

## Interpreting Graphs

### Why Learn This Skill?

Graphs are a good method of illustrating dates, facts, and figures. With a graph, you can easily compare change, progressions, or differences.

### Learning the Skill

There are basically three types of graphs:

- **Circle graphs:** They look like a pizza that has been divided into different-sized slices. They are useful for comparisons and percentages.
- **Bar graphs:** Individual bars are drawn for each item being graphed. The length of the bars easily illustrates differences or changes over time.
- **Line graph:** Each item is indicated by a point on the graph. The points are then connected by a line. You can tell how values have changed by whether the line goes up or down.

Most graphs also have titles and labels that include extra information. If the title is named "Maria's Weekly Clothing Expenses," then it is plotting how much Maria spends on clothes every week. Labels indicate when and how much Maria spent on clothes. The viewer can determine relationships among different numbers in the graph with a simple glance. If it is a bar graph, the bars representing different numbers are different sizes.

### Practicing the Skill

Look closely at the bar graph on this page comparing the nuclear weapons stockpiles of the United States and the USSR from 1945 to 1985.

Graphs use a guide called a key to indicate what different bars, patterns, or colors represent. The key for this graph shows you which color bars represent the countries of the United States and the USSR. If there were more countries represented by bars in the graph the key would include more colors for those countries, too. When other graphs are used in your lessons, pay close attention to the key and what it tells you. As the name suggests, it is your tool for unlocking the information in the graph.

### Skills Assessment

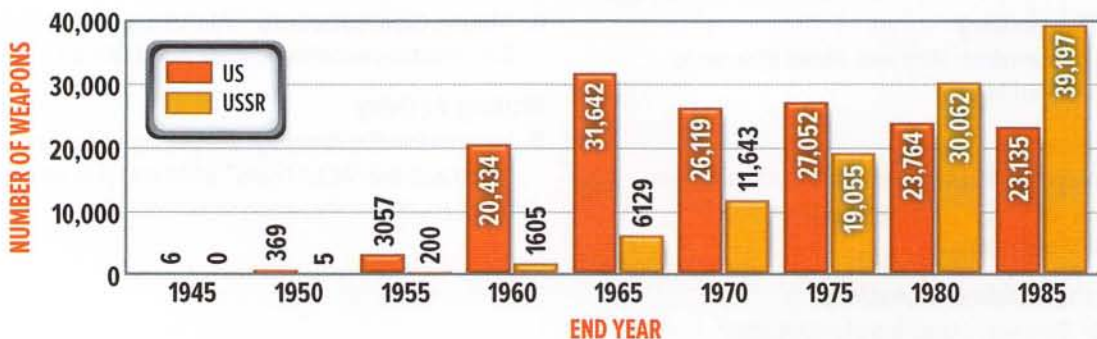
Study the bar graph and answer the following:

1. According to the graph, in what year did the United States have the greatest stockpile of nuclear weapons?
2. How many nuclear weapons did the USSR have in the year 1975?
3. In what year did the nuclear weapons stockpile of the USSR surpass that of the United States?
4. Using the graph, describe the trends you notice in the size of each nation's nuclear stockpile over the course of the Cold War.
5. Based on the graph, can you draw any conclusions about the relationship between the two superpowers during this time period?

### Applying the Skill

Study the bar graph on this page closely and write a paragraph summarizing how key events of the Cold War affected the nuclear weapons buildup of the two superpowers. Remember, a graph does not just present individual facts—it also presents relationships among those facts.

**NUCLEAR WEAPONS STOCKPILES, 1945–1985**



Source: Natural Resources Defense Council, "Archive of Nuclear Data," nrdc.org