



THE UNITED STATES
WORLD WAR ONE
CENTENNIAL COMMISSION



THE NATIONAL
WWI MUSEUM
AND MEMORIAL

Centennial Commemoration of U.S. Entry to World War I

Abridged Ceremony Summary

On April 6, 2017, the United States World War I Centennial Commission is hosting a national ceremony commemorating the centennial of the United States entry into the Great War at the National World War I Museum and Memorial. The Commission is engaging the country in exploring what this event meant to Americans 100 years ago, through readings, music and primary source images.

The following is an abridged script, based on the national commemoration, for your own local, school or classroom ceremony. The abridged readings and songs may need 30 minutes without additional elements.

Considerations:

Choose a date and time: April 6 (the anniversary) is ideal, but choose a time and date that works for your class/group

Consider your audience: Will this be for a classroom? The entire school? Your local community?

Review and modify the draft script: We've provided a recommendation, but each commemoration is unique. Consider your local perspective. Break the script into sections according to your number of readers. Consider a narrator(s) and individuals to read the quotations.

Include other elements: Consider meaningful additions that include your community: A color guard? A wreath laying? A flag ceremony? Playing of Taps? Re-enactors? American Legion or VFW post participation?

Assemble your readers/participants: From your narrator, to readers, to a potential VIP

Prepare your materials: Create a PowerPoint and/or create song sheets or other handouts for participants and guests

Join us on the web:

- Stream with us! Watch the full national ceremony live on April 6, 2017 at 11 a.m. CDT at theworldwar.org/april6/educators or on the Museum's YouTube channel after: youtube.com/NationalWWIMuseum
- Share your commemoration with the global community on social media! Use the hashtag **#USWWI100** and tweet at [@WWICC](https://twitter.com/WWICC) and [@thewwimuseum](https://twitter.com/thewwimuseum)
- If your event is open to the public, submit it to the wwlcc.org/events calendar
- After the fact, share images and a summary of your event at wwlcc.org/edu

Classroom Considerations:

Time Needed: Minimum of 30 minutes

Age Level: Middle/High School

Interdisciplinary: Social Studies, Language Arts, Music

Materials Needed: Copies of script divided into appropriate reading parts

Objectives:

- After reading historical evidence, understand similarities between today and the past.
- Identify conflicts that faced the United States in this era
- Understand the cause and objective for U.S. entry into WWI
- Analyze the significance of U.S. entry into World War I.

Modifications:

1. Before the presentation, assign students to use the [online collections database](#) of the National World War I Museum and Memorial to find three primary source photographs of the war they believe best represent the information or essence of their reading.
2. Consider having students highlight unfamiliar words and clarification their meaning, first by predicting the meaning from context, then by looking up the definition.
3. Break students into groups and research the topical sections.
4. After the reading, assign one of the following questions as a writing assignment or for group discussion:
 - Why is commemoration important?
 - How has the phrase “The world must be made safe for democracy” influenced the 20th and 21st centuries?
 - The inscription on the National World War I Museum and Memorial reads, “Let us strive on to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.” What would “just and lasting peace” look like? How can we strive toward just and lasting peace in our community? the nation? the world?
5. Add an interdisciplinary music component by beginning the ceremony singing the National Anthem.

[“The Star-Spangled Banner”](#)

O say can you see, by the dawn's early light,
What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming,
Whose broad stripes and bright stars through the perilous fight,
O'er the ramparts we watched, were so gallantly streaming?
And the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in air,
Gave proof through the night that our flag was still there;
O say does that star-spangled banner yet wave
O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave?

Did you know?

Woodrow Wilson signed an executive order designating “The Star Spangled Banner” to be the national anthem for all military ceremonies in 1916, fifteen years before it was formally declared the nation’s anthem.

6. *Adding songs?* Have students compare and contrast the national anthem and [“Over There,”](#) two songs both written about war.

Abridged Commemoration Script

The War's beginning & the “neutral” U.S. (2 minute)

NARRATOR: In June of 1914, a Bosnian Serb teenage nationalist killed the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Within a month, men from around Europe boarded trains to take them to the frontlines of a global war. Both sides, defending their homelands, believed their causes just. Most imagined the war would be a glorious adventure, decisive and short.

