Causes of WWII:

Like the colonial leaders of pre-WWI empires, the totalitarian leaders of Depression-era states had nationalistic ambitions to expand their territory and resources. The Germans felt they had been cheated by treaties at the end of WWI, and they wanted to right those wrongs.

Hitler’s Imperialistic Ambitions:

When Hitler came to power in 1933, he intended to make Germany a powerful nation again. Part of his plan involved uniting the “master race” of Germanic people and taking back territory that he believed belonged to Germany. In the years leading up to WWII, Hitler put his plan into action.

Appeasing Hitler:

In 1936, Hitler ordered his troops into the Rhineland, and area along Germany’s western border that had been demilitarized and put under French protection by the Treaty of Versailles. Although this was a violation of the Treaty, Britain and France chose not to act at this time. Two years later, Germany annexed, or took over, Austria. Again, this was another breach of the Treaty, but Britain and France chose not to act. They were willing to make concessions to maintain peace. However, their weaknesses made Hitler bolder.

Next, Hitler set his sights on the Sudetenland, a territory populated by ethnic Germans given to Czechoslovakia at the Paris Peace Conference (following WWI). When Hitler threatened to invade this territory, British and French leaders met with him in Munich to try to negotiate.

In exchange for the Sudetenland, Hitler promised not to invade the rest of Czechoslovakia. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain announced to the world that the Munich Agreement and their policy of appeasement would secure “peace in our time”. Only six months later, in March 1939, Hitler broke his promise and Germany invaded Czechoslovakia. Hitler’s actions made it clear that the policy of appeasement had failed. Another war in Europe was looming.

Analysis Questions:

1. Why do you think that the French and British chose to not act when Hitler’s army entered the Rhineland? Offer two possible answers.
2. Offer one idea as to why a “policy of appeasement” could have a positive result.
3. Offer one idea as to why a “policy of appeasement” could have a negative result.
4. As history has unfolded, Neville Chamberlain’s “peace in our time” speech has been criticized and ridiculed. One of the more common complaints is that “peace for \_\_\_\_\_\_ time is better than peace in OUR time.”