The League of Nations

Background
- Set up in 1920 by the Treaty of Versailles.
- Originally the idea of Woodrow Wilson who wanted the League to be like a world parliament.
- Based in Geneva, Switzerland.
- 42 countries joined at the start. By the 1930s this had risen to 60.
- May 1920, the US Senate voted against Versailles, thus the country did not join the League.
- The USSR did not join the League.
- Germany was not allowed to join as a punishment for causing WWI.
- The leading members were Britain and France, helped by Italy and Japan.

Aims (SIDE)
- Stop war (collective security)
- Improve health, life and jobs (encourage trade, economic and social agencies, health care, end slavery).
- Disarmament
- Enforce the Treaty of Versailles

The powers of The League
1. Covenant (Articles 10-17, members promised to keep the peace).
2. Moral Condemnation (the League could tell a country it was doing wrong).
3. Arbitration (the League could offer to decide between two countries).
5. Military Sanctions (but the League had no army of its own)

Structure
1. Assembly (the main meeting of the League - all members met once a year). Its main problem was that decisions had to be unanimous (agreed by everyone), 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):
   - Permanent Court of International Justice (enforced and interpreted the peace treaties, dealt with dispute).
   - Health Committee (to improve world health).
   - International Labour Organisation.
   - Slavery Committee (to end slavery).
   - Refugee Committee (to return people to their homes after wars or disasters).
   - Mandates Commission (looked after former German and Turkish colonies)
4. Secretariat (was supposed to organise the League, but failed).
The League and International Agreements

The Dawes Plan – This was designed by America to prevent conflict through lending money to Germany so that they could pay reparations. This helped the League with their aims of enforcing the Treaty of Versailles and stopping wars.

The Locarno Treaties – Germany agreed to accept the borders laid out in the Treaty of Versailles, that the Rhineland would remain a demilitarised zone and that any future disputes between France and Germany would be settled by the League. This again helped the League with their aim of enforcing the Treaty of Versailles.

Kellogg-Briand Pact – This agreement was signed in 1928 by 63 countries who agreed to try and stop any future conflict through peaceful means. This helped the League with their aim of stopping wars. It was particularly significant that America signed the Pact as they were not members of the League.

The cartoon shows that compared to ‘international strife’ which was a strong and deadly force in the 1920s the League was like little more than a defenceless rabbit. It was well-meaning idea, but in practice it would never work.

Failures of the 1920s
Poland (1920) Stopping wars/Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles
Poland took land from Russia, breaking the Treaty of Versailles. The Poles ignored the
Corfu (1923) Stopping wars
Mussolini ignored the League’s orders to pull out of Corfu in 1923, and made Greece pay money to Italy.
Jobs Improving lives and jobs
The International Labour Organisation failed to persuade countries to adopt a 48-hour week.

Invasion of the Ruhr Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles
France and Belgium invaded the Ruhr in 1923 to force the Germans to pay Reparations. The League was not involved in the decision.

On the whole, the League failed when trying to stop wars between powerful countries and to achieve disarmament as well as in enforcing the Treaty of Versailles. These failures were mainly due to the fact that the League had no way of effectively imposing sanctions due to its lack of an army and the fact that the one country that could support the League with the necessary economic and military power, the USA, was not a member. Britain and France were too weak following WWI to really be able to support the League.
Successes of the League in the 1920s

**Prisoners of War** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League took home half a million WWI prisoners of war.

**Aaland Islands (1921)** *Stopping wars*
In this disagreement over control between Sweden and Finland - League acted as arbitrator and said they should go to Finland, Sweden accepted.

**Greek – Bulgarian War (1925)** *Stopping wars*
Greece obeyed the League’s orders to pull out of Bulgaria in 1925.

**Slaves** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League attacked slave traders in Africa and Burma and freed 200,000 slaves.

**Disease** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League worked to prevent malaria and leprosy.

**Refugees (1922)** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League set up camps and fed Turkish refugees.

**Economic problems** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League sent economics experts to help Austria and Hungary.

**Drugs** *Improving lives and jobs*
The League closed down four big Swiss companies which were selling drugs.

Overall the League was very successful at improving people’s lives and jobs during the 1920s. These activities tended to be carried out by the League’s committees, showing that this area of the structure worked particularly well. The work of the League which successfully highlighted social problems on a global scale and made positive steps towards eradicating diseases such as leprosy and their work in relocating refugees had never been achieved before by any organisation.

Failures of the 1930s

**Disarmament (1932)** *Stopping wars/Enforcing the Treaty of Versailles/ Disaramament*
Disarmament talks failed, because Germany demanded as many weapons as everyone else.

**Manchuria**

- The Nationalist government of China led by Chiang Kai-shek was weak, corrupt and busy fighting the Communists.
- Due to the Great Depression, Japan wanted to build an empire to secure supplies of raw materials.
- The Japanese government was controlled by the army
- China ruled Manchuria, but the Japanese army ran the railway there, and ruled in Korea.
- Sept 1931: There was some vandalism on the Manchurian railway; Japan claimed the Chinese had sabotaged the railway.
- Japan invaded Manchuria and set up the ‘independent’ state of Manchukuo under the former Emperor of China, Henry Pu Yi.
- China appealed to the League.
- Dec 1931: the League appointed a commission led by Lord Lytton from Britain to investigate.
April 1932 Lytton goes to Manchuria.

