

Inquiry Lesson

Why Did the United States Enter World War I?

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Social Studies Methods

**Overview:**

In this lesson, students will try to figure out the reasons why the United States decided to enter World War I. For most of the war, the United States tried to remain out of the “European Conflict,” but eventual pressure forced them into action. While the sinking of the Lusitania is the most common excuse for why America finally decided to enter the war, there were a number of other factors that also contributed to America’s decision. Economic ties, political beliefs, and a telegram also had a significant impact on forcing America into the war. Finding out the reasons why America went to war helps illustrate America’s place on the world stage at this time and their relationships with other countries. It also helps set the stage for World War II.

**Rationale:**

An inquiry lesson on why America entered World War I is important because it gets students thinking more critically about a subject that they may have viewed as pretty straight forward in the past. Finding out how America made its decision helps students realize that there are many different reasons why countries do what they do and it is rarely just one reason that dictates their actions. Also, analyzing different reasons why America went from a stance of neutrality to war will be interesting for the students and add more importance to the topic.

**Multiple Objectives:**

The main goal I want from this lesson is that I want my students to begin thinking like historians. History in high school is often taught as a straightforward subject and it is not. My students will realize after this lesson that there are many factors that go into history and what happens. Looking through different data samples and analyzing all the different viewpoints and arguments will give them a new perspective on history.

1. Students will look at different reasons why America decided to enter World War I using documents from different perspectives. (WMAS B12.1)
2. Students will look at various documents and try to decide why America decided to go to war during World War I. (WMAS B12.11)
3. Students will look at Woodrow Wilson’s decision to go to war and try to analyze what options he had and why he eventually decided to enter the war. (WMAS B12.15)

**Grade Level:**

The lesson plan I designed would probably be best suited for a 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade classroom. Modifications could be made to use it in a lower level grade or higher level grade. However, I think the way that I designed my lesson; it would make more sense to use it in 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Time:**

Four 50-minute class periods.

**Course:**

This lesson plan would be used for a United States history class. However, it could be modified to put into other classes such as a wars class or a European history class as a way to introduce the Americans into the war. Obviously, less time would be spent on the American aspect of the lesson plan, but it could still be used in relation to the other countries America dealt with. The general topic will be related to the reason why countries go to war.

**Materials:**

Worksheet on hypotheses

Data packets

Projector and computer with an internet connection to show video

**Procedure:****1. Engagement in the Inquiry**

To begin this lesson, the teacher will show a quick video on the American entry into World War I. The video is only three minutes long and will be a nice introduction to the lesson because it gives some background information without giving away the reasons why America entered World War I. It is also a good way to introduce the lesson because it gives some interesting facts that will grab the student's attention (e.g. America troops were better at throwing grenades because of baseball.) Link to the video:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmyc\\_p20o\\_c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmyc_p20o_c)

After watching the video, the teacher will ask the students the question: "Why did American enter World War I?" to see how much background information they have or what they assumed happened. When students make a prediction of what happened and then they find out what actually did happen; it usually had a larger impact on what the students learned. For most high school students, this might be the first time they have really examined the causes or reasons why the United States decided to enter World War I. It will be fun for the students and the teacher to see what some students thought about what happened. In some cases, students will immediately say the sinking of the Lusitania. Through the lesson, they should come to realize that it is more complicated than that.

**2. Elicit Student Hypotheses**

The teacher should next handout a worksheet with the table of hypotheses. The sheet will also have a spot for students to record supporting or refuting evidence. Using this worksheet, students will be able to put their thoughts down on paper and start to formulate some ideas for what happened. Up till this point, the class should have focused on the early stages of the war and students should have some general ideas of America's involvement in the conflict so far. Using that knowledge, they should be able to create some logical

hypotheses. The teacher should encourage the students to think of every possibility so that they can generate more hypotheses.

3. Data Gathering, Data Processing, and Hypotheses Revision

After students have made a list of different hypotheses, they will be given a small packet containing data samples. The data samples will have a lot of different sources in them from statistics, to speeches given by Woodrow Wilson, to posters from the era. The data samples should be used one at a time, thoroughly talking about the data samples as a group and then as a class. The class should spend at least 15 minutes on each data sample. Towards the end, the teacher should combine some data samples to not only further discussion, but to also introduce evidence that contradicts each other. Data sample #5 contradicts #6 and #7 contradicts #8. The idea is that students should start to see that all sources will not be true or accurate. Students must use higher level thinking skills to determine which documents are true and which are false. Using these data samples, students should be able to come up with evidence that either supports or refutes their hypotheses. Students will also be encouraged to develop new hypotheses based on the data samples. The idea is develop a strong hypotheses supported by evidence.

