

Lesson Plan: Napoleon - Hero, Tyrant, or Something Else?

Materials Needed:

- A computer with internet access
- A notebook and pen, or a word processor (like Google Docs or Microsoft Word)
- **Video Resource:** "Napoleon Bonaparte: Crash Course European History #22" on YouTube.
- **Reading Resource:** "Napoleon Bonaparte" article from History.com.
- (Optional) Access to a free infographic maker like Canva or Piktochart.

Lesson Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify who Napoleon Bonaparte was and explain his rise to power.
2. Analyze the primary causes of the Napoleonic Wars.
3. Describe the major outcomes of the wars and their impact on Europe.
4. Formulate a well-supported argument evaluating Napoleon's legacy as either a positive or negative force in history.

Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Hook - Who Was the Man Behind the Legend? (Approx. 45 minutes)

Let's start by getting a sense of the man who set Europe on fire. He was a military genius, a revolutionary, and a dictator all at once. How did one person accomplish so much?

1. **Watch:** Open the video resource, "Napoleon Bonaparte: Crash Course European History #22". As you watch, take notes on the following:
 - His origins and early life.
 - Key personality traits or skills that helped him succeed.
 - The major steps in his rise from soldier to Emperor.
 - At least two major successes and two major failures mentioned in the video.
2. **Activity - Create Napoleon's "Professional Resume":**

Instead of just listing facts, you're going to create a one-page resume for Napoleon Bonaparte as if he were applying for the job of "Ruler of Europe." This is a creative way to organize what you just learned. Your resume should include:

- **Contact Info:** Name, Place of Birth, Title (e.g., Emperor of the French).
- **Objective/Summary:** A short, powerful statement about his goals (e.g., "To bring order, efficiency, and glory to France and spread revolutionary ideals across Europe.").
- **Key Skills:** List at least 5 skills (e.g., Military Strategy, Political Leadership, Legal Reform, Propaganda).

- **Experience/Career History:** List his major roles in chronological order (e.g., Artillery Officer, First Consul, Emperor), with a brief description of his achievements in each role.
- **Major Accomplishments:** Highlight 3-4 of his biggest wins (e.g., The Napoleonic Code, Battle of Austerlitz).
- **References:** (Be creative! Who would speak for him? Maybe a loyal soldier? Who would speak against him? Perhaps a defeated Austrian general?).

Part 2: The Spark and the Fire - Causes of the Wars (Approx. 45 minutes)

The Napoleonic Wars weren't just about one man's ambition. They were the explosive result of years of tension following the French Revolution. Let's dig into the "why."

1. **Read:** Open the reading resource, the "Napoleon Bonaparte" article from History.com. Focus on the sections titled "Napoleon's Rise to Power," "The Napoleonic Wars," and "Napoleon's Abdication and Final Years."
2. **Activity - The Domino Effect Flowchart:**

Your task is to create a visual flowchart that shows how one event led to another, starting the wars. Your first "domino" should be the French Revolution. What dominoes fell after that, leading to continent-wide war?

- **Domino 1: The French Revolution.** (What did it do? It overthrew a king and established a republic).
- **Domino 2: Fear in other European Monarchies.** (Why were they scared? What did they do about it?).
- **Domino 3: Napoleon's Rise.** (How did the chaos help him take power?).
- **Domino 4: Napoleon's Ambition & French Nationalism.** (What did he and France want?).
- **Domino 5: The Napoleonic Wars Begin.** (The clash of these forces).

You can draw this by hand or use a simple tool online. The goal is to see the chain of cause and effect, not just list the causes.

Part 3: The Aftermath - Outcomes and A New Europe (Approx. 30 minutes)

Wars change everything, from country borders to the way people think. What did Europe look like after Napoleon was finally defeated?

1. **Synthesize:** Using your notes from both the video and the article, think about the long-term results of the wars.
2. **Activity - Before & After Snapshot:**

Create a simple two-column chart or a basic infographic. Label one side "Europe Before Napoleon (c. 1789)" and the other "Europe After Napoleon (c. 1815)." Compare the two eras on the following points:

- **The Map:** What happened to the Holy Roman Empire? What new countries were formed or consolidated (like in Germany and Italy)?
- **Government Systems:** What happened to the idea of absolute monarchy? What new ideas were spreading?
- **Laws:** What was the Napoleonic Code and why was it so important? Where did its influence spread?

- **National Identity:** How did fighting against Napoleon make people in places like Spain, Germany, and Russia feel more "Spanish," "German," or "Russian"? (This is the rise of nationalism).

Part 4: The Final Verdict - Your Historical Analysis (Approx. 60 minutes)

Now for the big question: were the Napoleonic Wars a good thing or a bad thing? History is rarely black and white. Your final task is to act as a historian and write a balanced analysis, arguing both sides before coming to your own conclusion.

1. Activity - Write a "Legacy Report":

Write a short report (2-3 paragraphs for each section) that addresses the central question. Structure your report with the following three sections:

1. The Case FOR Napoleon: "The Modernizer"

In this section, argue for the positive impacts. Use evidence to discuss how Napoleon and his wars spread good ideas. Consider the Napoleonic Code (equality before the law, property rights), the idea of promotion by merit instead of by birth, and the breakdown of old, outdated feudal systems. Was he a necessary force for modernizing Europe?

2. The Case AGAINST Napoleon: "The Tyrant"

In this section, argue for the negative impacts. Use evidence to discuss the immense human cost of the wars (millions dead), his endless ambition that destabilized a continent for over a decade, his reversal of some revolutionary gains (like reintroducing slavery in French colonies), and his creation of a police state. Was he a warmonger who cared only for his own power?

3. Your Conclusion: The Historian's Verdict

After arguing both sides, what do you think? In a final paragraph, state your own conclusion. Was Napoleon's legacy ultimately more positive or more negative? Acknowledge the complexity of the issue. There is no single right answer, but your answer must be supported by the facts you've learned.