

## Activity #1: The Difficulty of American Neutrality

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Listen carefully as the following document is read aloud. Then answer the questions that follow the source.

Excerpts from President Wilson's Declaration of Neutrality (August 19, 1914):

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

The effect of the war upon the United States will depend upon what American citizens say and do. Every man who really loves America will act and speak in the true spirit of neutrality, which is the spirit of impartiality and fairness and friendliness . . .

The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war. It is natural and inevitable that there should be the utmost variety of sympathy and desire among them with regard to the issues and circumstances of the conflict. Some will wish one nation, others another, to succeed in the momentous struggle. It will be easy to excite passion and difficult to allay it. Those responsible for exciting it will assume a heavy responsibility, responsibility for no less a thing than that the people of the United States . . . may be divided in camps of hostile opinion, hot against each other, involved in the war itself in impulse and opinion if not in action.

Such divisions amongst us would be fatal to our peace of mind and might seriously stand in the way of the proper performance of our duty as the one great nation at peace . . .

I venture, therefore, my fellow countrymen, to speak a solemn word of warning to you against that deepest, most subtle, most essential breach 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.

Question	Answer
According to Wilson, how will people who love America react to the war in Europe?	
Why does the variety of the national origins of Americans present a challenge to neutrality?	
Why would differing views toward the war be dangerous for America?	

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**Group 1:** Excerpts from September 19, 1914 instructions from the U.S. Department of State regarding the arming of merchant ships registered to nations at war:

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

A. A merchant vessel of belligerent nationality [a nation at war] may carry an armament and ammunition for the sole purpose of defense without acquiring the character of a ship of war.

B. The presence of an armament and ammunition on board a merchant vessel creates a presumption that the armament is for offensive purposes, but the owners or agents may overcome this presumption by evidence showing that the vessel carries armament solely for defense.

C. . . . Indications that the armament will not be used offensively are:

1. That the caliber of the guns carried does not exceed six inches.
2. That the guns and small arms carried are few in number.
3. That no guns are mounted on the forward part of the vessel.
4. That the quantity of ammunition carried is small.
5. That the vessel is manned by its usual crew, and the officers are the same as those on board before war was declared
6. That the vessel intends to and actually does clear for a port lying in its usual trade route  
...
7. That the vessel takes on board fuel and supplies sufficient only to carry it to its port of destination, or the same quantity substantially which it has been accustomed to take for a voyage before war was declared.
8. That the cargo of the vessel consists of articles of commerce unsuited for the use of a ship of war in operations against an enemy.

9. That the vessel carries passengers who are as a whole unfitted to enter the military or naval service of the belligerent whose flag the vessel flies, or of any of its allies, and particularly if the passenger list includes women and children.

10. That the speed of the ship is slow.

D. Port authorities, on the arrival in a port of the United States of an armed vessel of belligerent nationality, claiming to be a merchant vessel, should immediately investigate . . . in order that it may be determined whether the evidence is sufficient to remove the presumption that the vessel is, and should be treated as, a ship of war....

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
Briefly explain why merchant ships of nations at war might arm themselves.	
Tell your classmates some (not all) of the ways in which armed merchant ships can prove to neutral nations that they are not warships.	
Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.	

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**Group 2:** November 13, 1914 letter from Sir Cecil Spring-Rice to Sir Arthur Nicolson [both were British officials] describing U.S. Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan's thoughts on the war: <http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1914/bryrice.html>

Bryan spoke to me about peace as he always does. He sighs for the Nobel Prize, and besides that he is a really convinced peaceman. He has just given me a sword beaten into a ploughshare six inches long to serve as a paper-weight. It is adorned with quotations from Isaiah [a book in the Bible] and himself. No one doubts his sincerity, but that is rather embarrassing for us at the present moment, because he is always at us with peace propositions. This time, he said he could not understand why we could not say what we were fighting for. The nation which continued war had as much responsibility as the country which began it. The United States was the one great Power which was outside the struggle, and it was their duty to do what they could to put an end to it. I felt rather cross and said that the United States were signatories to the Hague Convention [a 1907 conference in which delegations from the world's nations attempted to create a set of rules for warfare], which had been grossly violated again and again without one word from the principal neutral nation. They were now out of court. They had done nothing to prevent the crime, and now they must not prevent the punishment.

He said that all the Powers concerned had been disappointed in their ambitions . . . Why should they not make peace now, if they had to make peace a year hence after another year's fruitless struggle. It would be far wiser if each said what it was fighting for and asked the United States to help them in arriving at a peaceful conclusion.

I asked him if he thought that under present circumstances Germany would give up Belgium [the German Army had occupied most of Belgium since August] and compensate her for her suffering. If not, how could the United States Government go on record as condoning a peace which would put the seal on the most disgraceful act of tyranny and oppression committed in modern times . . . ?