4. Conclusion

The reason this questions works well with this type of lesson plan is because there are a number of different reasons why America decided to go to war. Students will start to understand that there are many different factors that can shape history. Students will also start to understand that some influences are stronger than others. With help from the data sources, students will be able to develop hypotheses and then argue in support of them or against them. In the end, we are fostering a healthy debate on World War I.

In order to keep students interested, it is important to finish the lesson with something that leaves the debate open-ended. I like finishing this lesson with a quote from Emma Goldman. The quote introduces another possible conclusion to the question and makes students reexamine their hypotheses. The quote:

“That which has driven the masses of Europe into the trenches and to the battlefields is not their inner longing for war; it must be traced to the cutthroat competition for military equipment, for more efficient armies, for larger warships, for more powerful cannon. You cannot build a standing army and then throw it back into the box like tin soldiers.”

-Emma Goldman, from “Preparedness: The Road to Universal Slaughter.”

**Assessment:**

Students will be assessed on not only their ability to come up with different hypotheses statements, but also on their ability to support their claims. Class

participation will be a major part of this lesson plan as students present their ideas and then support them with evidence from the data samples. Another way to assess the students would be to have them write a paragraph or two on their hypotheses and why they believe theirs is right. I will explain to the students that they should be developing strong hypotheses with supporting evidence because this will be how I will grade them for this lesson.

Possible assessment for a short paper:

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Accuracy</b> ___/6	Paper makes statements that are not true at all and lack supporting evidence.	Paper has some minor mistakes but is still accurate with the major ideas.	Paper contains no mistakes and all the information is accurate.
<b>Argument</b> ___/8	Paper does not have a statement that says why America entered World War I and lacks any evidence used from the data samples.	Paper states an opinion, but has very few supporting facts.	Paper not only states an opinion, but also backs it up with facts and evidence.
<b>Presentation</b> ___/6	So many grammatical mistakes that the paper is unreadable.	Grammatical mistakes but the overall idea is still understood.	Very few grammatical mistakes if any and the sentences are structured in a logical way.
<b>Total</b> ___/20			

**Reflection:**

Creating this lesson plan taught me how difficult it is to create an inquiry lesson. There are many factors that you must consider in order to develop a lesson that will get students thinking. In order to develop a quality inquiry lesson you must do a lot of thinking about you will teach the lesson and how your students will react to it. I know in the future I will continue to expand on this lesson plan because it is far from being perfect. What I want to do is try to include more secondary sources.

The problem that I had with trying to include them in the sample is that most of them are too long. I want my students to enjoy this assignment and too much reading might make it tedious and boring. I believe through this lesson I will reach my objectives. Students will be researching why America decided to go to war, which will force them to think like Woodrow Wilson at the time as they look at the pros and cons of going to war.

**PASS Standards:**

1. What I think this lesson plan does well is get students involved in higher level thinking. Students begin to think about the different reasons why America entered World War I. Students must find evidence to support their ideas.
2. Throughout this lesson students will remain focused on the topic of America's entry into World War I, which will build on their depth on the subject.
3. They will continue to engage in conversation with each other to develop hypotheses with evidence.
4. It would be interesting to relate this topic to modern events because the reason we go to war remains complex even today.
5. Students will have to think about the difficult decision Woodrow Wilson had to make to go to war. Americans knew how bloody the war in Europe had become and entering the war meant sending many Americans to their death.
6. Lastly, students will be using their economic and language art skills to analyze the different data samples and estimate their worth to their hypotheses. Overall, students will be engaging in a lesson that will challenge them, but in way that is information and interesting.

## Why Did the United States Enter World War I?

Hypotheses	Supporting Evidence	Refuting Evidence

## Data Packet

### Data Sample #1:

Value of U.S. exports for 1914:

1914 - \$824.8 million to Allies

1914 - \$169.3 million to Central Powers

Value of U.S. exports for 1916:

1916 - \$3.2 billion to Allies

1916 - \$1.2 million to Central Powers

Value of U.S. loans for 1917:

