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RUSSIA: A THORN IN NAPOLEÓN'S SIDE

The early 19th century was a time of sweeping changes in Europe. Armies swept across the continent, and governments were overthrown. Leo Tolstoy captured this dramatic period in his epic novel *War and Peace*.

Question: What was the most influential force for change in Europe during this period?

If you said the territorial aspirations of Napoléon Bonaparte, you'd be right. Shortly after being crowned Napoléon I, Emperor of France, in 1804, he became more assertive militarily. He led a huge army—his Grande Armée—and proceeded to march across one European nation after another. For more than a decade, the rest of Europe would be dealing with Napoléon, sometimes on their doorsteps.

Question: How did Russia become a thorn in Napoléon's side?

For years, Russia had been an ally of France. At first, Russia was mostly unaffected by Napoléon's ambitions, sitting a safe distance to the east. But eventually a conflict emerged that made Russia one of Napoléon's targets.

When Napoléon declared that other nations should stop doing business with England—in order to cripple England economically—Russia refused. Such an embargo would have hurt its economy as well. But when Russia opposed Napoléon's order, he decided to invade.

As Napoléon's Grande Armée marched into Russia, an epic struggle occurred. This conflict is at the heart of *War and Peace*. Study the timeline at right to see the major events of Napoléon's invasion. Alongside the historical events are turning points in *War and Peace*.

NAPOLEÓN & RUSSIA

- **1805 DECEMBER 5** Prince Andrei Bolkonsky fights in the Battle of Austerlitz, is captured, and meets his hero, Napoléon.
- **1806** Napoléon puts into place the Continental System embargo against Britain.
- **1807** Napoléon establishes the Duchy of Warsaw, a new Polish state using formerly Prussian lands.
- **1810** Russia stops complying with the embargo due to its effects on the country's trade and economy.
- **1812 JUNE** Napoléon's Grande Armée enters Russia. Napoléon captures the city of Vilna, but many troops are killed in an unseasonable storm.
- **1812 JULY–AUGUST** Russian citizens, in support of their country, burn fields to deny supplies to the French.
- **1812 SEPTEMBER 7** The battle of Borodino leaves the road to Moscow open to Napoléon's army.
- **1812 SEPTEMBER** Prince Bolkonsky returns to the army and is wounded in battle.
- **1812 SEPTEMBER** Pierre Bezukhov travels to Moscow, despite its evacuation.
- **1812 SEPTEMBER 14** Napoléon enters Moscow to find it evacuated and with little food supplies available.
- **1812 SEPTEMBER–OCTOBER** Natasha Rostova reunites with Prince Bolkonsky and tends to his injuries.
- **1812 OCTOBER 19** The Grande Armée leaves Moscow.
- **1812 LATE OCTOBER–LATE NOVEMBER** The Grande Armée's numbers dwindle because of extreme winter weather. Thousands of wounded are left behind as Napoléon's army attempts to cross the Berezina River.
- **1812 EARLY DECEMBER** Napoléon flees back to Paris.
- **1813** Several European countries, including Russia and Great Britain, band together to fight Napoléon's newly formed army, which is weaker than the Grande Armée.
- **1813 OCTOBER** Napoléon's army is defeated at the Battle of Leipzig (in Saxony, in Germany).
- **1813** Pierre and Natasha are married.

Note: Entries in red are from the novel *War and Peace*.



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WAR & PEACE



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MILITARY MOVEMENTS— A NATION IN TURMOIL

In the epic novel *War and Peace*, Napoléon's Grande Armée marches across Europe and Russia. Track the Grande Armée's path during the years of the novel, 1805-1813.* Use the map to the right, which shows Europe as it looked in the early 1800s, to plot notable battles and movements of Napoléon's army.

Use the following resources to aid in your mapmaking:

- The historical timeline in Lesson 1
- Online resources
- The novel *War and Peace*
- The television series *War & Peace*



Fill your map with additional details you discover by using callout boxes (text boxes with arrows). These might include geographic details or insights into the lives of the Russian people during that period. Be sure to consider what life must have been like for Russians during the French invasion.

*Note: The novel's epilogue continues to 1820.