For three years, the Great War raged across the globe, bringing death, destruction, disease and displacement to millions of peoples. The United States had remained “neutral” since August 1914 when Woodrow Wilson stated,

READER (Wilson): *“The people of the United States are drawn from many nations, and chiefly from the nations now at war... Those responsible for [creating division] will assume a heavy responsibility for... the people of the United States, whose love of their country and whose loyalty to its government should unite them as Americans all, bound in honor and affection to think first of her and her interests... The United States must be neutral in fact as well as in name during these days that are to try men’s souls.”*

NARRATOR: “Americans all” in 1914 included many demographics: a growing Hispanic population of refugees from the Mexican Revolution; a fifth of Americans declared Germanic heritage; women, possessing voting rights in only 10 states; African-Americans, who faced subtle and avert attacks on their citizenship; and native tribes who had been denied American citizenship. Nearly one in three Americans was an immigrant or first generation American.

American Volunteerism and Views (3 minutes)

NARRATOR: As the war continued to rage, the United States was decidedly less than neutral but distinctly not one-sided. Citizens raised funds for both Allied and Central Powers, Americans volunteered to fly, fight and heal – and shipped millions of tons of both relief and war goods to Europe. Mary Gladwin, a nurse from Akron, Ohio, was among the first American Red Cross nurses to go to Europe during the War, serving as the supervisor of nurses at the American Hospital in Belgrade. She wrote:

READER (Gladwin): *“The cannonading lasted all the time. There was no time during twenty-four hours in the first six months that some of the guns were not fired. My room was a little whitewashed one. Every time one of the big French guns would fire.... It would illuminate all the wall and then... I would hear the boom of the guns. That kept up night after night, until the time came that we did not hear them any more...”*

NARRATOR: Germany, responding to Britain’s blockade of its’ ports, introduced a new weapon, unrestricted submarine warfare. Despite the sinking of the *Lusitania* and other unarmed ships in 1915, the majority of Americans believed this was not their war. In January of 1916, Helen Keller delivered her famous “Strike Against War Speech”:

READER (Keller): *“We are facing a grave crisis in our national life. The few who profit from the labor of the masses want to organize the workers into an army which will protect the interests of the capitalists. It is in your power to refuse to carry the artillery.... All you need to do to bring about this stupendous revolution is to straighten up and fold your arms.”*

NARRATOR: Yet others rallied around a cry for preparedness and that the War seemed not that distant “Over There”. W.E.B. DuBois alluded to this in a 1914 editorial, “World War and the Color Line”:

READER (DuBois): Many colored persons... may easily make the mistake of supposing that the present war is far removed from the color problem in America.... This attitude is a mistake. The present war in Europe is one of the great disasters due to race and color prejudice and it but foreshadows greater disasters in the future....

NARRATOR: Still, in November of 1916, Woodrow Wilson won re-election under the slogan “He kept us out of war.” In December and January, while negotiating peace amid Mexican revolutionary turmoil, Wilson also attempted to negotiate a peace between Germany and the Allied Powers. The peace with Mexico succeeded. The peace settlement in Europe failed.

Road to War (2 minutes)

NARRATOR: In January of 1917, the Russian military stronghold on the Eastern front was crumbling. With over a million German combatants killed and hundreds of thousands of German civilians starved, German military leaders convened and decide to reinstate unrestricted submarine warfare, hoping it would end the European stalemate while recognizing it would likely draw Americans into war. With this renewed tactic, German Foreign Secretary Arthur Zimmermann sent an appeal to Mexico – that if the United States joined the war on the side of the Allied Powers, Germany would provide a military alliance to Mexico. Broadcasted by newspapers around the globe, the world waited to see what the United States would do. Briton Lt. Coningsby Dawson wrote the following on February 6th of 1917:

READER (Dawson): I read in today's paper that the U.S.A threatens to come over here and help us. I wish she would. The very thought of the possibility fills me with joy... I would like to see the country... become splendidly irrational even at this eleventh hour in the game. It would redeem her in the world's eyes... To lay down one's life for one's friend once seemed impossible. All that is altered. We lay down our lives that the future generations may be good and kind, and so we can contemplate oblivion with quiet eyes... they may die childless but their example will father the imagination of all the coming ages.

NARRATOR: By February of 1917, Woodrow Wilson received authority to arm American merchant ships. From January through March, several American ships were torpedoed and many more lives were lost.

Proclamation of War (3.5 minutes)

NARRATOR: On March 20, almost a month after the Zimmermann Telegram hit the American press, President Woodrow Wilson convened the Cabinet to discuss moving from a policy of armed neutrality to combat. It was unanimous: all members advised war. With a proclamation already being drafted, the American steamship *Aztec* was torpedoed and sunk by Germany on April 1. On the evening of April 2 at a convened joint session of Congress, President Wilson shared one of the most important speeches in American history.