Oct 1932: Lytton’s report published - stated that Japan was the aggressor and should leave.

24 Feb 1933: The Assembly voted that Japan should leave Manchuria, Japan walked out of the meeting.

Japan stayed in Manchuria.

The League could not agree economic sanctions or an arms sales ban.

In 1933 Japan resigned from the League, and invaded/ conquered Jehol (next to Manchuria).

In 1937 Japan invaded the rest of China.

A SPECTACULAR failure:

The League was discredited

Manchuria showed:

- It was slow (the Lytton Report took almost a year)
- A country could get its own way if it ignored the League ‘Collective security’ was useless against big countries - especially during the Great Depression.
- Even the great powers within the League (Japan was on the Council) were happy to ignore it.

Abyssinia

- Independent African nation, rich in raw materials.
- October 1935 Italy invaded.
- The Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie asked the League of Nations for help.
- The League did not want a clash with Mussolini. Britain and France wanted him to be their ally against Hitler.
- The Hoare-Laval Pact (a secret agreement to give the rich areas of Abyssinia to Italy) was drawn up.
- As result of the Pact and the subsequent failure of the League, weaker countries realised they could not depend on the League for Help.
- Hitler invaded the Rhineland.
- It showed that the League could not make collective security work.
- In October 1936 Hitler and Mussolini made the Rome-Berlin Axis Agreement: another world war was looming.
Why did the League fail?

It WAS DUMB!

Weak - the League’s ‘powers’ were virtually useless. Sanctions did not work (Failed to stop the sale of arms to Italy during the Abyssinian crisis). It had no army.

America - the strongest nation in the world never joined. Britain and France were not strong enough to impose peace on their own.

Structure - the League was muddled, so it took ages to do anything. Members couldn’t agree - but decisions had to be unanimous. This paralysed the League. It was very slow to act (Manchuria).

Depression - the world-wide Depression made countries try to get more land and power. They were worried about themselves, not about world peace.

Unsuccessful - the more the League failed, the less people trusted it. (Manchuria led to the invasion of the Rhineland). In the end, everybody just ignored it.

Members - the League’s main members let it down. Italy (Abyssinian Crisis) and Japan (Manchurian Crisis) betrayed the League. France and Britain did nothing to help it.

Big bullies - in the 1920s, the League had dealt with weak countries. In the 1930s, powerful countries like Germany, Italy and Japan attacked weaker countries. They were too strong for the League to stop them.
League of Nations past questions

What questions:

- What were the weaknesses of Britain and France as leaders of the League of Nations?
- What were the main aims of the League of Nations when it was set up in 1920?
- What was ‘collective security’ and how was it meant to work?
- How did the League of Nations hope to prevent future wars between nations?
- What were the roles of (i) the Council and (ii) the Refugees Commission in the League of Nations?
- Describe the role played by the League of Nations in two disputes in the 1920s.
- Describe the successes of the League of Nations in the 1920s.
- Describe the work of the Agencies of the League of Nations.
- Describe how the League of Nations tried to improve living and working conditions around the world.
- Describe the Manchurian crisis.
- What was the Hoare-Laval Pact?

Why questions:

- Why did its structure and membership weaken the League?
- Why did some major powers not join the League?
- Why was leadership of the League weak from the start?
- Why was the League dominated by Britain and France?
- Why did the USA’s failure to become a member create problems for the League?
- Why did the League of Nations fail to restrict the aggression of Japan in the 1930s?
- Explain why the League was quite successful in the 1920s.
- Explain why some countries viewed setting up the League of Nations with suspicion.
- Explain how the Japanese invasion of Manchuria showed the weaknesses of the League.
- Why did the League fail to deal with Japanese aggression against Manchuria?
- Explain why the disarmament conference 1932-3 failed.
- Why was the conquest of Abyssinia by Italy not prevented by the League of Nations?
- Explain why Italy defeated Abyssinia.

How Far:

- The peacemakers of 1919–23 coped successfully with the problems they faced.’ How far do you agree?
- How far was the League of Nations a failure in its peacekeeping role in the 1920s?
- How successful was the League of Nations in dealing with international disputes in the 1920s?
- Evaluate the view that structural weaknesses caused failure of League of Nations in 1920s
- “The Depression had a greater impact on the League than the events in Manchuria.” How far do you agree with this statement. Explain your answer.
- Which was the more important cause of the failure of the League of Nations – the World Depression of the 1930s or the invasion of Abyssinia?
- ‘The League of Nations was destroyed by the Depression of the 1930s.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- ‘Italy was more responsible than Britain and France for the failure of the League of Nations.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- ‘Britain and France were to blame for the failure of the League.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- Evaluate how far League of Nations failed because of the Depression.
- ‘It was the Hoare-Laval Plan rather than World Depression that destroyed the League.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- “The League failed because of the Abyssinian Crisis.” How far do you agree with this statement. Explain your answer.
- How far was the League of Nations a success?
- ‘The League had its greatest success in its humanitarian work.’ How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- How far was the League of Nations a failure? Explain your answer.
- It was the Abyssinian crisis that destroyed the League of Nations as an effective peacekeeping body’ How far do you agree with this statement?
- Evaluate how far the disarmament conference showed that League of Nations was a failure.
- ‘The League was a failure’. How far do you agree with this statement? Explain your answer.
- To what extent can the outbreak of war in 1939 be blamed upon the failure of the League of Nations?