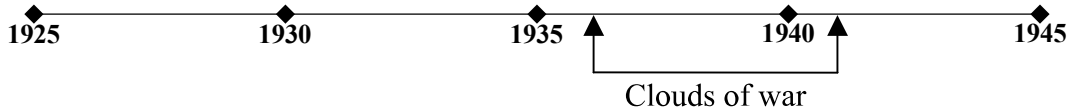


# LESSON 6: UNDER THE CLOUD OF WAR

## Student Handout 1



### DECISIONS

#### Context:

You are President Franklin Roosevelt in December 1936. When you were elected in 1932, the U.S. was in the midst of the worst economic depression in its history. Americans faced tremendously high unemployment (about 25%), and hundreds of thousands of people couldn't feed their families. You've focused most of your attention up to this point on bringing back prosperity. Earlier this year, you won reelection in one of the greatest landslides in American history.

Meanwhile, international events have increasingly become matters for concern. In Europe, Adolf Hitler came to power the same year you did. He controls a brutal dictatorship and has built a strong military in defiance of the Treaty of Versailles. Meanwhile, in Asia the militaristic government of Japan has taken over both Manchuria (a part of China) and Korea.

Americans disagree on how the U.S. should respond to these events. A popular isolationist group called the America First Committee would like the U.S. to avoid getting involved in these international conflicts at all costs. In 1935, Senator Gerald Nye led an investigation into the U.S. entry into World War I. The Nye Committee concluded that the U.S. had not really had good reason to enter the war, and had been pushed into the bloody conflict by munitions makers and bankers eager to make profits. After hearing the Nye Report and growing concerned that events in Europe might escalate into another world war, Congress passed several Neutrality Acts in order to prevent the sale of arms to warring nations. Congress believed the acts would prevent the U.S. from getting dragged into another war. The Neutrality Acts received strong public support, so you reluctantly signed them into law.



Senator Gerald Nye

**Goals in 1936:** Before you can make decisions regarding the crisis in Europe and Asia, you must establish your goals. You can list up to three.

### DECISION 1—1936

Mounting aggression by both Hitler and Benito Mussolini, Italy's leader, has resulted in a series of troubling events. Last year, the Italians attacked the relatively weak African nation of Ethiopia and at this point have almost completely conquered it. Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie has appealed to the League of Nations and the world to put a stop to this outright aggression. Reports suggest that the Italians have used poison gas and bombed Ethiopian civilians.



Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie

In March, Germany violated the Treaty of Versailles by sending troops into the Rhineland, an industrial area of Germany. In the summer, a civil war broke out in Spain. Italy and Germany support the fascist rebels against Spain's republican government. Italy and Germany have also formed an alliance, the Rome-Berlin Axis.

Domestically, opinion polls show that two out of three Americans have no opinion about the Spanish Civil War. Two out of three Americans also believe that the U.S. was wrong to get involved in World War I.

As FDR, how will you respond to the situation? Choose as many of the following options as you like.

1. Send messages to the countries involved in the conflict asking them to resolve the situation peacefully. Offer to mediate the conflicts in Spain and Ethiopia.
2. Threaten to send U.S. troops to intervene if Germany and Italy don't end their support of the fascists in Spain and if Italy doesn't withdraw from Ethiopia.
3. Institute a trade embargo with Germany and Italy if they continue to support the fascists in Spain and if Italy doesn't withdraw from Ethiopia. Italy in particular depends heavily on oil, and the U.S. is currently the world's largest producer of oil.
4. Give speeches to make Americans aware of the threat posed by Germany and Italy.
5. Ask Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts so that the U.S. can sell weapons to Britain and France in order to help them fight Germany and Italy.
6. Build up the American military so the U.S. can negotiate from a position of strength in the future.
7. Stay out of this situation—it isn't in America's interest to get involved.



The U.S.S. *Panay*

<b>DECISION 2—1937 &amp; 1938</b>
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In 1937, Japan launched a full-scale invasion of China proper, killing hundreds of thousands of civilians. Japanese planes also bombed and sank the U.S.S. *Panay*, an American ship stationed in China to protect American citizens and trade. Three Americans died and 48 were wounded. The Japanese government said its pilots hadn't recognized the *Panay* as an American ship. However, the ship's captain had large American flags (one of which was 26' x 32') spread across its top deck. News footage of the attack (a Universal newsreel cameraman on board filmed it) showed the Japanese planes flying in very low, meaning that they couldn't possibly have missed seeing the flags. You know that the Japanese government is lying, but it did apologize and promise to compensate the U.S. about \$2 million for the deaths and injuries. A Gallup poll shows that 59% of Americans favor supporting China over Japan: American missionaries have traveled to China for decades, and a book about China called *The Good Earth* is very popular. However, a majority also favors U.S. withdrawal from China.