This President, who in 1912 as he headed to his first term of office stated, “It would be the irony of fate if my administration had to deal chiefly with foreign affairs,” penned and spoke words on April 2, 1917 that changed the face of American foreign policy. “The world must be made safe for democracy.”

READER (Wilson): *“While we do these momentous things, let us make very clear to all the world what our motives are. Our object, now as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice as against selfish and autocratic power. Neutrality is no longer feasible or desirable where the peace of the world is involved and the freedom of its peoples, and the menace to that peace and freedom lies in the existence of autocratic governments. We have seen the last of neutrality. We are at the beginning of an age in which it will be insisted that the same standards of conduct and of responsibility for wrong done shall be observed among nations and their governments that are observed among the individual citizens of civilized states.”*

NARRATOR: His speech received enthusiastic applause from Congress and cheering crowds flanked the streets. The President went back to his office and shared with his secretary Joseph Tumulty, “My message today was a message of death for our young men. How strange it seems to applaud that.” He laid his head upon the table and sobbed.

READER (Seeger): Though written in early 1916, this poem by American Alan Seeger, a volunteer with the Foreign Legion, was published in 1917 and gained popularity as the Doughboys were shipping off.

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath—
It may be I shall pass him still.
I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

God knows 'twere better to be deep
Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where Love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear ...
But I've a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

Army of Democracy: (4 minutes)

NARRATOR: The U.S. Army was a truly national organization—the result of an unprecedented effort to create a unified military from the most diverse population in history. Within a year of declaring war, America had assembled a military force of nearly 4 million men and women. The United States navy played vital roles convoying and defending against anti-submarine warfare. The American Expeditionary Forces, known as the AEF, combined units from the army, Marines, National Guards and a new army of volunteers and draftees. Recent immigrants from Europe, who had been arriving by the millions, felt “American” for the first time in army camps and war rallies. One particular New York Division claimed that 42 languages and dialects were spoken in its ranks.

READER (Observer): A French observer of U.S. troops in 1918 wrote:

“You can’t imagine a more extraordinary mixture than this American army; there’s everything—Greeks, Italians, Turks, Chinese, Indians, Spaniards, even lots of Germans—to tell the truth about half the officers are of German origin. It doesn’t seem to bother them... Did I tell you the story of the man...who was disembarking in France and saw his brother working in the port as a German prisoner of war?”

NARRATOR: Doubts about entering the conflict gave way to an outpouring of support. From cities to small towns, Americans rationed food, bought war bonds, worked longer hours and enlisted in armed forces. Industries switched to producing munitions, uniforms and weapons.

READER (Parker): The President of the Society of American Indians, Seneca Arthur Parker, wrote in 1917:

The American Indian has common cause with the Allies. The Indian fights because he loves freedom and because humanity needs the defense of the freedom loving man. The Indian fights because his country, his liberties, his ideals and his manhood are assailed by the brutal hypocrisy of Prussianism. Challenged, the Indian has... shown himself a citizen of the world, [and] an exponent of an ethical civilization wherein human liberty is assured.

READER (Hockaday): 1st Lieutenant James Hockaday of the 89th Division of the American Expeditionary Forces wrote a letter to his mother from “Somewhere in France” in 1918

It has been raining for the last two days... It is real fighting weather. The rain has made the trenches a little muddy and slippery but we are used to sleeping right through a thunderstorm of shells or water.... Enclosed are some flowers I gathered while in a trench opposite the German lines. Every now and then a big shell came over and lit in a little town in a valley just behind our lines. I saw the rocks fly and smoke curl up when each shell hit. I can tell just about where each shell will land now by the whistle it makes, that is if they don’t come too fast.”

READER (Sweeney): It was a war of technology that assaulted all. Robert Sweeney, an African-American in the 92nd Division shared about his experiences in France:

“That 72 hour barrage...[t]here was a time that I had never seen as many airplanes... [T]he air was just black with airplanes going on over to bomb... [a]nd I can see how the Germans [could be] ready to surrender.”

READER (Derby): Caroline A. Derby, a nurse for the American Red Cross wrote from York England on August 24th, 1918:

“Dear Mr. Woodcox... It is with the deepest sympathy that I am writing to tell you about the death... of your son, Ernest... I do not know if he realized how ill he was or not... the early part of the evening he seemed in a good deal of pain, but the doctor thinks that towards the end he did not suffer. He gave him everything he could to relieve the pain... I kissed his forehead for you just afterwards, and also before the coffin was closed. I saw the body. It was dressed in full uniform, with flowers around him and my own Stars and Stripes covering him.”

