

DOCUMENT BASED QUESTION

United States Enters WWI:

Weighing the decision to enter the war

Recommended Grade Levels: 9-10

Course/Content Area: U.S. History; AP U.S. History

Authored by: National World War I Museum and Memorial

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- Why did the United States enter World War I?
- What were the dominant interventionist arguments and themes, and how did Americans react to those arguments?
- Why did some Americans oppose American military involvement?



SUMMARY: The United States' decision to declare war on Germany in 1917 was not made lightly. A variety of factors were involved. While many citizens supported the declaration of war, there were many that stood opposed. These primary sources represent arguments made by both sides of the issue as the nation wrestled with a decision that would forever change the United States' role in global affairs.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT: See Standards Alignment Appendix B

TIME NEEDED: Two 55-minute class periods.

OBJECTIVES: *Students will:*

- Assess primary documents critically, determining the points of view of each author and whether each contains objective or subjective information.
- Apply interpretations of primary sources towards an essay which details arguments made by U.S. citizens supporting and opposing the nation's entry into World War I.
- Demonstrate skills required for formal writing, including citation of sources upon which arguments rely.

INTERDISCIPLINARY: Language Arts, Visual Art

THEMES & CONNECTIONS: This lesson can be included in a unit study of the First World War, but can also be used as stand-alone practice to assess documents and images and write formally using citations.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computer or notebooks and pens.
- Documents and questions for each student.

LESSON

PRE-ASSESSMENT:

Ask the class what skills are required to critically assess a primary document. Ask the class how an image is best assessed. (It is useful to record answers on the board so they can be referred to by students as they work on their DBQ essays.)

DIRECTIONS:

1. Give each student a copy of the DBQ questions and documents (see Appendix A).
2. In the first class, ask students to read the prompt carefully and write down the key components they need to answer.
3. In groups, pairs, or individually, ask students to read and analyze documents, then synthesize an answer to the questions asked. They should take notes as they do so.
4. In the second class, give students time to craft their essay answering the writing prompt. Remind them to cite the documents given as evidence to support their response.

POST-ASSESSMENT:

Students may meet with teacher to discuss their essays and/or work in peer groups to workshop their responses. To workshop, they can discuss how each document helped them answer the questions. Hearing analysis from other students can be helpful for all students to build their depth of understanding.

MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMODATIONS

- For students who are approaching document based questions for the first time, it is beneficial to have them work in groups to analyze documents and take notes before drafting their essays.
- For classes preparing to take the AP United States History exam, make sure the full 55 minutes of the second class is given for writing the essay. This is the time of the DBQ section on the exam so this will serve as practice for the students.

APPENDIX A:

UNITED STATES HISTORY

Document-Based Question

Writing prompt:

Why did the United States enter World War I? Explain the dominant interventionist arguments and themes, and how Americans reacted. Why did some Americans oppose American military involvement?

Document 1

Excerpt from *Why America Fights Germany* (1918), a government propaganda pamphlet concerning alleged German atrocities.

We were horrified still more by their conduct in Belgium—by their needless destruction of precious things, by their vile and filthy treatment of the Belgians, by their robberies, by their numberless murders. A German soldier fell off his bicycle and his gun went off; he declared he had been shot at, and all the inhabitants of the village were burned to death in their homes. Feeble old Belgian priests were forced to walk in front of the marching German armies as screens, so that if the Belgians fired they might kill the priests first. Babies were stabbed with bayonets. Belgians were carried off into Germany and forced to work for the German armies. . . . Whole books have been written about these horrors, against all law and humanity, and yet half of them have not been recorded.

Document 2

Excerpt from *Joe's War: Memoirs of a Doughboy* by Joseph N. Rizzi.

When we did meet she [Rizzi's girlfriend] would show me [news]papers carrying cruelties committed by the Huns. She called me a coward and said that I was ungrateful by not serving for our country. She tormented me with the fact that she would never marry me unless I entered the army. I tried to reason with her and point out that some of the acts were being exaggerated to incite people against the Germans.

If acts WERE committed they were by some individual and a whole nation could not be condemned. I tried to show her that the atrocities related by the papers were being committed by criminals in civilian life; therefore, some unruly Germans were perpetuating those acts, and false propaganda also was being issued. But still she refused to listen to me and remained deaf to any of my phone calls and would not answer my letters.

Document 3

Excerpt from *How the War Came to America* (1917), a government propaganda pamphlet.

On the eve of the present conflict, our position toward other nations might have been summarized under three heads:

- I. The Monroe Doctrine.—We had pledged ourselves to defend the New World from European aggression, and we had by word and deed made it clear that we would not intervene in any European dispute.
- II. The freedom of the seas.—In every naval conference our influence had been given in support of the principle that sea law to be just and worthy of general respect must be based on the consent of the governed.
- III. Arbitration.—As we had secured peace at home by referring interstate disputes to a federal tribunal, we urged a similar settlement of international controversies. Our ideal was a permanent world court. We had made plain to the nations our purpose to forestall by every means in our power the recurrence of wars in the world.

