Historical Context

Throughout the 1930s 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, which was especially seen in the Munich Pact.

Modified from materials from “Document-Based Assessment for Global History” and the British National Archives
Abraham Lincoln
Nov. 19, 1863
Sixth Hour

Gettysburg Address a Bold Move

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this (document #3).

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which
Using information from the documents and your knowledge of social studies (especially textbook chapter 31.4), to consider the answers to the questions that follow each document. Your answers to the questions will help you write the essay in which you:

Judge whether the British policy of appeasement the most effective response to Hitler’s aggression during the 1930s.

Complexity requires that you address both sides.
Background

According to the Treaty of Versailles, the Rhineland, a strip of land inside Germany bordering on France, Belgium and the Netherlands, was to be de-militarized. That is, no German troops were to be stationed inside that area or any fortifications built. The aim was to increase French security by making it impossible for Germany to invade France by surprise. Other terms restricted the German army to 100,000 men and the navy to just 36 ships. Germany objected to the terms of the treaty but were told to sign it or the war would begin again.

In March of 1936, German troops marched into the Rhineland. It was Hitler’s first illegal act in foreign relations since coming to power in 1933 and it threw the European allies, especially France and Britain, into confusion. The British people felt that the treaty was unfair on Germany and was over-restrictive, and so partly because of this, the British government decided to do nothing.
Hitler moved on from the Rhineland in 1936, to the annexation of Austria and the seizure of the Sudetenland in 1938.

At a conference at Munich, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain got an international agreement that Hitler should have Sudetenland in exchange for Germany making no further demands for land in Europe. Chamberlain said it was “Peace in our time.” Hitler said he had “No more territorial demands to make in Europe.” In October, German troops occupied the Sudetenland: Hitler had got what he wanted without firing a shot. Hitler then moved to the take-over of the rest of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 and then Poland in September 1939.
“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.”

1. What does Hitler suggest is needed for Germany?
2. How would that lead to war?
Haile Selassie, emperor of Ethiopia

After Italy attacked Ethiopia in 1935, their emperor asked the League of Nations for help in stopping the invasion. He asked for military sanctions but the League of Nations’ response was ineffective.

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

3. According to Haile Selassie, who should stop the aggressors?
4. What will happen if the aggressors are not stopped?
German point of view

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 articles from The New York Times of March 8, 1936, explain this issue from the German and the French points of view.

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

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 (violation) of Germany’s signed (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.

6. What was the reaction in France? How might this have led to war?
“It took the Big Four just five hours and 25 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 10 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.”

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

8. Why does Chamberlain suggest appeasement? Under what conditions would he fight?
“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.

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

10. Who is responsible for these lost opportunities?
“The Munich Agreement was a . . . desperate act of appeasement at the cost of the Czechoslovak state, performed by Chamberlin 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.”

11. What are two reasons Kennan felt the Munich Agreement was unnecessary?
British historian

Author Keith Eubank 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 (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.”

12. What evidence does this historian give for his belief that Hitler would not have been stopped prior to 1939?
“What does the Day of National Mourning mean today? Floods of tears for the fallen. Are we to remain pacifist for ever and live for ever on the Treaty of Versailles? The British pay homage to Shakespeare and swear on the Bible, but they keep battleships to rule the seas. Their hypocrisy should be unmasked before our people. ... We cannot capture our political power without our movement and without a reawakening in Germany; without that we cannot bring the Germanic peoples together or secure our people’s lebensraum.”
England not ready

The British foreign secretary describes a meeting he has had with the French, Belgian and Italian governments.

“Our position at home and in home waters was a disadvantageous one, whether from the point of view of the Navy, Army or Air Force, or anti-aircraft defense. In addition, public opinion was strongly opposed to any military action against the Germans in the demilitarized zone. In particular, the ex-Service men were very anti-French. Moreover, many people, perhaps most people were saying openly that they did not see why the Germans should not re-occupy the Rhineland. In these circumstances, it was generally accepted that it was worth taking almost any risk in order to escape from that situation.”
“It follows, therefore, that, from the military point of view, time is in our favor and that, if war with Germany has to come, it would be better to fight her in say 6-12 months’ time, than to accept the present challenge.”

British Readiness

A note from General Ismay to the British Cabinet sent on September 20th, 1938 (before the Munich Conference)
Hitler was elected

British historian A. J. P. Taylor’s 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.”

13. What were two reasons this author used to explain why appeasement was the logical policy at that time?
We are in the presence of a disaster of the first magnitude. ... we have sustained a defeat without a war ... And do not supposed that this is the end. ... This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to use year by year unless, by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigor, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time.