

OxfordAQA

International GCSE

History (9245)

Scheme of work

Hitler's foreign policy and the origins of the Second World War, 1933-1941

For teaching from September 2026 onwards

For International GCSE exams in June 2028 onwards

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Introduction

This scheme of work is intended to help teachers plan and implement the teaching of Hitler's foreign policy and the origins of the Second World War option of the Oxford AQA International GCSE History (9245) specification. The purpose is to provide advice and guidance to teachers, not to prescribe and restrict their approach to the specification. There are obviously many other ways of organising the work, and there is absolutely no requirement to use this scheme. We hope the suggested activities will support your teaching of this topic.

The scheme focuses on the developing crisis of the inter-war years after 1933 and looks at reasons why tensions between countries developed and how these might have led to the Second World War. It was a period in which short term events merged with long term tensions fueling suspicion and distrust between countries. It was also a period in which individuals such as Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Chamberlain played a prominent role in events. The Specification content is based on an unfolding narrative of key developments in international affairs and allows students to explore the impact that these events had and to question why the Second World War broke out.

Students will study key aspects of the period and determine how these events contributed to change. Tension might be measured in a variety of ways including military, diplomatic and ideological with some awareness of how these interacted to influence change. Students will also look at the role of key individuals and groups in shaping tension and the impact these developments had on the broader sense of a developing crisis after 1933.

Assumed coverage and teaching hours

This scheme of work assumes that the OxfordAQA International GCSE History is taught as a two-year linear course, with a total of approximately 120–140 guided learning hours in total, in line with specification guidance. This equates to approximately two hours of teaching per week over two academic years, although this may vary according to local timetabling arrangements and students' prior experience. As this particular optional topic equates to one quarter of the qualification, this scheme of work is designed to be taught in around 30-35 hours.

Work will also need to be completed outside of lessons. The amount of independent study required will depend on curriculum time, the pace of delivery and the extent to which assessment practice and consolidation activities are incorporated into timetabled lessons.

Assessment

Assessment points in the learning activity column indicate possible assessment opportunities. These could be short tests of about ten minutes (exam-style questions, short factual tests, source evaluation) or longer assessments (exam-style questions).

The assessment in Section B is based on a series of short and extended response questions.

- Question 1 tests AO1 and is worth 3 marks. It requires students to show their knowledge of a given issue.
- Question 2 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 6 marks. It requires students to explain one way in which a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 3 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 9 marks. It requires students to explain two changes or two ways/reasons why a given issue developed, supporting their explanation with knowledge and understanding. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.
- Question 4 tests AO1 and AO2 and is worth 12 marks. It requires students to construct an extended response with a line of reasoning. It requires students to explain a given cause/consequence/change and at least cause/consequence/change in the context of a broader development, leading to a judgement that evaluates their relative importance. It will focus on the 2nd order concept of cause/consequence or change.

Resources

Research exercises assume students have access to a textbook(s) and / or the internet. You can supplement textbook(s) by other sources.

OUP support this option with 'Hitler's Foreign Policy and the Origins of the Second World War, 1933-1941', published in 2026 as part of the OxfordAQA International series and available in various formats.

A parallel product written for a similar AQA UK examination option about the inter-war years contains supplementary material: 'Conflict and Tension, the Inter-war Years, 1918-1939'.

Part 1: Increasing International Tensions, 1933-38

The origins of tensions

Suggested timing

4 hours

Specification content

The origins of Tension: threats to peace; Hitler's aims in foreign policy; the legacy of the Treaty of Versailles; Lebensraum; the beginning of rearmament in Germany: withdrawal from the Disarmament Conference and the League of Nations.

