

Decision Making in U.S. History

World War I & the 1920s

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WORLD WAR I AND THE 1920s

Introduction

OVERVIEW

This volume on World War I and the 1920s consists of eight lessons: four focused on World War I, and four on the 1920s. As in the other volumes, no effort is made to cover all the major topics in this time period. Rather, lessons were chosen around interesting decision-making problems.

SKILLS GRID FOR THIS VOLUME

X = part of lesson

E = emphasized in the lesson

Skill	Lesson							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Underlying problem	E			X	X	E		
Point of view	X			X	E		X	
Assumptions/emotions	E			X				
Ask—context	E	X		X	E	X	X	
Ask—sources						E		
Ask—analogies	E		X					
Goals? Realistic?	X	X	E	E			E	E
Options. Ethical?				E	X	X		
Unintended consequences	X	E	E			X	E	
Play out option							X	

LESSON 1: AMERICAN NEUTRALITY AND THE GREAT WAR

Teacher Pages

OVERVIEW

The U.S. was very slow to enter World War I. Between the start of the war in 1914 and his war message in April 1917, President Wilson wrestled with the question of how the United States should respond to events in Europe. This lesson presents students with the same challenging questions Wilson faced as the U.S. moved from neutrality to war. Some historians have argued that the U.S. should have joined the Allies sooner, and many students may agree as they consider the problems. They may decide to enter the war at an earlier point than President Wilson did. This would present you with an opportunity to ask students what role emotions played in their decisions. Did they believe that it was in the best interests of the U.S. to enter the war, or were they simply frustrated (as students often are during this lesson) by the continuous negotiations with the German government over submarines?

This is a long, intricate lesson with many handouts. You can pick and choose which handouts to use and how long to make the lesson. Note the ideas in the “Quick Motivator” section on the Lesson Plan page.

VOCABULARY

- Allies—Britain, France, and Russia
- Central Powers—Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey (Ottoman Empire)
- Submarines—Underwater ships (U-boats) that shoot torpedoes to sink ships without warning
- Western Front—The war in France and Belgium
- Eastern Front—The war in Russia and Austria-Hungary
- Trenches—Long ditches dug to protect soldiers against attack
- Naval mines—Floating bombs that detonate when ships bump into them
- War zone—The zone surrounding Britain in which Germany declared it would sink ships
- Kaiser—The German head of state (from “Caesar”)
- *Lusitania*—British passenger ship sunk by a German submarine
- *Sussex*—French passenger ferry torpedoed by a German submarine
- Sussex Pledge—Assurance by Germany that it would not sink merchant ships without warning and would not sink passenger ships at all
- Unrestricted submarine warfare—German decision to sink all ships in the war zone around Britain
- Zimmermann telegram—Note sent by a German leader proposing that Mexico ally with Germany against the United States. In return, Germany would help Mexico reclaim land in the southwestern U.S.

LESSON 3: GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF INFORMATION DURING WORLD WAR I

Student Handout 5

Primary Source: The Espionage Act (excerpts)

“Whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully make or convey false reports or false statements with intent to interfere with the operation or success of the military or naval forces of the United States or to promote the success of its enemies and whoever when the United States is at war, shall willfully cause or attempt to cause insubordination, disloyalty, mutiny, refusal of duty, in the military or naval forces of the United States, or shall willfully obstruct the recruiting or enlistment service of the United States, to the injury of the service or of the United States, shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment for not more than twenty years, or both.”

Title III: “Every letter, writing, circular, post card, picture, print, engraving, photograph, newspaper, pamphlet, book, or other publication, matter or thing, of any kind, containing any matter advocating or urging treason, insurrection, or forcible resistance to any law of the United States, is hereby declared nonmailable.”

Primary Source: Trading With the Enemy Act (excerpt)

Subsection 3d: “Whenever, during the present war, the President shall deem that the public safety demands it, he may cause to be censored under such rules and regulations as he may from time to time establish, communications by mail, cable, radio or other means of transmission passing between the United States and any foreign country... Any person who willfully evades or attempts to evade the submission of any such communication to such censorship or willfully uses or attempts to use any code or other device for the purpose of concealing from such censorship the intended meaning of such communication...shall, upon conviction, be...fined not more than \$100,000, or imprisoned for not more than ten years or both.”

Primary Source: Sedition Act (excerpt)

“...and whoever, when the United States is at war, shall willfully utter, print, write or publish any disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language about the form of the government of the United States or the Constitution or the military or naval forces of the United States or the flag of the United States...to the injury of the service or of the United States, shall be punished by a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment of not more than twenty years, or both...”

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. How could each of the four sections help defend the U.S. and the war effort?
2. How could each of the four sections threaten free speech or other freedoms?

LESSON 3: GOVERNMENT CONTROL OF INFORMATION DURING WORLD WAR I

Student Handout 6



QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What is the point of this poster, and what is its underlying message?
2. Is this poster an example of propaganda? Do you find anything suspect about it?