Meanwhile, Germany took control of Austria in 1938. The Germans called it an "annexation" and claimed that Austrians wanted German rule. Since then, numerous reports have come in describing German mistreatment of Austrian Jews.

After touring German airplane factories, famed aviator Charles Lindbergh reported, "German aviation development is without parallel [and]...it is doubtful that any country in Europe will be able to catch up with them in the next few years." U.S. Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith has also argued that Germany is becoming the dominant power in Europe. If trends continue, Britain and France will be very weak compared to Germany, and all of Europe will be in danger of a German takeover. If this happens, the U.S. would basically have to stand alone against the dictators in Europe.

As FDR, how will you respond to the situation? Choose as many of the following options as you like:

1. Send a message to the countries involved asking them to resolve the situation peacefully.
2. Threaten to send in U.S. troops if Japan doesn't withdraw from China.
3. Institute a trade embargo if Japan doesn't withdraw from China. Japan depends heavily on oil to keep its war machine going, and the U.S. is currently the world's largest oil producer.
4. Give speeches to make Americans aware of the threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
5. Ask Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts so that the U.S. can sell weapons to Britain and France in order to help them fight Germany and Italy.
6. Build up the American military so the U.S. can negotiate from a position of strength in the future.
7. Stay out of this situation—it isn't in America's interest to get involved.

### DECISION 3—1938

Hitler has demanded that Germany take over the Sudetenland, a mountainous area of Czechoslovakia with a large German population. At the Munich Conference, France and Britain decided to follow a strategy of “appeasement” and pressed Czechoslovakia to turn over the land. Hitler has repeatedly increased his demands: for instance, he initially claimed only to want independence for the Sudetenland but later demanded that it be annexed into Germany itself.

Meanwhile, reports indicate Germany is persecuting Jews as a matter of government policy. On *Kristallnacht* (“night of broken glass”) in November 1938, members of the Nazi Party roamed the streets and destroyed thousands of Jewish businesses and synagogues. The German government then charged Jewish communities with the cost of cleaning up the mess. About 2000 people died, thousands more were beaten, and the Nazis forced 30,000 people into concentration camps.



Jewish business damaged during  
*Kristallnacht*  
(photo from the  
U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)

About 90% of Americans favor the British and the French and disapprove of the actions of Germany and Italy. Your diplomats agree that Hitler has caused the crisis. Earlier, during the crisis over the Sudetenland, you decided to send a letter asking all countries to seek a peaceful resolution. Britain and France thanked you for the note and said they hoped for a peaceful settlement. However, Hitler responded with a speech in which he shouted that Germany would attack Czechoslovakia if necessary; his audience could be heard chanting “War! War!” Hitler’s written response also declared that war would result if Germany’s demands weren’t met.

The British and French have given in to Hitler’s demands at Munich and allowed Germany to occupy the Sudetenland without a fight. The Czechs, lacking any allies to back them up, agreed to the plan. While most Americans are anti-fascist, the majority wants peace and approves of the Munich Agreement.

Meanwhile, Republicans have gained seats in Congress, putting you in a weaker position domestically.

As FDR, how will you respond to the situation? Choose as many of the options as you like:

1. Offer to mediate the dispute over the Sudetenland.
2. Declare war on Germany—this aggression must stop.
3. Embargo exports to Germany until German soldiers leave the Sudetenland.
4. Give speeches to make Americans aware of the threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
5. Ask Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts so that the U.S. can sell weapons to Britain and France in order to help them fight Germany and Italy.

6. Build up the American military so the U.S. can negotiate from a position of strength in the future.
7. Form an alliance with Britain and France against Germany.
8. Stay out of this situation—it isn't in America's interest to get involved.

### DECISION 4—1939–1940

The international situation has deteriorated dramatically over the past year and a half. In August 1939, the Soviet Union made a non-aggression pact with Germany. This agreement allowed Germany to attack other countries without worrying about being attacked by the Soviets.

