Napoleon’s Europe

Main Idea
Napoleon Bonaparte rose through military ranks to become emperor over France and much of Europe.

Reading Focus
1. How did Napoleon rise to power?
2. How did Emperor Napoleon come to dominate Europe?
3. What were Napoleon's most important policies?

Key Terms and People
Napoleon Bonaparte
Admiral Horatio Nelson
coup d’état
plebiscite
Continental System
nationalism

Teach the Main Idea

1. Teach Ask students the Reading Focus questions to teach this section.
2. Apply Have students draw a ladder that shows Napoleon’s rise to power. Have students list Napoleon’s policies at the top of their ladders.
3. Review As you review the section, have students discuss what steps Napoleon took to gain power and the policies he pursued when he was in power.
4. Practice/Homework Have students prepare a short illustrated biography of Napoleon. 

With a Little Luck...

How did a young officer’s chance to prove himself change Europe’s future?
Sometimes achieving greatness requires a little luck. For a young soldier named Napoleon Bonaparte, the lucky break came in the summer of 1793. British troops held the vital French port of Toulon. The French artillery battled courageously to retake the port but made little headway. During the fighting the French captain was wounded, and young Napoleon Bonaparte was chosen to take the wounded captain’s place.

Napoleon made the most of his chance. He came up with a daring plan to retake the port by surrounding the harbor with 80 cannons. Napoleon convinced the officers above him that his plan would succeed. Within 48 hours, the port was his. The victory showed Napoleon’s genius for military strategy and brought him both notice and promotion. There now appeared to be no stopping him. Within 20 years, he would rule most of Europe.
Napoleon’s Rise to Power

Napoleon Bonaparte was a ruthlessly ambitious young man. The turmoil of the French Revolution gave him a prime opportunity to rise quickly to power. Within a few short years, he would rise from a mere army captain to become the ruler of France.

Opportunities for Glory

Napoleon was a brilliant military leader who achieved many early successes. In 1793 he forced British troops out of the port of Toulon. The following year he won a dazzling victory over Austrian troops in Italy. In 1795 Napoleon faced off against a mob of royalists trying to regain power in Paris. Using artillery to shoot into the crowd, Napoleon forced the royalists to flee. As a reward for stopping the uprising, Napoleon was put in charge of defending the French interior. He was only 26 years old.

The following year, the Directory placed Napoleon in command of French forces invading Italy. Poorly supplied, his troops had to take their food from the countryside. But Napoleon turned this hardship to his advantage. Because his troops were not slowed down by a supply train, they could strike quickly. In Italy, Napoleon won battles against the Austrians and Italians. His victories not only kept France’s borders secure but also won territory for France. Napoleon’s future looked very bright.

Next, Napoleon turned his attention to Egypt, where he wanted to disrupt the valuable trade between Great Britain and India. He took the French fleet and a large army across the Mediterranean Sea in 1798. Napoleon’s forces quickly defeated Egypt’s Ottoman defenders and won control of much of Egypt. But the British navy, under the command of Admiral Horatio Nelson, was on Napoleon’s tail. Nelson trapped the French ships. In the long Battle of the Nile, the British destroyed most of the French fleet.

After his loss in the Battle of the Nile, Napoleon wanted to cover up his disastrous defeat. He left his army in Egypt under the command of another officer and sailed back to France. He kept his defeat out of the press and exaggerated the successes of the French army, becoming a national hero in the process.

Napoleon Seizes Power

Napoleon’s ambitions continued to grow. Capitalizing on his status as a national hero, he decided to seize political power.

By this time, the Directory had grown weak and ineffective. As a result, some French leaders feared that royalists might conspire to place a monarchy in power. Others feared the growing opposition of European nations, such as Great Britain and Austria, against France. As a result, a group of conspirators began to plot to seize more power for Napoleon.

Armed supporters of Napoleon surrounded the Directory legislature and forced members to turn the government over to Napoleon in November 1799. This event was a coup d’état (koo day-tay), a forced transfer of power.

A group of three consuls, called the Consulate, would replace the Directory as the government of France. Members voted Napoleon in charge as first Consul. The structure of a republic was still in place, but Napoleon had become a dictator.

Why would a nation that had overthrown its king now welcome a new dictator? Exhausted by the chaos of the Revolution and constant warfare, the French craved the order and stability Napoleon promised. Napoleon also pledged to uphold key revolutionary reforms. The people would willingly give up some freedoms if Napoleon could bring peace, prosperity, and glory to France.

Reading Check

Summarize

What events led to Napoleon’s rise to power?