Teaching guidance

- This study relates to the developing tension between countries in the years 1933 to 1941. Recurring questions will relate to knowledge of the individual events identified, an understanding of the causes and of the consequences of these events, and an evaluation of how far events contributed to tension and to the outbreak of war.
- At the early stage, students might consider the situation in 1933, exploring different causes of tension that existed. This might include the legacy of the Treaty of Versailles and how Hitler's foreign policy in 1933 sought to resolve the apparent injustices. This might include withdrawal from discussions about disarmament and the desire to rearm. It might also include the failure of the League of Nations to maintain world peace. The interaction between these factors thereby builds up a complex view of the past. The importance of these factors can be tracked through each Part of the specification, taking their influence up to 1941.
- Here is an early opportunity to practice writing in response to 'explain' style questions: questions 2, 3 and 4. A common method to approach this is using the structure Point, Evidence, Explain, though this is by no means the only permissible approach.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: 'How did the terms of the Treaty of Versailles affect Hitler's foreign policy aims?'
- Present students with the terms of the Treaty. Discuss the importance of the War Guilt Clause and explain how this then justified the other clauses such as disarmament and reparations.
- Class discussion: why might these terms have led to anger and a belief that the terms of the Treaty should be overturned?
- Present students with the methods available to the League to prevent conflict: moral condemnation, sanctions, military intervention. For each method, task students with

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developing an argument about the likely effectiveness of each.

- To develop your students' understanding of how the factors interlinked, task students with explaining how the Treaty of Versailles and the failures of the League of Nations may have encouraged a more aggressive foreign policy from Hitler.
- In groups, task students with researching the aims of Hitler's foreign policy in 1933. Give key words such as Lebensraum, Volksdeutsche, Anschluss, and ask for a definition of each, plus a causal link to explain how the Treaty or the failure of the League may have affected these aims.
- Discuss the reasons why Germany left the Disarmament conference. Task students with explaining how Hitler justified this decision and explain how he used the terms of the Treaty to help him.
- Discuss how other events such as the Oxford Pledge or Germany's need for more natural resources may have contributed to Hitler's war aims.
- Students conduct their own version of the Oxford Union debate; 'This class would never fight for King and Country'.
- Ask the evaluative question: 'What were Hitler's foreign policy objectives in 1933 and why did he hold them?'

The development of tensions

Suggested timing

4/5 hours

Specification content

The development of tensions: Germany's non-aggression pact with Poland 1934; the reintroduction of conscription from 1935; the Anglo-German Naval Agreement 1935; plebiscite and the return of the Saar, 1935; the Stresa Front.

Teaching guidance

- This is an opportunity to develop the themes identified in the previous section and to link specific events in the years 1933 to 1935 to the aims that Hitler held in 1933.
- Whilst each of the factors should be considered in isolation, it will be important to make links between the factors and the aims of Hitler. It might also be helpful to begin to consider if there was a clearly defined objective to Hitler's foreign policy or whether it was merely an opportunistic response to events.
- Consideration might be given to the consequences of each event and how they undermined the efforts to maintain the peace. For example, the Anglo-German Naval Agreement might be considered as weakening the Treaty of Versailles. Students could then perhaps be given some opportunity to think about the extent to which this was the aim of the Agreement or whether it was simply about Germany rearming for reasons of self-defence.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: 'Do the events of 1933 to 1935 prove that Hitler had an aggressive foreign policy?'
- In groups, ask your students to research each event and consider:
 - Why did the event occur?
 - What happened?
 - What were the consequences of the event?
 - What does the event illustrate about Hitler's foreign policy objectives?
- Students might role-play scenarios of the possible alternative consequences of each event and try to determine why other powers did so little in response to each event.
- Students might produce an argued speech or presentation from a German perspective designed to encourage people to vote for reunion with Germany in the Saar Plebiscite.
- Students might produce display work, which they add to throughout the course. Perhaps entitled 'How did Hitler get away with it?' Alternatively, some students could produce a speech/presentation/display to argue that Hitler's foreign actions must be stopped. Other groups might produce a display to argue that what Germany was doing was entirely reasonable.
- Students might be encouraged to make as many links as possible between the events. Perhaps encouraged to find two similarities for causation and two similarities for consequence. Try to prioritise the links – was there a particular cause or consequence that was the most important and explain why.