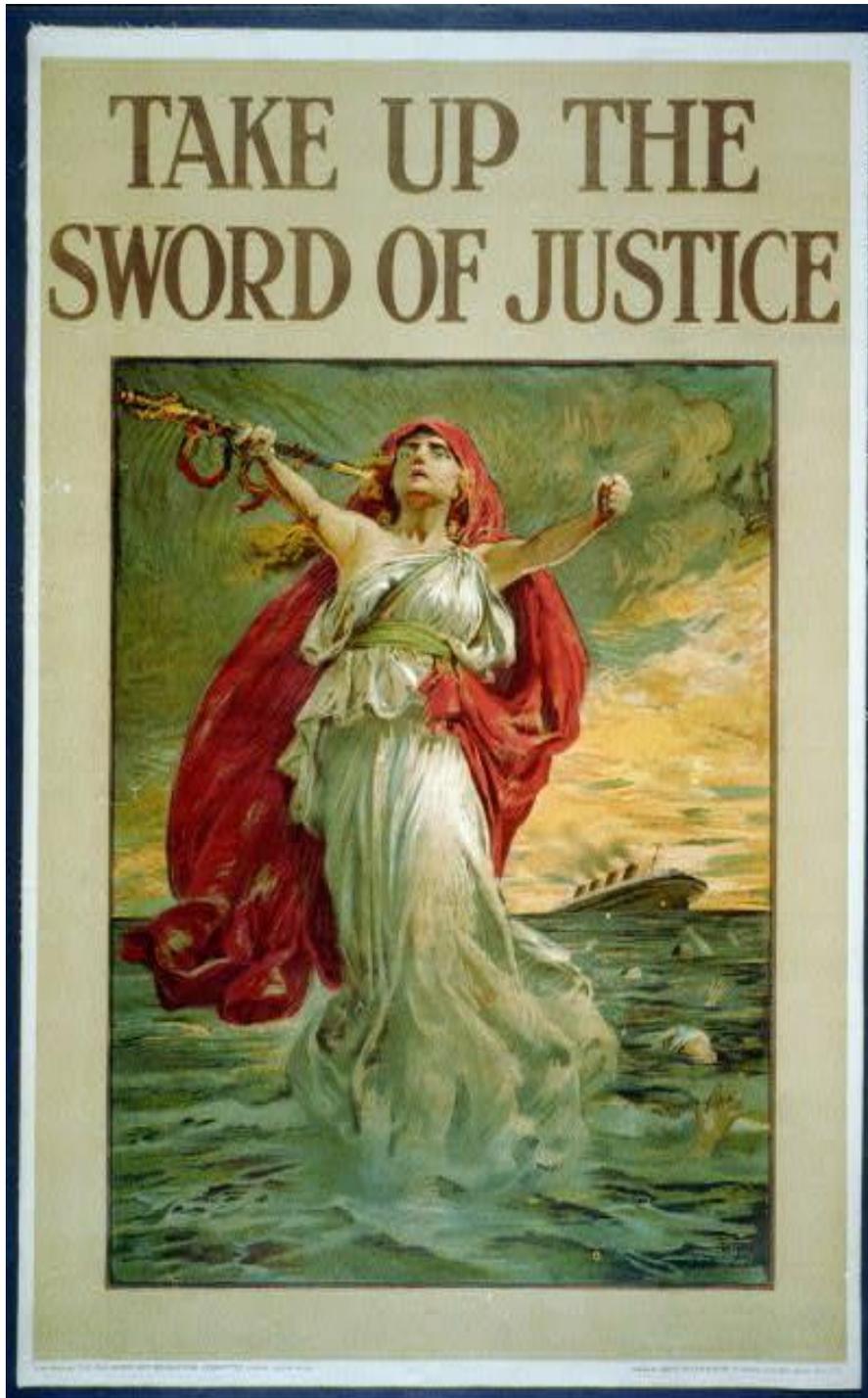
1917 - \$2.5 billion to Allies

1917 - \$27million to Central Powers

Source: [http://edsitement.neh.gov/view\\_lesson\\_plan.asp?id=474](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=474)

