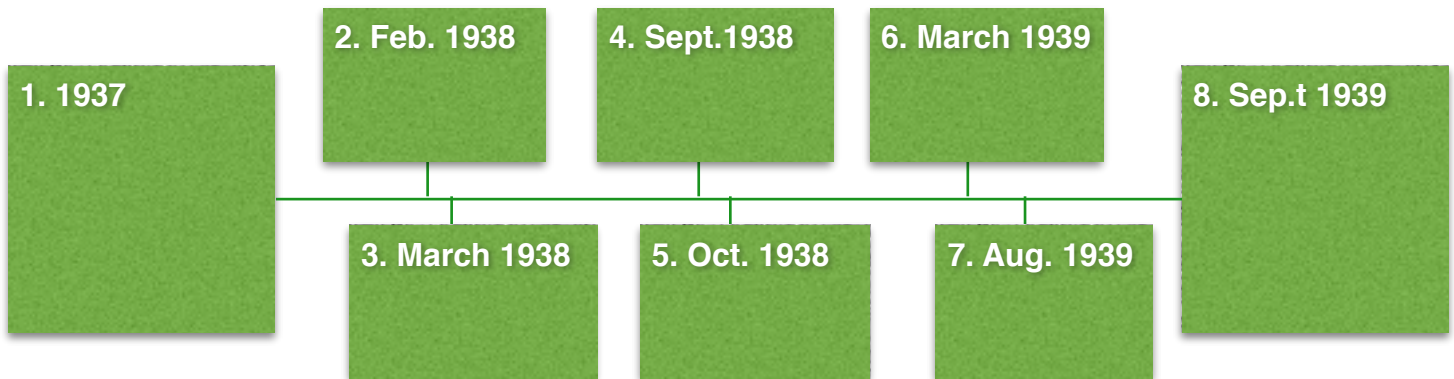


# World War II Begins

## Big Idea

As you read through this document, complete the time line below by **recording the events leading up to the beginning of World War II.**



## Path to War

### Making Inferences

**Make an inference about the success or failure of the policy of appeasement.**

European leaders tried to avoid war by negotiating with Germany. In 1938, Hitler threatened to invade Austria unless Nazis were given important government posts. Austria's chancellor put the matter to a democratic vote. Fearing the outcome, Hitler sent troops into Austria and announced the unification of Austria and Germany. Then Hitler claimed the Sudetenland, a German-speaking area of Czechoslovakia. Though Czechoslovakia opposed his claim, Britain and France agreed to Hitler's demands at the Munich Conference. The resulting policy became known as **appeasement**.

Hitler next demanded German control of the Polish city of Danzig. This convinced Britain and France to prepare for a military intervention. They announced that they would aid Poland if it defended its territory. In May 1939, Hitler ordered his army to prepare to invade Poland. He also began negotiating with the USSR. Hitler proposed to Stalin a nonaggression treaty. Stalin agreed—shocking the world. However, Britain and France understood that Hitler was freeing himself to fight them. The pact also included a deal to divide Poland between Germany and the USSR.

# The War Begins

## Determining Cause and Effect

**1. What caused Hitler to invade through Belgium?**

**2. What were the effects of this invasion route?**

Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. World War II had begun. Poland bravely resisted the invasion. Germany's new way of fighting blitzkrieg, or lightning war, proved too advanced for Poland's outdated army. By October 5, Germany had defeated Poland. Hitler prepared to invade France.

The British sent troops to France. Instead of attacking Germany, French forces waited behind the Maginot Line, along its German border. This allowed Hitler to concentrate on Poland. It also allowed him to maneuver around the Maginot Line by invading through Belgium. French and British forces raced into Belgium in response, which turned out to be a mistake. The Allies assumed Hitler's forces would not be able to make it through the mountains of Luxembourg and eastern Belgium— but they did. They easily smashed the French lines and trapped Allied forces in Belgium.

Britain was able to save more than 300,000 troops when Hitler hesitated to attack the port of Dunkirk. However, France surrendered to Germany in June of 1940. After installing a puppet government, Hitler then set his sights on Britain.

# Britain Remains Defiant

## Predicting

**Predict the fate of the British had they not had the advantage of radar.**

Hitler expected Britain to negotiate peace after France surrendered. For British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, however, the war was now a fight to defend civilization. When Hitler realized Britain would not surrender, he prepared to invade. Getting across the English Channel would be a challenge, though, for Germany did not have many transport ships. To invade, Hitler had to defeat the British Royal Air Force. In June 1940, the Luftwaffe launched a fierce air battle—the Battle of Britain—to destroy the British air force.

On August 23, German bombers accidentally bombed London, enraging the British, who in turn bombed Berlin the following night. Furious, Hitler then ordered the Luftwaffe to continue bombing London. Hitler's goal was now to terrorize the British people into surrendering. He failed. Londoners took refuge in the city's subway tunnels whenever German planes attacked.

Germany had thousands of fighter planes. Britain had a few hundred, but it also had radar, which let British fighters detect and intercept incoming German planes. The German air force suffered greatly as a result. On October 12, 1940, Hitler cancelled the invasion of Britain.

# FDR Supports England

## Formulating Questions

**What is a question you could ask to understand the Neutrality Act of 1939?**

The United States was divided at the beginning of Germany's war with Britain and France. President Roosevelt declared the United States neutral two days after Britain and France declared war. Despite this, Roosevelt wanted to help the two nations in their struggle against Hitler. He asked Congress to revise the neutrality laws to eliminate the ban on arm sales to nations at war. The result was the Neutrality Act of 1939. The law was similar to the 1937 Neutrality Act governing the sale of nonmilitary items by allowing countries to buy weapons on a cash-and-carry basis. The public supported the president's decision to help the allies as long as the arms sales were not carried on American ships.

Soon U.S. neutrality would be tested. Britain had lost nearly half its naval destroyers. It needed to purchase destroyers from the United States, but lacked the cash. Roosevelt created a loophole. He exchanged 50 American destroyers for the right to build American bases in British-controlled parts of Bermuda and in the Caribbean. The act did not apply because the deal did not involve a sale or any purchases.

# Japan Attacks

## Problems and Solutions

**As you read, write Roosevelt's solution to the following problem.**

**Problem: Great Britain's ships in Asia were threatened by Japanese attacks.**

**Solution:**

Britain needed much of its navy in Asia to protect itself against a Japanese attack. Japan depended on the United States for key materials, including steel and oil. Wanting to hinder Japanese aggression, Roosevelt restricted the sale of strategic materials, including fuel and iron. Furious, the Japanese signed an alliance to become a member of the Axis.

Japan sent troops into Indochina, now a direct threat to Great Britain. Roosevelt responded by freezing Japanese assets in the United States. He reduced the amount of oil sent to Japan and sent General Douglas MacArthur to the Philippines to build American defenses there. Roosevelt made it clear the oil embargo would end only if Japan withdrew its troops from Indochina. Japan continued to prepare for war while it negotiated with the United States. Neither side would back down. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

Although Germany and Japan were allies, Hitler was under no obligation to aid Japan. He was frustrated, though, with the American naval attacks on German submarines. He believed the time had come to declare war. On December 11, Germany and Italy both declared war on the United States. Hitler had greatly underestimated U.S. strength.

# Section Wrap-Up

Answer these questions to check your understanding of the entire section.

1. Why was Hitler able to take over Austria and Czechoslovakia?

2. Describe the early events of the war. Why was Britain able to resist the Nazis?

3. How did Roosevelt help Britain while maintaining official neutrality?

4. What events led to increasing tension, and ultimately war, between the United States and Japan?