He got rather angry and said that if that was what we wanted, why did we not say so. He added, "Who can tell who was really responsible for what had happened in Belgium or whether the treaty wasn't only a pretext?" I reminded him that he was a great admirer of Gladstone [a famous British politician from the 19<sup>th</sup> century], who was like him, a great lover of peace, and that Gladstone had always maintained that if we had gone to war for Belgium in 1870, we should

have gone to war for freedom and for public right and to save human happiness from being invaded by a tyrannous and lawless power, and that in such a war as that while the breath continued in his body he was ready to engage. This rather surprised him as he had read in the newspapers that Gladstone had always maintained that the Belgian Treaty was not binding.

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
<p>Summarize what William Jennings Bryan wants Britain and the other warring nations to do.</p>	
<p>Explain why Lord Cecil Spring-Rice believes the United States is being inconsistent in calling for peace.</p>	
<p>Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.</p>	

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**Group 3:** Excerpts from a letter from Secretary of State Bryan to Walter Hines Page, U.S. Ambassador in Great Britain, December 26, 1914:

<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1915/usmarit.html>

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 . . .

The Government of the United States has viewed with growing concern the large numbers of vessels laden with American goods destined to neutral ports in Europe, which have been seized on the high seas, taken into British ports and detained sometimes for weeks by the British authorities . . .

It is needless to point out to His Majesty's Government, usually the champion of the freedom of the seas and the rights of trade, that peace, not war, is the normal relation between nations and that the commerce between countries which are not belligerents should not be interfered with by those at war unless such interference is manifestly an imperative necessity to protect their national safety, and then only to the extent that it is a necessity . . . [the United States] is reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the present policy of His Majesty's Government toward neutral ships and cargoes exceeds the manifest necessity of a belligerent and constitutes restrictions upon the rights of American citizens on the high seas . . .

This Government believes and earnestly hopes His Majesty's Government will come to the same belief, that a course of conduct more in conformity with the rules of international usage, which Great Britain has strongly sanctioned for many years, will in the end better serve the interests of belligerents as well as those of neutrals.

Not only is the situation a critical one to the commercial interests of the United States, but many of the great industries of this country are suffering because their products are denied long-established markets in European countries, which, though neutral, are contiguous to the nations at war. Producers and exporters, steamship and insurance companies are pressing, and not

without reason, for relief from the menace to transatlantic trade which is gradually but surely destroying their business and threatening them with financial disaster.

In conclusion, it should be impressed upon His Majesty's Government that the present condition of American trade with the neutral European countries is such that, if it does not improve, it may arouse a feeling contrary to that which has so long existed between the American and British peoples. Already it is becoming more and more the subject of public criticism and complaint. There is an increasing belief, doubtless not entirely unjustified that the present British policy toward American trade is responsible for the depression in certain industries which depend upon European markets . . .

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
Tell your classmates what Britain is doing to American ships and why.	
Explain why the United States wants fair access to European ports even though there is a war.	
Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.	



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**Group 4:** Sinking of the *Lusitania*, May 7, 1915:

The *Lusitania* Disaster: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/rotogravures/rotolusit.html>

Photograph of the *Lusitania* at dock: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pan.6a11970>

Excerpts from official American over the sinking of the *Lusitania*:  
<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/bryan2.htm>

. . . In view of recent acts of the German authorities in violation of American rights on the high seas which culminated in the torpedoing and sinking of the British steamship *Lusitania* on May 7, 1915, by which over 100 American citizens lost their lives, it is clearly wise and desirable that the government of the United States and the Imperial German government should come to a clear and full understanding as to the grave situation which has resulted . . .

[The United States] assumes . . . that the Imperial government accept, as of course, the rule that the lives of noncombatants, whether they be of neutral citizenship or citizens of one of the nations at war, cannot lawfully or rightfully be put in jeopardy by the capture or destruction of an unarmed merchantman, and recognize also, as all other nations do, the obligation to take the usual precaution of visit and search to ascertain whether a suspected merchantman is in fact of belligerent nationality or is in fact carrying contraband of war under a neutral flag.

The government of the United States, therefore, desires to call the attention of the Imperial German government, with the utmost earnestness, to the fact that the objection to their present method of attack against the trade of their enemies lies in the practical impossibility of employing submarines in the destruction of commerce without disregarding those rules of fairness, reason, justice, and humanity which all modern opinion regards as imperative. It is practically impossible for the officers of a submarine to visit a merchantman at sea and examine her papers and cargo. It is practically impossible for them to make a prize of her; and, if they cannot put a prize crew on board of her, they cannot sink her without leaving her crew and all on board of her to the mercy of the sea in her small boats.