Document 4

Liberty Bond poster, 1918.



Document 5

Excerpt from President Wilson's 2 April, 1917 address before Congress, calling for war against Germany.

We are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretense about them, 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. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty. We have no selfish ends to serve. We desire no conquest, no dominion. We seek no indemnities for ourselves, no material compensation for the sacrifices we shall freely make. 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 6

Editorial excerpt from *The Washington Post* titled "Liberty Draws the Sword", 4 April, 1917.

Now comes the great republic, the natural enemy and destroyer of autocracy. With insane rage autocracy has challenged the sovereignty of this nation. It has struck squarely at the life of democracy, and boasts that it will overcome the United States. The spokesman of the world's free people has sounded the call to arms. America is called upon to defend herself and destroy her assailant. There is not room on earth or ocean for both autocracy and democracy. One or the other must perish.

Document 7

Poem, *The New Crusade*, by Katharine Lee Bates. From the Committee on Public Information's 1918 publication, *The Battle Line of Democracy: Prose and Poetry of the World War*.

The New Crusade

Life is a trifle;
Honor is all;
Shoulder the rifle;
Answer the call.
“A nation of traders”!
We'll show what we are,
Freedom's crusaders
Who war against war.

Battle is tragic;
Battle shall cease;
Ours is the magic
Mission of Peace.

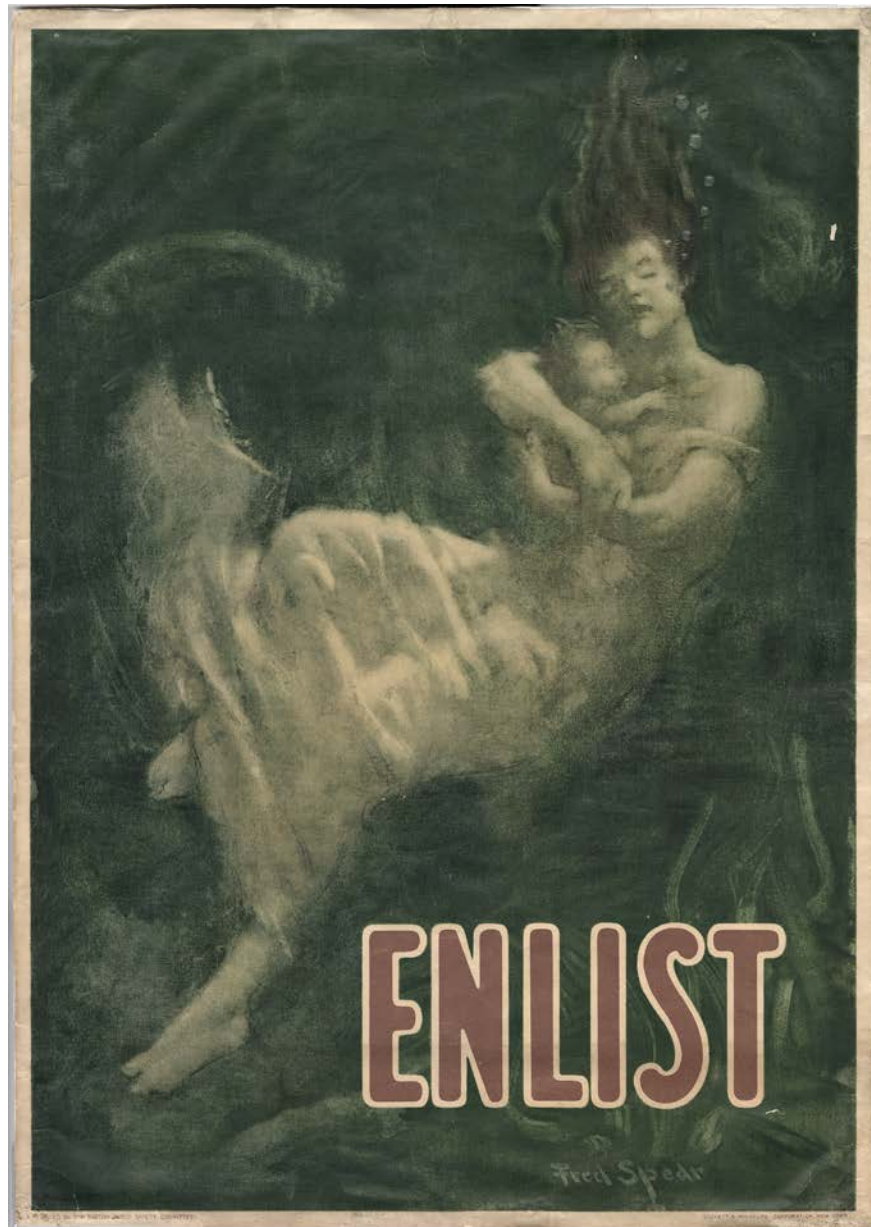
Gladly we barter
Gold of our youth
For Liberty's charter
Blood-sealed in truth.
“A nation of traders”!
We'll show what we are,
Freedom's crusaders
Who war against war.

