



World History

Conditions Leading to World War II

Name: _____

Section: _____

Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the following documents pertaining to the beginning of World War II and answer the associated thought questions. Once finished answer the post-activity thought question at the bottom.

Document 1:

In this excerpt, Adolf Hitler explains some of his ideas.

"One blood demands one Reich. Never will the German nation have the moral right to enter into colonial politics until, at least, it includes its own sons within a single state.... Oppressed territories are led back to the bosom of a common Reich, not by flaming protests, but by a mighty sword."

Source: Adolf Hitler, Mein Kampf, 1925-26 (adapted)

Thought Question:

1. What did Hitler suggest was needed for Germany? How would that lead to war?

Document 2:

Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935. Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, asked the League of Nations for help in stopping the invasion by Italian soldiers. He asked for military sanctions. Here is part of his appeal to the League of Nations.

"God and history will remember your judgment. ... It is us today. It will be you tomorrow."

Thought Question:

2. What would happen if the aggressors were not stopped?

Document 3:

Hitler promised to tear up the Versailles Treaty. One article of the treaty forbade German troops from entering the Rhineland, a buffer zone between Germany and France. Two headlines and articles from The New York Times of March 8, 1936, are excerpted below. They explain this issue from the German and the French points of view.

"HITLER SENDS GERMAN TROOPS INTO RHINELAND

Berlin, March 7-Germany today cast off the last shackles fastened upon her by the Treaty of Versailles when Adolf Hitler, as commander-in-chief of the Reich defense forces, sent his new battalions into the Rhineland's demilitarized zone.... "After three years of ceaseless battle," Hitler concluded, "I look upon this day as marking the close of the struggle for German equality status and with that re-won equality the path is now clear for Germany's return to European collective cooperation."

PARIS APPEALS TO LEAGUE

Paris, March 7-France has laid Germany's latest treaty violation before the Council of the League of Nations. At the same time the French Government made it quite clear that there could be no negotiation with Germany ... as long as a single German soldier remained in the Rhineland in contravention [violation] of Germany's signed undertakings [agreements].... What is essential, in the French view, is that the German government must be compelled by diplomatic pressure first, and by stronger pressure if need be, to withdraw from the Rhineland."

Source: The New York Times, March 8, 1936 (adapted)

Thought Questions:

3. What action did Hitler take in defiance of the Versailles Treaty? How did he explain his action?

4. What was the reaction in France? How might this have led to war?

Document 4:

German aggression continued in 1938. Britain, France, and Italy met with Hitler to discuss his demands for the Sudetenland, a section of Czechoslovakia. This radio broadcast by William Shirer describes what happened at this meeting.

“It took the Big Four just five hours and twenty-five minutes here in Munich today to dispel the clouds of war and come to an agreement over the partition of Czechoslovakia. There is to be no European war ... the price of that peace is ... the ceding by Czechoslovakia of the Sudeten territory to Herr Hitler's Germany. The German Fuhrer gets what he wanted.... His waiting ten short days has saved Europe from a world war ... most of the peoples of Europe are happy that they won't have to go marching off to war Probably only the Czechs ... are not too happy. But there seems very little that they can do about it in face of all the might and power represented here.”

Source: William Shirer, CBS broadcast, 1938 (adapted)

Thought Question:

5. What happened at this Munich Conference, according to Shirer? What did he feel was the reaction in Czechoslovakia and in the rest of Europe?

Document 5:

This excerpt is from a speech that British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain gave to Parliament in 1938. In it, Chamberlain explains why he favored a policy of appeasement in dealing with Hitler at Munich.

“With a little good will and determination, it is possible to remove grievances and clear away suspicion.... We must try to bring these four nations into friendly discussion. If they can settle their differences, we shall save the peace of Europe for a generation. And, in The Times [London]: I shall not give up the hope of a peaceful solution.... We sympathize with a small nation faced by a big and powerful neighbor. But we cannot involve the whole British Empire in war simply on her account. If we have to fight, it must be on larger issues than that.... I am a man of peace.... Yet if I were sure that any nation had made up its mind to dominate the world by fear of its force, I should feel that it must be resisted.... But war is a fearful thing.”

Thought Questions:

6. Why did Chamberlain suggest appeasement?

7. Under what conditions would he fight?

Document 6:

Winston Churchill disagreed with Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. In this speech to Parliament in 1938, Churchill warns England about following a policy of appeasement.

"I have always held the view that keeping peace depends on holding back the aggressor. After Hitler's seizure of Austria in March, I appealed to the government. I asked that Britain, together with France and other powers, guarantee the security of Czechoslovakia. If that course had been followed, events would not have fallen into this disastrous state ... (I)n time, Czechoslovakia will be swallowed by the Nazi regime... I think of all the opportunities to stop the growth of Nazi power which have been thrown away. The responsibility must rest with those who have control of our political affairs. They neither prevented Germany from rearming, nor did they rearm us in time. They weakened the League of Nations.... Thus they left us in the hour of trial without a strong national defense or system of international security."

Thought Questions:

8. What strategy did Churchill suggest for keeping peace and stopping the growth of Nazi power?

9. In his opinion, what opportunities had been lost in the quest for peace?

Document 7:

This excerpt offers a critical view of the Munich Agreement.

"The Munich Agreement was a ... desperate act of appeasement at the cost of the Czechoslovak state, performed by Chamberlain and French premier, Daladier, in the vain hope that it would satisfy Hitler's stormy ambition, and thus secure for Europe a peaceful future. We know today that it was unnecessary ... because the Czech defenses were very strong ... and because the German generals, conscious of Germany's relative weakness at that moment, were actually prepared to attempt to remove Hitler ... had he continued to move toward war."

Source: George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*, Atlantic Little Brown, 1961 (adapted)

Thought Questions:

10. What are two reasons Kennan felt the Munich Agreement was unnecessary?

Document 8:

In this excerpt, British historian A.J.P. Taylor presents another point of view on appeasement.

"Can any sane man suppose ... that other countries could have intervened by armed force in 1933 to overthrow Hitler when he had come to power by constitutional means and was apparently supported by a large majority of the German people? The Germans put Hitler in power; they were the only ones who could turn him out. Also the "appeasers" feared that the defeat of Germany would be followed by a Russian domination over much of Europe."

Source: A.J.P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War*, Atheneum, 1965 (adapted)

Thought Questions:

11. What were two reasons used to explain why appeasement was logical at that time?

Document 9:

In this excerpt, the author argues that the discussion about stopping Hitler prior to 1939 was not an issue, for several reasons.

"[N]either the people nor the government of [Britain and France] were conditioned to the idea of war Before September 1, 1939, Hitler had done nothing that any major power considered dangerous enough to warrant precipitating [starting] a major European war. Nor was there any existing coalition that could have opposed Hitler's massive forces. For Britain sought to appease Hitler [and] the French feared a repetition of the bloody sacrifices of 1914-1918. Stalin wanted an agreement with Hitler on partitioning Europe and the United States rejected all responsibility for Europe."

Source: Keith Eubank, *Origins of World War II*, Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1969 (adapted)

Thought Questions:

12. What evidence did this historian give for his belief that Hitler would not have been stopped prior to 1939?

Post-Activity Thought Question:

1. Use the documents above to come up with a general explanation for why the the world plunged into World War II in 1939?