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
<p>Tell your classmates what happened to the <i>Lusitania</i> on May 7, 1915.</p>	
<p>Explain why the United States wants Germany to stop using submarines to destroy the merchant ships of its enemies.</p>	
<p>Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.</p>	

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**Group 5:** Wilson's April 19, 1916 remarks to Congress regarding Germany's attack on the *Sussex*, an unarmed French passenger ship traveling in the English Channel:

<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1916/sussex.html>

. . . I have deemed it my duty, therefore, to say to the Imperial German Government, that if it is still its purpose to prosecute relentless and indiscriminate warfare against vessels of commerce by the use of submarines, [despite the] impossibility of conducting that warfare in accordance with what the Government of the United States must consider the sacred and indisputable rules of international law and the universally recognized dictates of humanity, the Government of the United States is at last forced to the conclusion that there is but one course it can pursue; and that unless the Imperial German Government should now immediately declare and effect an abandonment of its present methods of warfare against passenger and freight carrying vessels this Government can have no choice but to sever diplomatic relations with the Government of the German Empire altogether.

This decision I have arrived at with the keenest regret; the possibility of the action contemplated I am sure all thoughtful Americans will look forward to with unaffected reluctance. But we cannot forget that we are in some sort and by the force of circumstances the responsible spokesmen of the rights of humanity, and that we cannot remain silent while those rights seem in process of being swept utterly away in the maelstrom of this terrible war. We owe it to a due regard to our own rights as a nation, to our sense of duty as a representative of the rights of neutrals the world over, and to a just conception of the rights of mankind to take this stand now with the utmost solemnity and firmness . . .

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
<p>Tell your classmates why Wilson is threatening to break off diplomatic relations with Germany.</p>	
<p>Explain why the United States cannot ignore Germany's use of submarines to attack merchant (commerce) ships, even when they are not American ships.</p>	
<p>Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.</p>	

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**Group 6:** Wilson's "Peace without Victory" address to the U.S. Senate, January 22, 1917:  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/senate.html>

It is inconceivable that the people of the United States should play no part in [negotiating an end to World War I]. To take part in such a service will be the opportunity for which they have sought to prepare themselves by the very principles and purposes of their polity and the approved practices of their Government ever since the days when they set up a new nation in the high and honorable hope that it might in all that it was and did show mankind the way to liberty. They can not in honor withhold the service to which they are now about to be challenged . . .

The question upon which the whole future peace and policy of the world depends is this: Is the present war a struggle for a just and secure peace, or only for a new balance of power? If it be only a struggle for a new balance of power, who will guarantee, who can guarantee, the stable equilibrium of the new arrangement? Only a tranquil Europe can be a stable Europe. There must be, not a balance of power, but a community of power; not organized rivalries, but an organized common peace.

[There] must be a peace without victory . . . [t]he equality of nations upon which peace must be founded if it is to last must be an equality of rights; the guarantees exchanged must neither recognize nor imply a difference between big nations and small, between those that are powerful and those that are weak. Right must be based upon the common strength, not upon the individual strength, of the nations upon whose concert peace will depend. Equality of territory or of resources there of course cannot be; nor any other sort of equality not gained in the ordinary peaceful and legitimate development of the peoples themselves. But no one asks or expects anything more than an equality of rights. Mankind is looking now for freedom of life, not for equiposes of power.

And there is a deeper thing involved than even equality of right among organized nations. No peace can last, or ought to last, which does not recognize and accept the principle that governments derive all their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that no right anywhere exists to hand peoples about from sovereignty to sovereignty as if they were property....

Instructions for presenting to class	Presentation
<p>Tell your classmates why Wilson believes the United States must help end the war.</p>	
<p>Explain what Wilson means by "peace without victory."</p>	
<p>Explain how this primary source shows the difficulty of the United States remaining neutral.</p>	

## Activity #2: On the Brink of War, January-March, 1917

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** in this exercise, your group will create a political cartoon responding to two war-related crises from early 1917. The purpose of your cartoon is to indicate whether or not the United States should declare war on Germany. The two war-related crises are Germany's declaration of unlimited submarine warfare and the German attempt to ally with Mexico in case of war against the United States. To make your cartoon, you will read about the two crises, and then draft a list of reasons to go to war and *not* to go to war. After making this list and reading the cartoon instructions provided below, your group will create the cartoon. To help get you started, a link to a sample political cartoon has been provided.

### Crisis 1: Unlimited Submarine Warfare

Germany's declaration of unlimited submarine warfare effective February 1, 1917, message from German Ambassador Count Johann von Bernstorff to the U.S. Secretary of State, Robert Lansing: [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/uboaat\\_bernstorff.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/uboaat_bernstorff.htm)

A new situation has thus been created which forces Germany to new decisions. Since two years and a half England is using her naval power for a criminal attempt to force Germany into submission by starvation. In brutal contempt of international law, the group of powers led by England not only curtail the legitimate trade of their opponents, but they also, by ruthless pressure, compel neutral countries either to altogether forego every trade not agreeable to the Entente Powers [England and its allies] . . .