**Data Sample #2:**

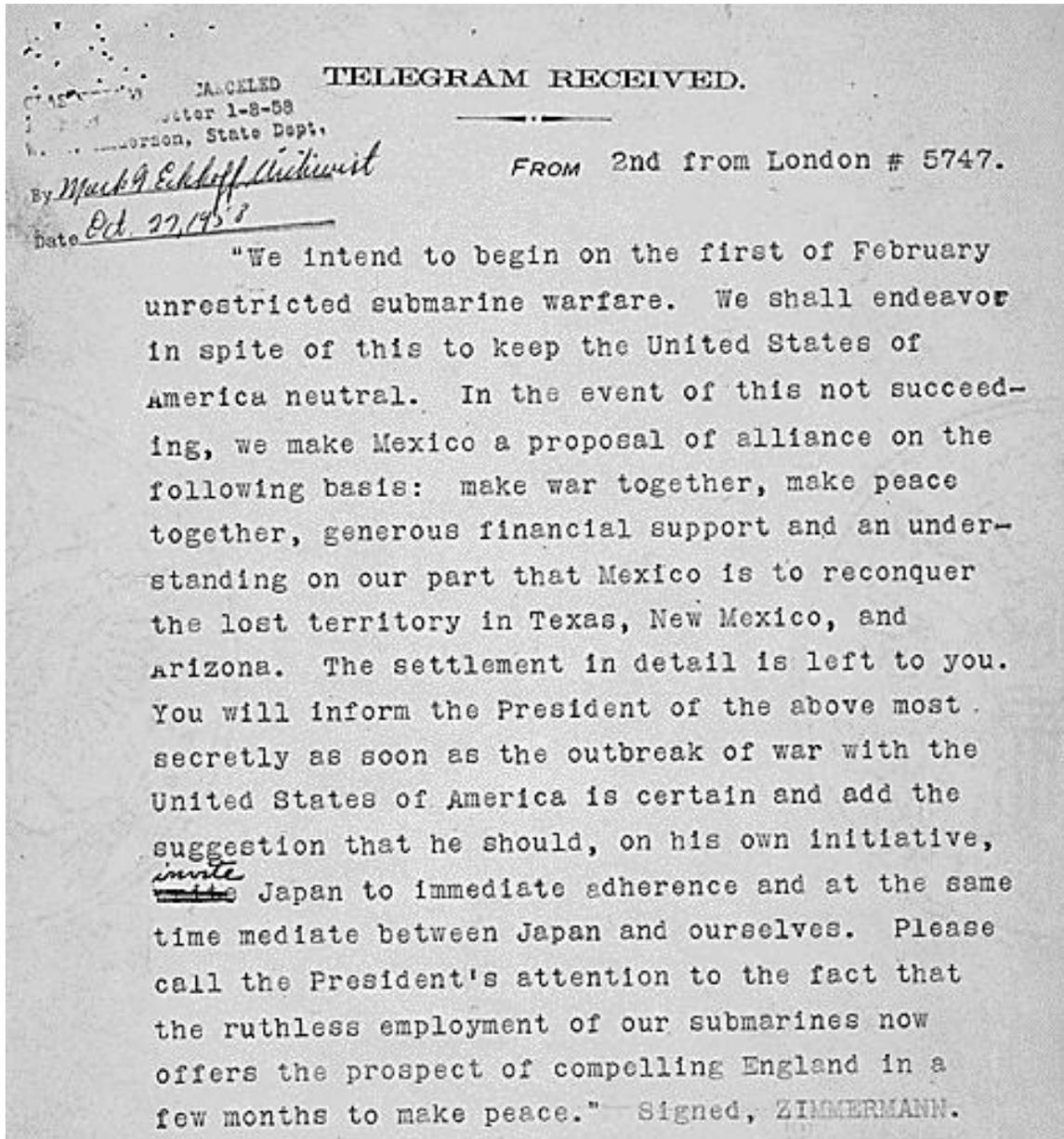
Poster made after the sinking of the Lusitania.



Source: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3b53006> (Library of Congress)

Data Sample #3:

The Zimmerman Telegram from Germany to Mexico.



Source: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/zimmermann/>

Data Sample #4:

**UNITED  
AMERICAN  
INDUSTRY  
MUST  
BACK UP  
THE BOYS  
"OVER  
THERE"**



Wage-earners and wage-payers are industrial patriots with a mutual interest in Democracy.  
They must work shoulder to shoulder to provide our fighting men and our Allies with the many things they need—and need without delay.

© 1918 United States War Relocation Authority  
All Rights Reserved. No. 1000  
Printed in the U.S.A.

Kodak Epy 6501

Source: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g07855> (Library of Congress)

### **Data Sample #5:**

Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan to Walter Hines Page, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain:

*Washington, December 26, 1914*

“The present condition of American foreign trade resulting from the frequent seizures and detentions of American cargoes destined to neutral European ports has become so serious as to require a candid statement of the views of this Government in order that the British Government may be fully informed as to the attitude of the United States toward the policy which has been pursued by the British authorities during the present war.”

Source: <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1914/byrice.html>

### **Data Sample #6:**

Germany’s promise not to sink liner’s without warning:

“Liners will not be sunk by our submarines with warning ... safety of the lives of non-combatants, providing that the latter do not try to escape resistance.”

(Note of Ambassador Bernstorff of Secretary Lansing, Sept. 1, 1915, based on instructions sent from Berlin before the sinking of the Arabic, Aug. 19.)

Germany’s second promise, orders to naval forces:

“In accordance with the general principles of visit and search and destruction of merchant ships recognized by international law, such vessels both within and without the area declared as naval war zone, shall not be sunk without warning and without saving lives unless these ships attempt to escape or offer resistance.”