Germany invaded Poland and then conquered Denmark and Norway. Then in 1940, Germany attacked and took over France in less than one month, despite the fact that France had the second-largest army in Europe. In World War I, Germany had tried for four years to take over France and hadn't succeeded—now it has managed to defeat France in less than 30 days. Hitler is reveling in the historic victory, as shown in this photograph:



Hitler in Paris, June 23, 1940

In an effort to cut off all goods and supplies to Britain, Germany has sunk large numbers of ships, including American transports. The British prime minister has asked the U.S. to provide Britain with 50 destroyers. These fast warships will be able to attack German submarines and protect shipping. You can only give these ships to Britain if the U.S. doesn't need them for defense; however, your naval commander has told you that the U.S. does need them—even though they now sit unused at American naval bases. Britain requires huge amounts of other supplies but is running out of money to buy them,

and the Neutrality Acts prevent the U.S. from loaning Britain money. In a 1939 poll, about 66% of respondents favored selling war materials to Britain and France, although fewer Americans favor selling military planes since the U.S. only has about 200 planes in all.



St. Paul's Cathedral as seen through the smoke of an air raid (December 29, 1940)

Germany bombs Britain daily in apparent preparation for a land invasion of the island. The U.S. Ambassador to Britain, Joseph Kennedy, says the British don't have much chance of holding out against the militarily superior Germans; he

thinks Britain should negotiate with Hitler.

Meanwhile, the Japanese continue their aggressive campaign against China. Public opinion polls show a large majority of Americans favor an embargo against Japan. European countries with colonies in the area have asked the U.S. to negotiate with Japan.

As FDR, how will you respond to the situation? Choose as many of the options as you like:

1. Send a message to Hitler asking him to pledge not to attack other countries.
2. Declare war on Germany—this aggression must stop.
3. Embargo exports to Germany and Japan.
4. Give speeches to make Americans aware of the threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
5. Ask Congress to revise the Neutrality Acts so that the U.S. can sell weapons to Britain and France in order to help them fight Germany and Italy.
6. Build up the American military so the U.S. can protect itself against the German and Japanese threat
7. Form an alliance with Britain against Germany
8. Stay out of this situation—it isn't in America's interest to get involved.

### DECISION 5—1941

The Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan) have made gains during 1941. The Germans and Italians have conquered most of Europe, including France, the Low Countries, and all of Eastern Europe. Now, just this month, Germany has invaded the Soviet Union.

The United States is trying to send aid to Britain under the Lend-Lease program, but German submarines have sunk many of the ships transporting this aid. Right now, the Neutrality Acts specifically prohibit U.S. warships from escorting ships into a war zone, such as the one around Britain. Americans are conflicted about what to do: opinion polls show that most Americans support escorting ships to Britain, even though this means engaging German submarines in battle. Americans don't want Britain to lose the war, and without armed escorts to protect much-needed supplies it probably will: the British are losing five ships for each one they construct. However, an even-larger percentage of Americans still state that they want the U.S. to stay out of the war.



A German submarine

You are equally concerned about Japan. The Japanese have steadily conquered one country after another. They currently occupy Korea and Manchuria (a region in northern China). Four years ago, they attacked China itself. Large numbers of Chinese civilians

have been killed as Japan has expanded. The U.S. has been giving some aid to the Chinese to fight Japan. However, the U.S. still sells a much greater quantity of goods to Japan. Newspaper editorials complain that U.S. scrap metal sold to the Japanese has helped Japan conquer China. Polls show that a majority of Americans want to stop the Japanese war machine by instituting an embargo on selling war supplies to Japan.

Nine months ago, Japan joined Germany and Italy in the Axis alliance. Then, last week, after Germany attacked the Soviet Union, Japan took over Indochina (Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia). These aggressive attacks by the Japanese threaten U.S. territory in the Philippines, as well as the whole balance of power in Asia.

Your advisors suggest the U.S. reduce exports to Japan—especially oil. Cutting off trade with the Japanese will definitely get their attention: they currently get 80% of their oil from the U.S., and since the U.S. produces more than half of the world's oil, they will have difficulty finding another source. On the other hand, one of your advisors theorized that Japan might attack the Dutch East Indies in order to get oil. Therefore, an oil embargo may provoke the Japanese to become even more aggressive, which could force the U.S. to join the war.

As FDR, how will you respond to the situation? Choose as many of the following options as you like.

1. Declare war on Japan—this aggression must stop.
2. Place an embargo on exports of oil and war materials to Japan.
3. Give speeches to make Americans aware of the threat posed by Germany, Italy, and Japan.
4. Negotiate with Japan. Perhaps these problems can be settled peacefully.
5. Build up the American military so that the U.S. will be prepared to fight.
6. Have American warships escort supply ships to Britain.
7. Start giving Lend-Lease aid to Russia as well as Britain so that the Russians can counter Japan's power in Asia.
8. Stay out of this situation—it isn't in America's interest to get involved.