The escalation of tension

Suggested timing

4/5 hours

Specification content

The escalation of tension: remilitarisation of the Rhineland 1936; Italian and Japanese militarism, the Rome-Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact; German involvement in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39; the Anschluss with Austria 1938.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on explaining how and in what ways Hitler's foreign policy 1936 to 1938 added to international tension. In addition, this section should see a broadening of the theme of tension beyond just a focus on Germany to consider Italy, Spain, and Japan.
- This should include not only knowledge of the individual events themselves but also a clear evaluative link to the extent to which this increased tension.
- By this stage, a sense of sequential understanding should be developing with some understanding of how one event may have led to another.
- Develop your students' understanding of the sequencing of events by considering the short term and long term consequences of each event.
- Develop your students' awareness of the rise of tension across different regions by considering common themes such as nationalism, militarism, imperialism, and economic factors.
- Some understanding of the reaction of other countries to these events will also help to develop an understanding not only of increasing tension but also of the causal links between events.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: 'Why did tension escalate in the years 1936 to 1938?'
- Students complete a table which includes information on the causes, events, and consequences of each event.
- On a map of the world, students label where events causing tension are located and give a brief description.
- Compare events in Manchuria and Abyssinia. Conduct a class debate on which was the most damaging to the League's efforts to keep the peace. Explain why.
- Ask your students to produce a graph. Label the x axis 'years', and the y axis 'international tension'. For the years studied so far, draw a line showing how tension changed over time. Label each change in the graph with a specific event and explain in a key the ways in which that event affected tension.

- Ask your students to research the life of both Mussolini and of Hitler. Focus on finding as many factors as possible that might explain their attitudes to foreign policy. More advanced work might try to locate factors or events common to both individuals.
- Discuss in class how far events were being led primarily by individuals or how far individuals were merely reacting to events outside of their control.
- Distribute a series of propaganda posters from the Spanish Civil War. For each, ask students to explain what might be learned from them as historical sources and how they illustrate growing tension. Students might also then be tasked with producing their own propaganda poster from one of three perspectives: German, Communist or Spanish nationalist. Conduct a class discussion comparing the completed posters and discuss how different perspectives in war lead to increased international tension.
- Show students a newsreel of the bombing of Guernica. Ask students to imagine that they are watching this as part of an audience in Britain in 1937. As they watch, they should record their feelings/response to what they are seeing. Then, write an answer to the question: 'In what ways might Guernica encourage the search for peace and the easing of tensions?' Then, complete an answer to the same question but explaining how Guernica might lead to an increase in tension and make war more likely.
- Define terms such as:
 - Nationalism
 - Militarism
 - Imperialism
 - Mercantilism

Students are then tasked with linking each event studied to one or more of the themes listed. Ask if one theme seems to explain the majority of events. The list might be added to as the course progresses.

- Students role-play the meeting between Hitler and Schuschnigg in 1938. Each should produce a summary of what each individual wishes to achieve in the meeting and how they intend to achieve it. Then act out the meeting.

Review

Suggested timing

1 hour

Specification content

Review and assessment of Part 1: Increasing international tensions 1933-1938

Assessment guidance

- This is the opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning so far.
- You can use exam-style questions based on the content of Part 1.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.

Resources

Specimen papers and Activities sections of the OUP textbook.

Part 2: Appeasement, the outbreak of war and the global conflict 1938-41

France and Britain's differing priorities, efforts to maintain peace and strengthen their defences