1. Display students time lines in the classroom. Ask students which events in Napoleon’s life made a large impact on the course of history.
2. Have students conduct additional research to find events and dates that are not in the text, and have them add this information to their time lines. Each time line should include at least four illustrations.

MISCONCEPTION ALERT

Though Napoleon is often described by historians as a short man, he would not have been considered short during the time in which he lived. He stood about 5’6”, which was an average height in early 19th century France.

Lifespan Challenge

How did Napoleon rise to power? 
achieved military successes, showed courage and leadership, covered up his defeat, his supporters staged coup d’état

Napoleon’s Rise to Power

Recall

What was the outcome of Napoleon’s campaigns in Italy? He was victorious, kept France’s borders secure, and won territory for France.

Explain

How did Napoleon become the dictator of France? His supporters staged a coup d’état; Napoleon was set up as first Consul, clearly in charge.

Evaluate

Did Napoleon achieve more by his victories or by covering up his defeats? Possible answer—Covering up his defeats made him seem invincible.

Materials: butcher paper, art supplies

1. Organize students into small groups. Have each group use information in the text to create an illustrated time line of Napoleon’s life.
2. Have students conduct additional research to find events and dates that are not in the text, and have them add this information to their time lines. Each time line should include at least four illustrations.

Skills Focus: Sequencing

Reading Skill

Life of Napoleon

Materials: butcher paper, art supplies

1. Organize students into small groups. Have each group use information in the text to create an illustrated time line of Napoleon’s life.
2. Have students conduct additional research to find events and dates that are not in the text, and have them add this information to their time lines. Each time line should include at least four illustrations.

At Level

Research Required

Answers

Reading Check stopped royalists from regaining power, defended French interior, won battles in Italy, kept borders secure, won territory for France, covered up Battle of Nile, coup d’état

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Emperor Napoleon

As first consul, Napoleon moved quickly to strengthen his power over France. Once France was firmly under his control, he set about conquering Europe.

Napoleon Crowns Himself

Napoleon wanted to make his own power permanent and hereditary. He submitted a plebiscite, a question put before all the voters, in 1804: Did they want to declare France an empire? French voters supported him and voted yes. Thus, Napoleon became Emperor Napoleon I.

Pope Pius VII came from Rome to crown Napoleon emperor in Paris. As the pope was about to place the crown on the new emperor’s head, Napoleon grabbed the crown and placed it on his own head. This action told the world that no one gave Napoleon his authority—he took it for himself.

Desire for Empire

Once Napoleon became emperor of France, he moved to build an empire. He wanted to rule Europe and to extend French power in the Americas. France controlled a number of territories in the Americas, including Louisiana, Florida, and the sugar-producing colony of Saint Domingue (now called Haiti). When civil war erupted in Saint Domingue, Napoleon sent an expedition to take back the colony and restore its profitable sugar industry. But the French expedition failed miserably. This failure led Napoleon to abandon his dream of empire in the Americas. He sold the Louisiana Territory to the United States and turned his focus to Europe.

The Napoleonic Wars Begin

In his quest to conquer Europe, Napoleon began a series of wars that became known as the Napoleonic Wars. These wars were an extension of the ones fought between France and other European nations during the French Revolution. During this period of warfare, France became the dominant European power. Although it grew rapidly under Napoleon’s leadership, the French empire would fall apart even more quickly. The Napoleonic Wars lasted until 1815, keeping France in a state of near-continuous warfare for more than a decade.

Throughout the Napoleonic Wars, Great Britain remained France’s greatest enemy. Britain helped organize a series of coalitions of European nations against France, and British funds helped strengthen resistance to Napoleon across Europe. Napoleon knew that until he could defeat Great Britain, he would have no peace in Europe.

Napoleon hoped to invade Britain and defeat it. However, Admiral Nelson and the British navy, the commander and fleet that had earlier defeated Napoleon in Egypt, stood in his way. The British navy proved its worth in October 1805 when it defeated a combined French and Spanish navy off the coast of Spain in the Battle of Trafalgar.

On land, Napoleon was more successful. Two months after his defeat at the Battle of Trafalgar, he won a devastating victory over Russian and Austrian troops at the Battle of Austerlitz, near Vienna, Austria.

The Continental System

Great Britain continued to defy Napoleon. But this “nation of shopkeepers,” as Napoleon disdainfully called the country, was vulnerable. Britain’s economy depended on overseas trade. If Napoleon could disrupt that trade, he would weaken Britain’s ability to fund rebellion in Europe against him.

