On December 4, 1918, President Woodrow Wilson of the United States set sail for Europe to attend the peace conference in Paris, France, which would officially put an end to the First World War. He hoped that this peace conference would result in the creation of a more peaceful world order – one in which war would never happen again. To help meet this goal, President Wilson wanted to create an organization of the world’s nations that could meet and talk-through their issues with one another, thus preventing war. Wilson also hoped to establish new independent nations for ethnic groups in Europe who previously were under the control of other nations. This is the idea of self-determination. This meant allowing people to decide for themselves under what government they wished to live.

The Paris Peace Conference opened on January 12th, 1919, with thirty-two leaders representing 75% of the entire world’s population. Representatives from European colonies in Africa and Asia also came, hoping to have their voices heard by the European nations. However, the peace conference was dominated by the five Allied Power nations considered most responsible for bringing an end to the war: Britain, France, Italy, the United States, and Japan. Russia was not represented due to its participation in their own revolution at the time. None of the Central Powers, including Germany, had any say in the matters discussed at the Paris Peace Conference.

The results of the Paris Peace Conference included the creation of five treaties, but the most important of these by far was the Treaty of Versailles.

The following are the main terms of the Treaty of Versailles:

1. The League of Nations was created. It was an international association composed of representatives from independent nations whose goal would be to keep international peace through diplomacy [discussion & negotiation].
2. Germany had to surrender its European territory of Alsace-Lorraine to France.
3. Germany had to surrender coalmines in the Saar region of Germany to France.
4. Germany had to surrender part of its lands in Western Germany to form the new nation of Poland for ethnic Poles.
5. Germany had to surrender all of its colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific to Britain, France, and Japan.
6. Germany properties in foreign countries were confiscated.
7. Germany had to give all war materials to the Allied Powers.
8. Germany was not allowed to have tanks, airplanes, submarines, large warships, and poison gasses.
9. Germany had to abolish the military draft in its nation.
10. The total size of Germany’s army was not to exceed 100,000 troops.
11. The German navy was not to exceed 15,000.
12. Germany was barred from joining the League of Nations.
13. Germany must admit “war guilt.” This placed sole responsibility for the destruction caused by the war on Germany’s shoulders.
14. Germany had to pay 20 billion gold marks [marks were the form of German currency at the time] in war reparations to Britain and France for war damages.
15. Austria-Hungary had to surrender territory to form new nations. From this territory would be formed new nations of Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.
16. The Ottoman Empire had to surrender all foreign possessions to the League of Nations.
17. The Ottoman Empire’s territories in the Middle East would become mandates [territories to be managed by the League of Nations], with the exception of Turkey. Britain would oversee the Middle Eastern mandates of Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan. France would oversee the mandates of Syria and Lebanon. The mandates were to be given their independence when they successfully adopted democracy.
TERRITORIAL CLAIMS IN CHINA AFFECTED BY THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES:

The Japanese claim to Shandong (a peninsula in northeast China) was disputed by the Chinese. In 1914 at the outset of the First World War, Japan had seized the Shandong territory which had previously been granted to Germany in 1897. Japan also seized German island claims in the Pacific north of the equator. In 1917, Japan had made secret agreements with Britain, France, and Italy as regards their annexation of these territories. With Britain, there was a mutual agreement with Japan also agreeing to support British annexation of the Pacific islands south of the equator. Despite a generally pro-Chinese view on behalf of the American representatives to the Paris Peace Conference, Article 156 of the Treaty of Versailles transferred German territory in Shandong, China to Japan rather than returning sovereign rule to China. Chinese outrage over the provision led to demonstrations known as the May Fourth Movement. The Pacific islands north of the equator became a mandate administered by Japan.
PARIS PEACE CONFERENCE, 1919: QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What was the primary treaty signed at the Paris Peace Conference?

2. For the following questions, read the summarized provisions of the Treaty of Versailles:
   a. What country lost the most due to the Treaty of Versailles?

   b. Identify 6 major ways that that nation was limited by the treaty?

   c. What happened to the Ottoman Empire as a result of the Paris Peace Conference?

   d. Representatives from Allied Europe’s colonies in Africa and Asia came to the Paris Peace Conference hoping for more rights and freedoms, including self-determination. According to the Treaty of Versailles, what rewards would Europe’s colonies receive for their loyal service during World War I?

3. Who gained more from their membership in the Allied Powers of World War I: China or Japan? Explain.

4. What was the May Fourth Movement?

5. How might the Treaty of Versailles impact Germany in the decades immediately following World War I?

6. In your opinion, was the Paris Peace Conference fair? For what reasons do you believe this?

7. If you had control of the Paris Peace Conference, how would you have determined the peace terms differently?