Staying Out?

How appeasement and neutrality shaped responses to aggression

USH.C.5.1.B "Examine the roles of appeasement and isolationism in the United States of /America's reluctance to respond to Fascist military aggression in Europe and Asia including the Neutrality Acts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline reasons leaders avoided confronting aggression, circle actions they took, and number the places where those choices had limits. Use your marks to compare appeasement with U.S. isolationism.

When Aggression Met Restraint

1. In September 1938, German troops threatened Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland. At Munich, British and French leaders agreed that Germany could take the region, hoping Adolf Hitler would stop demanding territory. Czechoslovakia was not allowed to negotiate at the meeting. This policy of appeasement traded a concession for a promised peace, rather than confronting military threats. The United States did not sign the Munich agreement, but the choice by major European powers reduced the chance of a united response to Hitler. Germany occupied the rest of the Czech lands in March 1939, showing how little that promise protected Europe.

2. Across the Atlantic, many Americans opposed another European war. They remembered the deaths and costs of World War I, while the Great Depression demanded attention at home. This outlook, called isolationism, favored staying out of foreign conflicts. Congress translated that reluctance into Neutrality Acts: a 1935 law barred arms sales to countries at war, and a 1936 law barred loans to them. A 1937 law allowed sales of nonmilitary goods only if buyers paid cash and carried the goods away on their own ships. These rules aimed to avoid steps that might draw Americans into fighting.

3. The rules had limits. In 1937, Japan launched a wider invasion of China, but neither side formally declared war. President Franklin Roosevelt chose not to apply the Neutrality Acts to that conflict, so the arms embargo did not automatically block sales to either country. His government criticized aggression, yet avoided military intervention. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Congress revised neutrality law to allow countries at war to buy American arms if they paid cash and transported them themselves. Britain and France could use that opening more easily than Germany because they controlled Atlantic sea routes. The United States still stayed out of the war.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the decision at Munich delay a united response to Germany, even though the United States did not sign the agreement?

2. How did Americans' reasons for staying out of war shape the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936?

3. How did Japan's invasion of China expose a limit of the Neutrality Acts, and how did Roosevelt respond?

4. How did the 1939 change to neutrality law differ from the earlier arms ban, and why could Britain and France benefit more easily than Germany?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a member of Congress in 1938. In four sentences, propose a U.S. response to Germany's threats in Europe and Japan's invasion of China, explain how your plan differs from appeasement and isolationism, and address the Neutrality Acts.

ANSWER KEY

Staying Out?

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.5.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline reasons leaders avoided confronting aggression, circle actions they took, and number the places where those choices had limits. Use your marks to compare appeasement with U.S. isolationism. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the decision at Munich delay a united response to Germany, even though the United States did not sign the agreement?	**Britain and France gave Germany territory instead of confronting its threat, reducing the chance that major powers would act together against Hitler.**
2	How did Americans' reasons for staying out of war shape the Neutrality Acts of 1935 and 1936?	**Memories of World War I and concern about the Depression encouraged Congress to bar arms sales and loans to countries at war.**
3	How did Japan's invasion of China expose a limit of the Neutrality Acts, and how did Roosevelt respond?	**Because neither country formally declared war, Roosevelt chose not to apply the acts. The arms embargo did not automatically block sales, and his government criticized aggression without intervening militarily.**
4	How did the 1939 change to neutrality law differ from the earlier arms ban, and why could Britain and France benefit more easily than Germany?	**Countries at war could now buy American arms if they paid cash and transported them. Britain and France controlled Atlantic sea routes, making transport easier for them than for Germany.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1938, I would urge Congress to bar weapons sales to Japan and permit arms sales to China, while joining Britain and France in warning Germany against further attacks. Unlike appeasement, this plan would not reward territorial demands with concessions. Unlike isolationism, it would use economic and diplomatic pressure without sending American troops. Congress would need to revise the Neutrality Acts so the rules could distinguish an aggressor from a country defending itself.

Accept historically plausible 1938 proposals that address both Europe and Asia. Responses should distinguish appeasement from U.S. isolationism and recognize when a proposed action would require changing neutrality law.