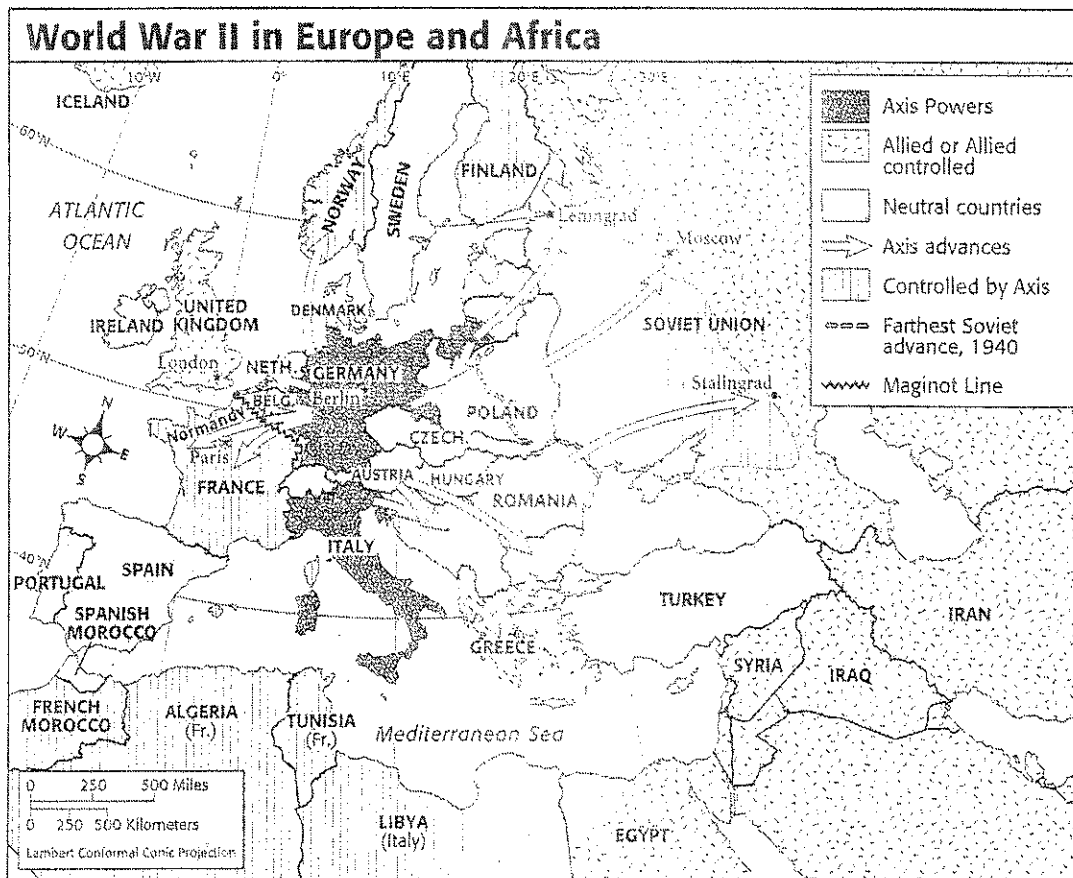
CHAPTER 14

Critical Thinking Activity
Northern and Western Europe

From The Speeches, May 19, 1940
Winston Churchill

Between September 1939 and May 1940, Germany—which had already annexed Austria and most of Czechoslovakia—conquered Poland, Denmark, and Norway. Just nine days before Churchill's speech, Hitler's army swept through Holland and Belgium on its way into France. By the morning of May 19, 1940, the British troops that had been fighting in western Europe had been driven to the shores of the English Channel.

Winston Churchill, who had just been elected prime minister, had only hours to prepare this speech for delivery on a British radio broadcast. Study the map below then read the excerpt. Answer the questions that follow.



1 I speak to you for the first time as Prime Minister in a solemn hour for the life of our country, of our empire, of our allies, and, above all, of the cause of Freedom. A tremendous battle is raging in France and Flanders. The Germans, by a remarkable combination of air bombing and heavily armored tanks, have broken through the French defenses of the Maginot

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Line, and strong columns of their armored vehicles are ravaging the open country, which for the first day or two was without defenders. They have penetrated deeply and spread alarm and confusion in their track. . . .

- ② If the French retain that genius for recovery and counter-attack for which they have so long been famous; and if the British Army shows the dogged endurance and solid fighting power of which there have been so many examples in the past—then a sudden transformation of the scene might spring into being.
- ③ It would be foolish, however, to disguise the gravity of the hour. It would be still more foolish to lose heart and courage or to suppose that well-trained, well-equipped armies numbering three or four millions of men can be overcome in the space of a few weeks, or even months, by a scoop, or raid of mechanized vehicles, however formidable. We may look with confidence to the stabilization of the Front in France, and to the general engagement of the masses, which will enable the qualities of the French and British soldiers to be matched squared against those of their adversaries. For myself, I have invincible confidence in the French Army and its leaders. . . .
- ④ We must expect that as soon as stability is reached on the Western Front, the bulk of that hideous apparatus of aggression which gashed Holland into ruin and slavery in a few days, will be turned upon us. I am sure I speak for all when I say we are ready to face it. . . . Our task is not only to win the battle—but to win the War. . . . there will come the battle for our Island—for all that Britain is, and all that Britain means. That will be our struggle. In that supreme emergency we shall not hesitate to take every step, even the most drastic, to call forth from our people the last ounce and the last inch of effort of which they are capable. . . .
- ⑤ Centuries ago words were written to be a call and a spur to the faithful servants of Truth and Justice: “Arm yourselves, and be ye men of valour, and be in readiness for the conflict; for it is better for us to perish in battle than to look upon the outrage of our nation and our altar. As the Will of God is in Heaven, ever so let it be.”

1. In which direction(s) did Germany strike out to invade Europe from 1939–1942?

2. Where is Flanders located?

3. If you had been living in England at the time of this speech, would Churchill’s words have inspired you to help the war effort? Why or why not?