In an effort to disrupt Great Britain’s trade with other nations, he planned a blockade. This plan, called the Continental System, prohibited French or allied ships from trading with Britain. The British responded by requiring all ships from neutral countries to stop in British ports for permission to trade with the French. While trying to enforce these trade restrictions, Britain and France were drawn into other conflicts. One conflict was the Peninsular War, which drew Portugal and Spain into the conflict between France and Great Britain.

The Peninsular War

Portugal, which shares the Iberian Peninsula with Spain, was neutral during the Napoleonic Wars. The Portuguese refused to comply with the Continental System because they depended on trade with Britain. To enforce his power, Napoleon sent French troops into Portugal to take control and drive out the king. Napoleon then quickly conquered Spain and placed his brother Joseph on the Spanish throne. But the Spanish resented having a foreign ruler and revolted in 1808.

To support the Spanish revolt of French rule, Great Britain sent its military forces to Spain.

Differentiating Instruction

Special Education Students

Materials: magazines, poster paper, paste, scissors, small photocopied images of Napoleon

1. Review the text about Napoleon’s rise to power. Have students brainstorm adjectives, both positive and negative, that could be used to describe Napoleon. Create a class list for students to see.

2. Give each student a piece of poster paper and a photocopied image of Napoleon. The image should be pasted in the center or at the top of the poster paper. The title of the poster should be: Words that Describe Napoleon.

3. Have students search the magazines for images that could be used to illustrate the adjectives on the class list. Students should write the term on their poster paper and paste the image above it.

4. Display posters for students to see.

Visual-Spatial

Alternative Assessment Handbook, Rubrics: Artwork; and 28: Posters
New battling two military forces, Napoleon faced a serious threat. He responded by sending troops from central Europe, and they quickly won several victories over the British and Spanish troops.

Yet a more deadly enemy still threatened—the Spanish people. They began a guerrilla war in which bands of peasants ambushed French troops and raided French camps. To punish the Spanish guerrilla fighters, the French slaughtered many innocent Spanish civilians. Nevertheless, the war kept the French army pinned down, and eventually Napoleon had to pull his troops out of Spain.

**Napoleon Dominates Europe** In spite of this setback in Spain, Napoleon managed to take control of most of Europe through treaties, alliances, and victories in battle. The only nations free of his control were Great Britain, Sweden, Portugal, and the Ottoman Empire. In many of the European nations Napoleon conquered, he put his relatives in power. He gave his brothers the thrones of Holland, the Italian states of Naples and Sicily, and the German state of Westphalia. His sisters, and even his stepson, also held powerful positions.

**Reading Check** Summarizing What regions of Europe did Napoleon dominate?

**Info to Know**

**The Napoleonic Code** The Napoleonic Code, a system of laws organized by Napoleon, has had a widespread impact throughout history. The code went into effect in the lands that Napoleon controlled and influenced other areas as well. Laws of most western European countries still show some influence of the code. In addition, because Quebec and Louisiana were settled by the French, the present-day laws of those places are also based on the Napoleonic Code.
Emperor Napoleon

**Identify** In what countries did Napoleon place his relatives? Spain, Holland, Italy, and Germany

**Make Judgments** Do you think placing one’s relatives in power is an effective way to lead a nation or territory? Possible answers — Yes, they can be manipulated and will do what the leader tells them; no, because they might be inexperienced or ineffective.

**Info to Know**

**Napoleon’s Empire, 1812** In all of the “satellite kingdoms” of France, efforts were made to introduce elements of French government. This meant trying to remove the old feudal privileges of the nobility and diminish the importance of the Church in society. Conscription, or a military draft, also occurred in regions throughout the empire.

**Interactive Map:** Napoleon’s Empire, 1812

**Answers**

**Interpreting Maps** 1. **enabled** Napoleon to control the entire empire, and relatives had same last name, a constant reminder of who was in power; 2. No, it was vulnerable to attack on the east-central border, the Mediterranean Sea

**Collaborative Learning**

**Nepotism Debate**

1. Discuss with students Napoleon’s policy of placing relatives in control of conquered territories.

2. Organize students into two groups. Pose the following question to students: Is nepotism an effective leadership tool?

3. Have students each group brainstorm ideas in support of their argument. One group should list reasons in favor of nepotism and the other group should list reasons against it. One student in each group should take notes and compile a group list.

4. Conduct a class debate, instructing students in each group to provide at least three reasons why they either support or oppose nepotism.

**At Level**

**Interpersonal, Verbal-Linguistic**

**Alternative Assessment Handbook,** Rubrics 10: Debates; and 14: Group Activity
Napoleon’s Policies

As Napoleon ruled his empire, he also strengthened the power of France’s central government. He developed a plan to establish order and efficiency throughout France, which involved reforms in many areas of French society.