Suggested timing

5 hours

Specification content

France and Britain's differing priorities, efforts to maintain peace and strengthen their defences: rearmament; the role of Chamberlain; arguments for and against appeasement; agreements in eastern Europe; the Sudetenland Crisis and Munich Agreement, 1938; the attitude of and towards the Soviet Union.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on reasons why appeasement took place, knowledge concerning the events of 1938 and an understanding of the arguments for and against appeasement from a number of different national perspectives.
- Teaching might develop students' understanding of the differing priorities of the major powers of Europe and the similarities and the differences in foreign policy objectives between each country by 1938.
- Students might deploy information from part one to consider why, by 1938, Hitler's foreign policy had still not prompted a strong international reaction. Students might consider why each country in Europe had a reason to avoid war.
- Teaching would develop students' powers of evaluation and the ability to answer questions requiring a longer and more speculative response, such as the extent to which appeasement was justified or how far appeasement achieved its objectives.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Centres could organise their teaching around the enquiry question: 'Was appeasement a good idea?'
- As students progress through this section, they should complete a table divided into arguments for and arguments against appeasement. As they study each event, they fill out their table with more information.

- An opportunity for role play might include writing a speech from a British and/or a French perspective arguing for or against the need to rearm at the start of 1938. Alternatively, this might be set up as a mock British parliamentary debate with two opposing sides of the debate set at the start of 1938.
- A complementary or alternative to the debate, or speech writing, might be to task students with designing a poster from a British or French perspective to encourage rearmament or to promote a policy of peace. Specific evidence of events up to 1938 should be included.
- Task students with a card sort, in which the separate events of 1938 are identified on each card, for example the meeting at Bad Godesberg. Students should place these in the correct chronological order and explain how one event connects to the next.
- Identify one end of the classroom as high tension, the other end as low tension. As the teacher reads out each event from this section of the course, students are asked to move towards one end of the room to signify an increase or decrease in tension. Students are asked to justify their move before the next event is then read out.
- Students write a letter to Chamberlain - set in the period just after the Munich agreement - in which they express their thoughts, either positive or negative about what has been achieved.
- Task students with a perspectives exercise in which they are asked to write an interpretation of the events from the perspective of the Czechoslovakians, the British, the French, the Germans, and the Russians. Debate whether the perspective of one country might be more significant than another. This might serve as an opportunity to discuss the concept of significance in historical scholarship.
- In groups, students use material studied to date to produce a presentation advocating that appeasement was a good idea, or that it was not.
- Students write a response to the exam style 12 mark question 'Was appeasement justified?' Here might be an opportunity to introduce and discuss essay skills such as range, balance and substantiated judgement.

The ending of appeasement

Suggested timing

3 hours

Specification content

The ending of appeasement: the collapse of Czechoslovakia, March 1939 and its impact on Britain and France; changing public opinion; guarantees to Poland.

Teaching Guidance

- The focus should be on explaining how the achievements of appeasement quickly collapsed, perhaps identifying what conclusions might be drawn about Hitler's foreign policy as a result.
- Students might deploy knowledge from the previous section to explain the inherent weaknesses of the appeasement agreements and the impact that these had on Czechoslovakia, Britain, France, and Poland.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students might focus on the overall enquiry question: 'Why did the policy of appeasement collapse?'
- For each country (Germany, Hungary and Poland), students list why each had ambitions in Czechoslovakia and how they sought to achieve these.
- On their own map of Czechoslovakia students detail where the invasions from each country occurred and explain why it was that particular region that was attacked.
- Students to draw a before and after map of Czechoslovakia showing the country pre 1938 and the country in September 1939.
- Draft the text of a speech that Chamberlain may have given in March 1939 in which he announces to the public what has happened to Czechoslovakia and attempts to justify his policy up to that date.
- Draft the text to a similar speech this time from the perspective of Hitler in March 1939. He announces why it was necessary for German troops to go into Czechoslovakia in defiance of the Munich agreement.
- Design a newspaper article from the perspective of Germany in early 1939, advocating that Hitler should take action over Danzig and Poland.
- Students to produce a list of reasons why Hitler had ambitions in Poland. From the list, try to prioritise the factors to arrive at an answer to the question: 'Why was Hitler not satisfied with his achievements in Czechoslovakia'?