Since the attempts to come to an understanding with the Entente Powers have been answered . . . with the announcement of an intensified continuation of the war, the Imperial Government [Germany]--in order to serve the welfare of mankind in a higher sense and not to wrong its own people--is now compelled to continue the fight for existence . . . with the full employment of all the weapons which are at its disposal.

Sincerely trusting that the people and the Government of the United States will understand the motives for this decision and its necessity, the Imperial Government hopes that the United States may view the new situation from the lofty heights of impartiality, and assist, on their part, to prevent further misery and unavoidable sacrifice of human life . . .

From February 1, 1917, sea traffic will be stopped with every available weapon and without further notice in . . . blockade zones around Great Britain, France, Italy and in the Eastern Mediterranean . . .

## Crisis 2: The Zimmermann Telegram

Arthur Zimmermann was the German Foreign Minister. The telegram was written on January 19, 1917 but was not sent to Mexico until February 24. British intelligence agents obtained a copy and gave it to the United States, which publicly released the telegram on March 1:

<http://www.archives.gov/global-pages/larger-image.html?i=/education/lessons/zimmermann/images/decoded-message-1.jpg&c=/education/lessons/zimmermann/images/decoded-message.caption.html>

REASONS TO DECLARE WAR (Pro)	REASONS <i>NOT</i> TO DECLARE WAR (Con)



**Cartoon instructions:**

1. Use white 8 ½” x 11” paper with colored paper backing.
2. Tape a 3” x 5” card to the bottom edge of the cartoon with the following information:
  - Names of your group members
  - date
  - title of your cartoon
  - brief explanation of the cartoon’s meaning
3. The design must be original (bold, readable designs preferred).
4. Use colored pencils or markers (pencil may be used for detailed drawing).

**Cutouts/clip art may be used, but not for the main design.**

Sample political cartoon, dated 1917, showing Wilson drafting his war message:  
<http://media.nara.gov/media/images/50/1/a0121.gif>

### Activity #3: The U.S. Declaration of War against Germany, April 1917

Student Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** in this exercise, you will read the following primary sources, then write a two paragraph essay answering this question: *Was Wilson’s policy of neutrality impossible to maintain during World War I?*

Document 1: Excerpt of Wilson’s request to Congress for a declaration of war, April 2, 1917:  
<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/wilswarm.html>

*Gentlemen of the Congress:*

I have called the Congress into extraordinary session because there are serious, very serious, choices of policy to be made, and made immediately, which it was neither right nor constitutionally permissible that I should assume the responsibility of making....

The present German submarine warfare against commerce is a warfare against mankind.

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way....

When I addressed the Congress on the 26th of February last, I thought that it would suffice to assert our neutral rights with arms, our right to use the seas against unlawful interference, our right to keep our people safe against unlawful violence. But armed neutrality, it now appears, is impracticable. Because submarines are in effect outlaws when used as the German submarines have been used against merchant shipping, it is impossible to defend ships against their attacks....

We are now about to accept . . . battle with this natural foe to liberty and shall, if necessary, spend the whole force of the nation to check and nullify its pretensions and its power. We are glad . . . to fight thus for the ultimate peace of the world and for the liberation of its peoples, the German peoples included: for the rights of nations great and small and the privilege of men everywhere to choose their way of life and of obedience. *The world must be made safe for democracy* [emphasis added]. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve . . . We are but one of the champions of the rights of mankind. We shall be satisfied when those rights have been made as secure as the faith and the freedom of nations can make them.

Document 2: War is a “Blessing, Not a Curse”: a March 30, 1917 essay from the magazine *North American Review* supporting a declaration of war: <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4939>

[...] We are for war; of course, we are; and for reasons good and plenty, to wit:

1. Because we have reached and passed the limit of forbearance in trying to maintain amicable relations with a barbaric brute who has presumed so far upon our good intent as to treat our most conciliatory and helpful suggestions with glaring contempt, who has incited all manner of treasonable activities and damnable outrages within our borders, has gloated over his avowed assassination of our innocent and harmless citizens of both sexes and all ages upon the high seas and has missed no opportunity to deceive, to sneer at and to lie to our constituted authorities; because to conserve our own self-respect we are driven finally to the point where we must fight or forfeit the decent opinion of all mankind . . .

2. Because we owe it to our forefathers who founded the Republic and to our fathers who saved the Union to prove ourselves not merely worthy of the happiness which flows from prosperity but eager and fearless in support of free life and full liberty the world over . . .

3. Because our going into the great conflict at this psychological moment would . . . complete the ring of democracies around the doomed autocracy . . .

Was Wilson's policy of neutrality impossible to maintain during World War I? **Your essay:**