Sons of the granite,
Strong be our stroke,
Making this planet
Safe for the folk.

Life is but passion,
Sunshine on dew.
Forward to fashion
The old world anew!
“A nation of traders”!
We'll show what we are,
Freedom's crusaders
Who war against war.

Document 8

A woman and her child drown after their passenger ship, the R.M.S. *Lusitania*, is sunk by a German submarine. 1915 recruitment poster by Fred Spear.



Document 9

Excerpt of speech by Sen. George Norris (R-Nebraska), 4 April 1917.

It is now demanded that the American citizens shall be used as insurance policies to guarantee the safe delivery of munitions of war to belligerent nations. The enormous profits of munition [sic] manufacturers, stockbrokers, and bond dealers must be still further increased by our entrance into the war. This has brought us to the present moment, when Congress, urged by the President and backed by the artificial sentiment, is about to declare war and engulf our country in the greatest holocaust that the world has ever known.

We are taking a step today that is fraught with untold danger. We are going into war upon the command of gold. We are going to run the risk of sacrificing millions of our countrymen's lives in order that other countrymen may coin their lifeblood into money. And even if we do not cross the Atlantic and go into the trenches, we are going to pile up a debt that the tolling masses that shall come many generations after us will have to pay. Unborn millions will bend their backs in toil in order to pay for the terrible step we are now about to take.

Document 10

In 1917, Emma Goldman was arrested and accused of inciting men not to register for the military draft, a federal crime. This is an excerpt of a speech Goldman gave at her trial. She was found guilty.

We say that if America has entered the war to make the world safe for democracy, she must first make democracy safe in America. How else is the world to take America seriously, when democracy at home is daily being outraged, free speech suppressed, peaceable assemblies broken up by overbearing and brutal gangsters in uniform; when free press is curtailed and every independent opinion gagged. Verily, poor as we are in democracy, how can we give of it to the world?

Document 11

Excerpt of editorial from the German-language *Omaha Daily Tribune*, February 1917.

The break with our old fatherland is at hand and on account of questions whose handling by our government sometimes seemed to us not entirely just and in keeping with the best interests of the future of our country. But we have duties toward our adopted country. Our allegiance belongs to America first, last, and all the time. These duties we must perform and will perform above all considerations regardless of what the future may have in store for us.

Appendix B:

Standards Alignment

Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading for Students in grades 6–12:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10: Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards for History/Social Studies for students in grades 9-10:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.6: Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.9: Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.10: By the end of grade 10, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 9–10 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards for History/Social Studies for students in grades 11-12:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.3: Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines *faction* in *Federalist* No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.5: Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.6: Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.8: Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.10: By the end of grade 12, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 11–CCR text complexity band independently and proficiently.

National Standards for English Language Arts (Developed by the International Reading Association [IRA] and the National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE].)

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

The National Standards for History are presented by The National Center for History in the Schools

U.S. History:

NSS-USH.5-12.7 Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)

The student in grades 5-12:

Understands the changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I.

World History:

NSS-WH.5-12.8 Era 8: A Half-Century of Crisis and Achievement, 1900-1945

The student in grades 5-12:

Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I.

National Standards for Social Studies Teachers prepared by National Council for the Social Studies

Thematic Standards:

I. Culture and Cultural Diversity

II. Time, Continuity, and Change

III. People, Places, and Environments

IV. Individual Development and Identity

VI. Power, Authority, and Governance

IX. Global Connections

X. Civic Ideals and Practices

National Visual Arts Standards part of the National Core Arts Standards

Responding Standards:

Students will:

7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
8. Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

Bibliography:

“Americans!! Help Rid the World of this Monster! poster, 1976.315.17” (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

"Comment by the hyphenate press." *Rochester Democrat and Chronicle*.
<https://www.newspapers.com/image/135332402/>.

Lane, Franklin K., and Guy Stanton Ford. *The battle line of democracy: prose and poetry of the world war*. Washington, D.C.: Govt. Print. Off., 1917.
Book, 1938.126.10. (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

"Liberty draws the sword." *The Washington Post*, April 4, 1917.
<https://www.fold3.com/image/227032470/>.

President Wilson's Declaration of War Message to Congress, April 2, 1917; Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; National Archives.

Red, White, and Blue Series No. 1: How the war came to America. Committee on Public Information, 1917. Pamphlet, 2007.216.6 (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

Rizzi, Joseph N. . *Joe's War - Memoirs of a Doughboy*. Huntington, WV: Der Angriff Publications, 1983. Book, 1983.82.0 (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial).

Spears, Fred. *Enlist* poster, 1915, 1920.1.74 (Kansas City, MO: National WWI Museum and Memorial.)

Tatlock, John S. P. *Why America fights Germany*. Washington, D.C.: Committee on Public Information, 1918.

Trial and Speeches of Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman in the United States District Court, in the City of New York, July, 1917 (New York: Mother Earth Publishing Association [1917], In <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/goldman/pdfs/Speeches-AddresstotheJury.pdf>.

U.S. Congress. *Congressional Record*, 65th Cong., 1st Sess., Vol. LV, pt. I, pp. 212-13.