Reform of Church-State Relations

Many French citizens had despised the anti-religious nature of the French Revolution. Napoleon soothed these feelings by making an agreement with the pope. Called the Concordat, this agreement acknowledged that most French citizens were Roman Catholics. The agreement did not require that they be Catholics, because religious toleration was still the law. The Concordat recognized the influence of the Roman Catholic Church in France but did not return any control over national affairs to the church.

Economic Reforms

Because Napoleon knew that a good financial system was essential for the stability of France, he established the Bank of France to regulate the economy. He also set up a more efficient tax collection system. These measures ensured that the government would not face the kinds of financial crises that occurred before the Revolution.

Legal and Educational Reforms

Under Napoleon’s leadership, scholars revised and organized French law and created the Napoleonic Code. This code made laws uniform across the nation and eliminated many injustices. However, it also promoted order and authority over individual rights. Freedom of the press, for example, was restricted by censors who banned books and newspapers for certain political content. In addition, the code was limited in that it only applied to male citizens. The code denied rights for women and allowed for husbands to have authority over their wives.

Napoleon also believed that a strong state depended on having strong leaders in government and military positions. He established a network of high schools, universities, and technical schools to educate young men in preparation for those jobs.

Napoleon’s Legacy

Napoleon left a legacy in France as well as throughout Europe. In France, Napoleon ensured that some basic ideas of the revolution would remain part of the French government. Historians speak of this period of Napoleon’s domination of Europe as the Age of Napoleon.

Napoleon made some basic revolutionary ideas part of the French government. These democratic ideas included equality before the law and a representative system of government. In fact, these revolutionary principles were those that Napoleon had approved and supported.

Throughout Europe, Napoleon’s actions helped fuel the spread of nationalism—a sense of identity and unity as a people. During the Revolution, the French people developed a new loyalty to France as a whole. In addition, similar feelings of nationalism spread to peoples that Napoleon had conquered.

**Reading Check**

1. a. Identify What happened in November 1799?
   b. Analyze How did Napoleon use French citizens to gain power?
   c. Evaluate Do you think you would have welcomed Napoleon as a dictator? Why or why not?
2. a. Recall Who fought the battles at Trafalgar and Austerlitz? Which side won each battle?
   b. Analyze How did the Continental System affect countries beyond Europe?
   c. Make Judgments How do you think you would have reacted if you had been present at Napoleon’s crowning?
3. a. Define What is nationalism, and how did it spread?
   b. Contrast In what way did Napoleon’s support of revolutionary ideals contrast with other actions that he took?
   c. Elaborate Why do you think historians may hold different views of Napoleon?

**Critical Thinking**

4. Sequence Use the graphic organizer below to show the sequence of events that led to Napoleon’s rise to power.

5. Exposition Write a one-paragraph letter to Napoleon from the viewpoint of a French officer stationed in Spain during the Peninsular War. In your letter, make suggestions about how to win the war.

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**Section 3 Assessment Answers**

1. a. Supporters of Napoleon staged a coup d’état.
   b. submitted a plebiscite asking whether France should be an empire
   c. possible answers—Yes, he established order; no—dictators take power from the people.
2. a. Trafalgar—British defeated French and Spanish; Austerlitz—French defeated Russians and Austrians.
   b. prohibited trade with Britain; created other conflicts
   c. possible answer—shocked that Napoleon crowned himself
3. a. sense of patriotism, identity, and unity as a people; through Napoleon’s conquests
   b. Napoleon often suppressed individual freedoms.
   c. possible answer—Napoleon was a complex figure who took many diverse actions.
   4. stopped royalists from regaining power, won battles and territory, secured borders, staged a coup d’état
   5. Students’ letters might mention attacks from peasants and propose reasonable ways to deal with guerrillas.

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**Napoleon’s Policies**

**Describe** Describe the Napoleonic Code, made laws uniform nationwide, eliminated injustices, promoted order and authority over individual rights.

**Evaluate** How well did Napoleon implement the principles of the French Revolution? success—equality before the law, representative system of government; failure—individual rights and freedoms.

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**Review**

**Assess**

**SE Section 3 Assessment**

**Progress Assessment**: Section 3 Quiz

**Alternative Assessment Handbook**

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**Reteach/Intervene**

**Interactive Reader and Study Guide, Section 3**

**Interactive Skills Tutor CD-ROM**

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**Answers**

**Reading Check** Napoleon made some basic revolutionary ideas part of the French government.