(German note of May 4, 1916, to Secretary Lansing.)

Source: <http://net.lib.byu.edu/~rdh7/wwi/comment/WarFacts/wfacts2.htm#4.14>

**Data Sample #7:**

President Wilson's declaration of neutrality August 19, 1914:

"I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against the deepest, most subtle, most essential branch of neutrality which may spring out of partisanship, out of passionately taking sides. The United States must be neutral in fact, as well as in name, during these days that are to try men's souls. We must be impartial in thought, as well as action, must put a curb upon our sentiments as well as upon every transaction that might be construed as a preference of one party to the struggle before another."

Source:

[http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President\\_Wilson%27s\\_Declaration\\_of\\_Neutrality](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/President_Wilson%27s_Declaration_of_Neutrality)

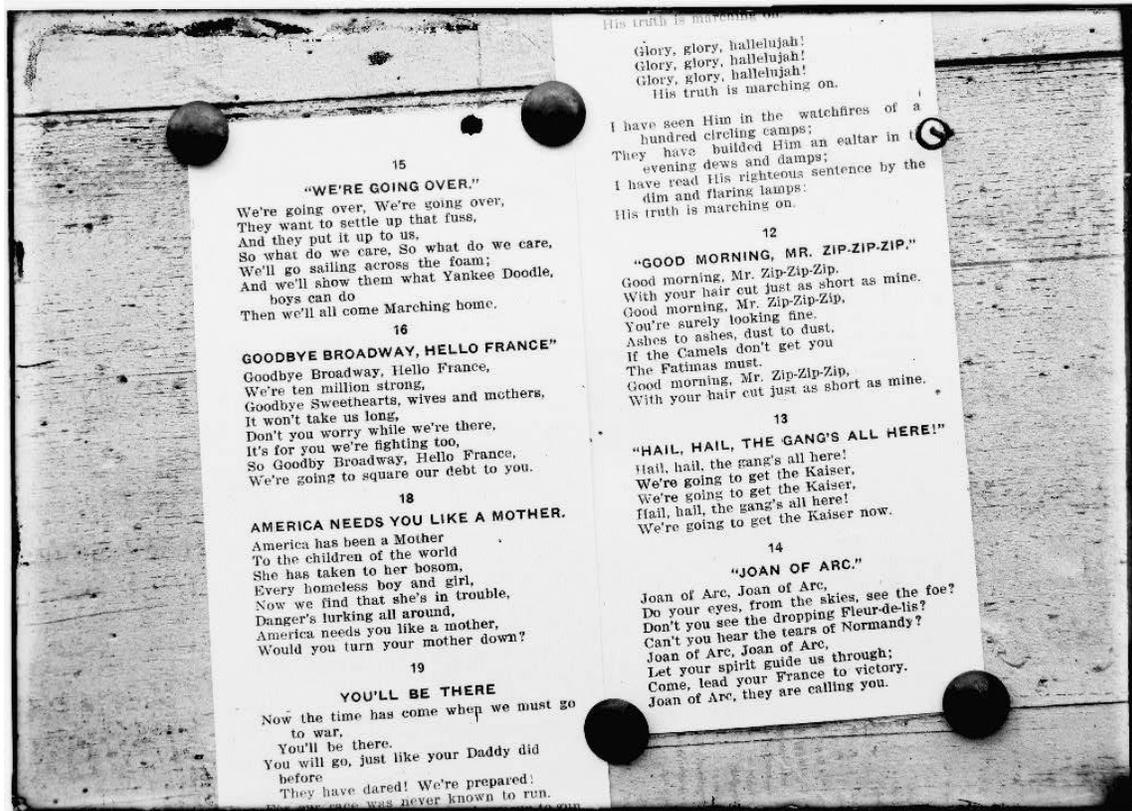
**Data Sample #8:**

President Wilson's war message to Congress April 2, 1917:

"A steadfast concert for peace can never be maintained except by a partisanship of democratic nations. No autocratic government could be trusted to keep faith within it or observe its covenants. It must be a league of honour, a partnership of opinion. Intrigue would eat its vitals away; the plottings of inner circles who could plan what they would and render account to no would be a corruption seated at its very heart. Only free peoples can hold their purpose and their honour steady to a common end and prefer the interests of mankind to any narrow interest of their own."

Source: [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson%27s\\_War\\_Message\\_to\\_Congress](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson%27s_War_Message_to_Congress)

Data Sample #9:



Source: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/txuruny.07766> (Library of Congress)