When Hitler annexed Austria, neither the League of Nations nor Western politicians did anything concrete to stop him. When Hitler demanded the Sudetenland, Britain and France gave in. When he took over the rest of Czechoslovakia, they again did nothing. It was not until Hitler invaded Poland that the Chamberlain of England and Daladier of France finally did something, but by then it was too late. These countries seemed to let World War II happen. The question is why?

The reason why the rest of the world allowed Hitler and Mussolini to have their way in Europe is that they had not paid a great deal of attention to the events going on in Europe. For North Americans, since Europe was all the way across the Atlantic Ocean, we had a sense of isolationism and seemed to be at a distance from the events. Another reason is that the governments of the world were following a policy of appeasement. In effect, this meant letting Hitler have what he wanted. The Allies, lead by England and France, hoped that eventually Hitler would be satisfied and another war could be avoided.

Appeasement was a popular policy in Canada and around the world. Many people believed that it was only fair for Germany to get back what it had lost in the Treaty of Versailles. Few people outside of Germany had bothered to read Hitler’s book Mein Kampf and did not know what his plans were. Few politicians realised that there was no limit to Hitler’s ambitions for Lebensraum (living space) for the German people. Some historians have since criticised the policy of appeasement, but at the time there were only a few people who opposed it. The question remains unanswered, was appeasement a mistake?

### Arguments for the policy of Appeasement

**Fear of Another World War:**
- Pacific suicide for King and his Liberals to be overly aggressive with Germany. They would have most likely been voted out of office in political suicide for King and his Liberals to be overly aggressive with Germany. They would have most likely been voted out of office in the next election. However, when Hitler broke the promise that he had made to the British Prime Minister at the Munich Agreement, Canadian public opinion took a dramatic swing towards a war to stop Hitler. When Hitler invaded Poland, public opinion in Canada changed to generally support Canada’s going to war.

**Germany Deserved a Fair Deal:**
- By the 1930s, many people in Canada accepted the fact that the Treaty of Versailles was too harsh on Germany. The conditions set out in the Treaty, people thought, would doom Germany to a future of misery and despair. If there was any sense of justice in the world, Germany should at least be given back the territory and the people it had lost in 1919. If Canadians were separated from each other would it not be fair to allow them to be together again? What about if your own family was separated? Many politicians thought that if the Germans were allowed to be one again they might be content and settle down.

**Canada and her Allies Needed More Time:**
- Most world leaders were not pacifists and they did not believe in avoiding war at all costs. The Prime Minister of Canada, Mackenzie King, believed that the British Prime Minister at the Munich Agreement, Canadian public opinion was not united behind the idea of war. It would have been political suicide for King and his Liberals to be overly aggressive with Germany. They would have most likely been voted out of office in the next election. However, when Hitler broke the promise that he had made to the British Prime Minister at the Munich Agreement, Canadian public opinion took a dramatic swing towards a war to stop Hitler. When Hitler invaded Poland, public opinion in Canada changed to generally support Canada’s going to war.

**Appeasement Encouraged Hitler to be Aggressive:**
- Much like a kid on the playground, every time Hitler got away with one of his aggressive acts, he became more daring and believed that none of the allied countries would attempt to stop him. There is evidence that Hitler was very unsure and nervous about marching the soldiers into the Rhineland. To his surprise, no one tried to stop him. If the allied countries would have acted then, Hitler could have been stopped, instead they let Hitler push his way around Europe.

**Hitler was Determined to Attack all of Europe:**
- In reality, western leaders should have known exactly what to expect from Hitler. After all, Hitler had laid out his blueprint for world domination in his book Mein Kampf, but no one bothered to read it. From the start of his reign in Germany almost all of his speeches and writings said that he wanted to conquer all of Europe. World leaders should have known that his earlier promises of peace were nothing but lies.

**The Munich Agreement was a Disaster:**
- The agreement that the British Prime Minister signed with Hitler was a total failure. The allies were not really attempting to buy more time so that they could rearm and unite behind the idea of war. Mackenzie King and other world leaders had simply been fooled by Hitler. Besides, when war finally did break out, none of the allied countries were ready for war.