The outbreak of war

Suggested timing

6 hours

Specification content

The outbreak of war: the Pact of Steel; the role of Stalin and the USSR 1938–1939; the Nazi-Soviet Pact; Poland and the outbreak of war, September 1939; responsibility for the outbreak of war; the reasons why a regional conflict became a global conflict in Europe, Asia, the Pacific and Africa up to 1941, including Germany's invasion of the USSR and Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor.

Teaching guidance

- The focus should be on why war broke out in September 1939 and how this developed into a global conflict by 1941.
- There is the opportunity to link material covered earlier in the course and to consider the role of themes such as nationalism, militarism and also the role of individuals.
- There is also the chance to consider the nature of causation and how events work together, developing skills such as sequencing and the notion of a web of causation, alongside a broader consideration of how long-term and short-term factors interact.
- Students might also use the opportunity to develop the skill of prioritisation, thinking of reasons why one factor or event might be considered dominant and how balance is better addressed in an evaluative response.

Possible teaching and learning activities

- Students might focus on the overall enquiry question: 'Why did war break out in September 1939?' A supplementary focus might also be: Why did war become a global conflict by 1941?
- Students might produce two lists: reasons why Stalin signed the Nazi-Soviet Pact and reasons why Hitler signed the pact. From each list, students identify one reason that they think is the dominant one and explain why. They should justify their decision.
- From their list of reasons, students address the question whether Germany or the Soviet Union had greater reason to sign the pact. Again, justify the decision.
- Students might consider the reason why Germany invaded Poland. Use the material developed in response to why Hitler signed the Nazi-Soviet pact and determine if the signing of the pact was the most important reason.
- Students might be given cards each detailing a separate reason for the outbreak of war. These cards can then be sorted for various tasks. For example, place each of the cards under separate thematic headings such as nationalism, militarism, the role of individuals. The cards might be used for a chronology exercise whereby students select a card, another student selects a card and a third tries to explain how one card links to another card.

- There is an opportunity to practice the structuring of evaluative questions such as 'What was the most important cause of the outbreak of war in September 1939?' Here students might have prepared their structure by classifying factors into long-term and short-term.
- An alternative approach is to begin to consider the role of individuals in history and to ask to assess the role of individuals in the outbreak of the war.
- Students research the events of 1940 and produce a chronology of events. There are plenty of opportunities to investigate individual events further. For example, the surrender of France, the importance of Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain. Students might present the results of their research to the whole class.
- Students might research the claim that 'Britain fought alone' from the summer of 1940 to the invasion of Russia in 1941. List as many countries as possible that remained at war against Nazi Germany after the surrender of France. Discuss why these countries continued to fight and what united them together. Students might be encouraged to debate why Britain continued to fight and whether that decision had an impact on Hitler's foreign policy objectives.
- An opportunity exists for longer term reflection. Considering the aims of Hitler's foreign policy identified at the beginning of the course, 'how far had Germany achieved these objectives by the summer of 1941?' Discuss if these objectives had changed and why.
- Students might consider the steps to global war. On a broader map of the world, identify where fighting was taking place by the end of 1941. For each region, detail why conflict occurred there and when it started, the countries involved and what the objective was.
- Students might be encouraged to debate the question: 'Why did war break out?' The class is divided into groups each representing a different potential cause of war. Their task is to produce a 3-5 minute presentation arguing that their cause was the most important. The groups are then given a chance to 'team up' with one other group to argue that both of their factors worked together to cause the war. The class lastly votes on which factor they think should be ejected from consideration as the least believable factor.

Review and assessment of Part 2

Suggested timing

1 hour

Assessment guidance

- This is an opportunity to develop your students' exam technique and to test their learning on the content of Part 2.
- You could use this as an opportunity to develop their understanding of how to answer AO1/AO2 questions such as the 6 and 9 mark questions and the bullet-point 12 mark evaluative question.
- Discuss exam technique with your students. Use low tariff questions to check acquisition of knowledge.
- For second order concept questions, analyse students' effectiveness when writing Point/Evidence/Explanation paragraphs in answer to an 'explain' style question.