The War of Spanish Succession

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Caption: Battle of Vigo Bay (Spain), the English and Dutch destroyed a Spanish treasure fleet, October 23, 1702

The War of Spanish Succession was a conflict that involved many of the countries of Europe. On the one side were France and Spain. On the other side were the Holy Roman Empire and its supporters including England, Portugal, and other countries. France was hoping to expand its territory by allying itself with Spain. The Holy Roman Empire hoped to protect the claims of its ruling family in Spain. The war began in 1701 and lasted for eleven years until 1714.

One interesting way to study this war is to look at its causes and its effects.

The general cause of the war was the conflict over who should succeed Charles II as king of Spain. There were many more specific causes - each one of them a member of a royal family with some claim to the Spanish throne.

One contender was Louis, the son of King Louis XIV of France. He was strongly opposed by those countries that did not want to see France expand its empire.

Another contender was Maria Theresa. Maria Theresa had been in line to succeed to the Spanish throne but had renounced her rights to rule Spain when she married. Her supporters, however, felt that she was still in line for the throne. Since Spain had never paid her dowry, they felt that her renunciation of the throne was not valid either.

A third contender for the throne was Leopold I of the Holy Roman Empire. Leopold was a member of the Austrian Hapsburg dynasty and was also cousin to King Charles of Spain. If Leopold took the throne, it would have united Spain with the Holy Roman Empire.

Fourth, there was Prince Joseph Ferdinant of Bavaria. Prince Joseph was only a child, but he became the preferred candidate. Although he was the grandson of Leopold, he was not a member of the Hapsburg dynasty and so was more acceptable to both sides. Leopold might have become the next king of Spain, but he died unexpectedly in 1699.

Another compromise candidate was Phillip duc d'Anjou. Phillip was the son of Louis and the grandson of King Louis XIV. With Prince Joseph out of the picture, King Charles chose Phillip as his successor. Phillip became King Phillip V of Spain.

Unfortunately, no one seemed happy with this final choice made by King Charles. Countries started taking sides and the War of Spanish Succession began.

The war was fought in Europe, in North America, and on the Spanish Main.

Eleven years later, when the war ended, the Treaty of Utrecht spelled out the results. Finally, the effects of the conflict over King Charles' successor became known.

In Europe, Phillip V remained King of Spain. However, he gave up his claim to succession to the French throne. This removed the threat of his combining the two countries into a larger empire. French supremacy over Europe was ended. The idea of a balance of power among countries began to take hold.

In North America, France and Great Britain had fought for control of the continent with the assistance of American Indian tribes on both sides. The end of the war resulted in Great Britain gaining territories including Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and the Hudson Bay region.

Changes took place in the Spanish controlled lands around the Caribbean Sea known as the Spanish Main, too. In this far off part of the Spanish empire, pirates had been heroes during the war when they attacked British ships. Now that the war was over, England was
no longer the enemy. Pirates who continued to do what pirates do on the high seas went from being viewed as heroes to being identified as outlaws.

Surely King Charles, as he pondered over his final decision about who would succeed him, never could have imagined that all of this would be the effect of that one choice.

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Questions

1. France and Spain were ______ in the War of Spanish Succession.
   A. allies
   B. enemies
   C. neutral
   D. none of the above

2. England and Portugal ______ the Holy Roman Empire.
   A. left
   B. supported
   C. opposed
   D. joined

3. All of the following were possible choices to become the new monarch of Spain EXCEPT ______.
   A. Charles II
   B. Louis
   C. Maria Theresa
   D. Leopold I

4. ______ was chosen to succeed Charles II.
   A. Maria Theresa
   B. Louis
   C. Phillip duc d'Anjou
   D. Prince Joseph Ferdinand

5. The War of Spanish Succession began ______.
   A. before the marriage of Maria Theresa
   B. after Charles II chose his successor
   C. after the rule of Phillip V ended
   D. after CharlesII was chosen to be king of Spain

6. After the war, Spain was ruled by ______.
   A. Phillip V
   B. Charles II
   C. Louis
   D. Louis XIV

7. After the war, ______ gained territory in North America.
   A. The Holy Roman Empire
   B. Spain
   C. Great Britain
   D. France

8. After the war, pirates ______.
   A. stopped breaking the law
   B. were considered heroes
   C. ruled Spain
   D. were considered outlaws

Think about another war that you have learned about in history. Write about the causes and the effects of that war.
Wars are not the only events in history that had causes and effects. Choose one of these topics and write about its possible causes and effects: European countries sending settlers to the New World, the invention of the steamship, the spread of literacy.