

DBQ 21: Causes of World War II

(Adapted from *Document-Based Assessment for Global History*, Walch Education)

Historical Context:

Even though the 1920's began with a favorable outlook for peace, toward the end of the decade and throughout the 1930's the clouds of war were forming. Dictators arose in countries that were dissatisfied with the results of World War I. Germany, Italy and Japan took aggressive actions, and neither the League of Nations nor the democratic countries were able or willing to stop them. British Prime Minister Chamberlain suggested the best way to deal with Hitler was a policy of appeasement. Actions were taken that moved Europe toward war. The debate over the causes of World War II provides different perspectives.

- **Directions:** The following question is based on the accompanying documents in Part A. As you analyze the documents, take into account both the source of the document and the author's point of view. Be sure to:
 1. Carefully read the document-based question. Consider what you already know about this topic. How would you answer the question if you had no documents to examine?
 2. Now, read each document carefully, underlining key phrases and words that address the document-based question. You may also wish to use the margin to make brief notes. Answer the questions which follow each document.
 3. Based on your own knowledge and on the information found in the documents, formulate a thesis that directly answers the question.
 4. Organize supportive and relevant information into a brief outline.
 5. Write a well-organized essay proving your thesis. The essay should be logically presented and should include information both from the documents and from your own knowledge outside of the documents.

Question: Why was the world plunged into World War II in 1939? What is the most effective response to aggression—appeasement or collective security?

- **Part A:** The following documents provide information about the steps leading to World War II. Examine the documents carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1

In this excerpt from *Mein Kampf*, Adolph 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.

What does Hitler suggest is needed for Germany? How would that lead to war? _____

(continued)

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 21: World War II: The Road to War (continued)**Document 2**

After Italy attacked Ethiopia, Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia, asked the League of Nations for help in stopping the invasion. He asked for military sanctions but the League of Nations' response was ineffective. Haile Selassie used these words to the League of Nations:

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

According to Haile Selassie, who should stop the aggressors? _____

What will happen if the aggressors are not stopped? _____

Document 3

Hitler promised to tear up the Versailles Treaty. Specifically, the treaty forbade German troops from entering the Rhineland, a buffer zone between Germany and France. The texts of two headlines and articles from The New York Times of March 8, 1936, 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.

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

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

(continued)

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 21: World War II: The Road to War (continued)**Document 4**

As 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.

William Shirer: 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.

What happened at this Munich Conference according to Shirer? What does he feel is the reaction in Europe and in Czechoslovakia? _____

Document 5

In this speech to Parliament, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain explains why he favored a policy of appeasement in dealing with Hitler at Munich in 1938.

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.

Why does Chamberlain suggest appeasement? _____

Under what conditions would he fight? _____

(continued)

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 21: World War II: The Road to War (continued)**Document 6**

Winston Churchill disagreed with Chamberlain's policy of appeasement. In this speech to Parliament, Churchill warned 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. . . . in 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.

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

Who is responsible for these lost opportunities? _____

Document 7

In this excerpt from *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin*, George F. Kennan offers another critical view of the Munich Agreement (Boston: Atlantic Little Brown, 1961).

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 forward.

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

(continued)

Name _____ Date _____

DBQ 21: World War II: The Road to War (continued)**Document 8**

In this excerpt adapted from British historian A. J. P. Taylor's *The Origins of the Second World War* (New York: Atheneum, 1965, p. 291), another point of view on appeasement is presented.

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.

What were two reasons this author used to explain why appeasement was the logical policy at that time?

Document 9

In this excerpt by Keith Eubank from *Origins of World War II*, the author argues that the discussion about stopping Hitler prior to 1939 was not an issue for several reasons.

. . . neither 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.

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

- **Part B—Essay**

Why was the world plunged into World War II in 1939? What is the most effective response to aggression—appeasement or collective security?

Document 1

According to Hitler, Germany needed to unite all its people under one government—the Reich. It should be accomplished by force—“the sword.”

Document 2

Haile Selassie wanted the League of Nations to stop Italian aggression. If the aggressor was not stopped, he would attack others. The aggressor should not be appeased.

Document 3

Hitler moved his troops into the Rhineland in violation of the Treaty of Versailles. He did this because he said it was time for Germany to be treated as an equal to the rest of the countries of Europe and no longer as a defeated punished nation. France went to the League of Nations and asked that Germany be removed from the Rhineland diplomatically or by “stronger pressure” if necessary.

Document 4

At the Munich Conference, the Big Four agreed to give the Sudetenland to Germany. According to Shirer, the Europeans were happy because war was avoided. The Czechs were not happy, but they couldn’t resist in the face of the power present.

Document 5

Chamberlain suggested appeasement because he believed “good will and determination” could solve differences among countries peacefully. He said they could not fight to save Czechoslovakia because it is a small country. But he is willing to fight over big issues. Specifically, he says he will fight to stop a country that is using force to take over the world, but he does not want war and prefers diplomacy and appeasement.

Document 6

According to Churchill, the aggressor must be stopped. Britain, France, and the other countries must join together (collective security) to stop aggression. They should have stopped Hitler when he seized Austria and when he threatened Czechoslovakia, which he eventually took over. The responsibility for the “disastrous state” of England rests with the British government, which weakened the League of Nations and did not build up their defenses. In addition, the British government did not stop Germany from rebuilding her army. Appeasement does not work. It only postpones the inevitable conflict that will come.

Document 7

This author believed that appeasement was unnecessary because Czechoslovakia was strong enough to save herself. In addition, the German generals were about to overthrow Hitler.

Document 8

Historian Taylor defends appeasement. He said there was little basis for suggesting that the Germans would reject Hitler since they had put him in power and supported him. In addition the other countries were worried about Russian expansion in Europe.

Document 9

The writer claims that the countries of Europe, especially Britain and France, were not willing to fight because Hitler had done nothing that would warrant their returning to the conditions they had suffered in World War I. All the countries had other interests and they were not willing to unite to stop Hitler. Collective security was not an option for them at that time.

Additional Information Beyond the Documents**Teacher Guide Page**

The documents provide students with only fragments of evidence. Answers should include relevant information from beyond the documents—information that students have learned from their classroom study. The following list suggests some of the information that students might include in their essays from outside learning.

Causes of World War II—alliance system, hatred for the Versailles Treaty, weaknesses of the League of Nations (collective security)

Hitler's basic ideas about race, lebensraum, and Germany's rightful place in the world.