**Germany was Growing Stronger:**
- In 1938 not many Canadians thought that it would be worth fighting over the tiny little country of Czechoslovakia. Canadian public opinion was not united behind the idea of war. It would have been political suicide for King and his Liberals to be overly aggressive with Germany. They would have most likely been voted out of office in the next election. However, when Hitler broke the promise that he had made to the British Prime Minister at the Munich Agreement, Canadian public opinion took a dramatic swing towards a war to stop Hitler. When Hitler invaded Poland, public opinion in Canada changed to generally support Canada’s going to war.

**Appeasement Threatened the USSR (Soviet Union):**
- Because the allies did not stand up to Hitler when he invaded Czechoslovakia, Stalin, the leader of Russia, believed that Britain would not help the USSR either if Hitler decided to attack them. This persuaded Stalin that he might as well try and reach an agreement with Hitler and look after the Soviet Union first. This attitude led to the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. After this was signed Hitler was now able to invade Poland.

**Fear of Communism**
- From the start of his reign in Germany almost all of his speeches and writings said that he wanted to conquer all of Europe. World leaders should have known that his earlier promises of peace were nothing but lies.

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Tasks:
Now that you have read through the arguments for and against appeasement, you can look at sources that deal with appeasement. Read each source below and decide whether the source is for or against appeasement. You should also include information for why you decided this.

**Helpful Hints:**
- Read all of the arguments for and against appeasement. Make sure you have a thorough understanding of both sides of the argument. You may wish to record the information on a separate sheet to use later.
- After you have read the “for and against” arguments, study sources A – G. Use the accompanying worksheet to show which sources are against appeasement and which sources are for appeasement.
- Watch out for one of the sources; it is tricky. You might want to consider the dates in it.
- Remember to read all of the information about the source, you may find clues to the answer you are looking for.

**Questions:**
1. You have now read a great deal about the policy of appeasement. Why did Mackenzie King and other world leaders like Chamberlain follow a policy of appeasement?
2. As an historian, do you think the policy of appeasement was a mistake or not? Be sure to include references and facts from the sources used during this task.

| Source A: Hitler's comment after sending troops into the Rhineland in 1936. |
| The 48 hours after the march into the Rhineland were the most nerve-racking of my life. If the French had opposed us then we would have had to withdraw. Our forces were not strong enough to even put up with moderate resistance. |
| Source B: From a speech given by Hitler on 30 May 1938. |
| “I shall only decide to take action against Czechoslovakia if I am convinced that France will not march and that Britain will not intervene in the situation.” |
| Source C: Advice given to the British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, by his Army generals in 1938. |
| “From the military point of view, time is in our favour. If war with Germany has to come, it would be better to fight in six to twelve months time, instead of at this moment.” |
| Source D: Results from public opinion polls in Canada in 1938. |
| March 1938: Should Britain promise to help Czechoslovakia if Germany invades? Yes: 33% No: 43% Undecided: 24% |
| October 1938: Hitler says that he has no more territorial ambitions in Europe. Do you believe him? Yes: 7% No: 93% |
| Source E: From a speech given by Chamberlain in 1938. |
| “When I think of those four terrible years [WWI], and I think of the 7 million young men who were killed, the 13 million who were wounded, I feel it was my duty to strain every nerve to avoid a repetition of the First World War.” |
| Source F: Comments given by Mackenzie King after a meeting with Hitler. |
| “Hitler seemed to be a man of deep sincerity and a genuine patriot. Hitler was a simple sort of peasant, not very intelligent and no serious danger to anyone.” |
| There had been nothing weak or foolish about the attitude of the Western leaders. They tried to settle differences by discussion and conciliation, methods that had been highly successful in the 1920s. Their failure was due to the fact that Hitler took consolation for weakness and found that he could get his own way. He could have been stopped earlier but only at the risk of war. Discussion was the method of gentlemen, which explains why Chamberlain and the Western leaders favoured it and Hitler did not. |