Conclusion (3 minutes)

NARRATOR: Between 1914 and 1918, the world was enveloped in a bloody conflict involving over thirty nations and every inhabited continent around the globe. World War I, as it became known, was a turning point in the history of the United States of America. The creation of a military force of over four million men and women helped create an industrial and economic structure that formed the basis of the nation's influence and prosperity throughout the 20th Century.

The American Expeditionary Forces in Europe were instrumental in bringing the war to a victorious conclusion on November 11, 1918. But victory came at a great price: over 130,000 American service personnel died and a further 200,000 wounded. Some American troops continued fighting on the Eastern Front in the North Russian Campaign until 1919. And some historians would argue that the conflicts of the First World War never truly ended.

NARRATOR: On November 11, 1926, President Calvin Coolidge delivered an address at the Dedication of the National World War I Museum and Memorial, reflecting on the war, its lessons and the future.

READER (Coolidge):

Reverence for our dead, respect for our living, loyalty to our country, devotion to humanity, consecration to religion, all of these and much more is represented in this [memorial]... No one can doubt that our country was inspired by its war experience. It attained a conscious national unity which it never before possessed. That unity ought always to be cherished...This is all one country...We had revealed to us in our time of peril...the unity of the spirit of our people. They might speak with different tongues, come from most divergent quarters of the globe, but in the essentials of the hour they were moved by a common purpose, devoted to a common cause, and loyal to a common country. We should not permit that spirit which was such a source of strength in our time of trial to be dissipated in the more easy days of peace. We needed it then and we need it now. But we ought to maintain it, not so much because it is to our advantage as because it is just and human and right. Our population is a composite of many different racial strains... We shall not make the most progress by undertaking to rely upon the sufficiency of any one of them, but rather by using the combination of the power which can be derived from all of them... This great lesson in democracy, this great example of equality which came to us as the experience of the war, ought never to be forgotten.

Suggested Participatory Conclusions (Select one or more!)

- A. Encourage all to recite Laurence Binyon poem, For the Fallen, and play “taps” to close.
- B. Encourage all to recite the inscription on the National WWI Museum & Memorial
- C. Have a recitation of General George S. Patton’s poem, A Soldiers Prayer
- D. Encourage all audience members to sing “Over There”

Closing A:

Narrator: Less than two months after the war began, Laurence Binyon wrote one of the most well-known and often recited poems of remembrance, *For the Fallen*. Individuals around the world recite this poem, that the lives sacrificed in war will be preserved In the memory of the living. Please join me in the reading:

*They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old:
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn;
At the going down of the sun, and in the morning,
We will remember them.*

Closing B:

Narrator: In commemoration we create a memory. We acknowledge that lives sacrificed in war will be preserved in the living. That their death had meaning. And, on the Great Frieze of the National World War I Museum and Memorial are inscribed the following. Please join me in the reading:

These have dared bear torches of sacrifice and service: Their bodies return to dust, but their work liveth forevermore. Let us strive on to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Closing C:

Narrator: Like many famous American military leaders of World War II, George S. Patton served heroically in World War I as the head of the U.S. Army’s Tank Corps. The war deeply influenced his individual developments, just as it profoundly influenced the development of the U.S. and the rest of the 20th century. Later in his military career, Patton is attributed with penning this poem. Please join me in the reading:

A SOLDIER’S PRAYER

A poem by General George S. Patton Jnr.

God of our Father, who by land and sea has ever
Led us on to victory, please continue your inspiring
Guidance in this greatest of our conflicts.

Strengthen my soul so that the weakening instinct of
Self preservation, which besets all of us in battle,
Shall not blind me to my duty to my own manhood, to the
Glory of my calling, and to my responsibility to my
Fellow soldiers.

Grant to our Armed Forces that disciplined valor and
Mutual confidence which insures success in war.
Let me not mourn for the men who have died fighting,
But rather let me be glad that such heroes have lived.

Closing D:

Narrator: George M. Cohan, famous Broadway producer and composer, was inspired by the headlines of April 6, 1917 to write about the call to join the war effort. Consider an inspiration, it became one of the most popular tunes in American history.

“Over There”

Verse 1

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun, Take it on the run, on the run, on the run; Hear them calling you and me; Every son of liberty.

Hurry right away, no delay, go today, Make your daddy glad, to have had such a lad, Tell your sweetheart not to pine, To be proud her boy's in line.

Chorus

Over there, over there, Send the word, send the word over there, That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming, The drums rum-tumming everywhere. So prepare, say a prayer, Send the word, send the word to beware, We'll be over, we're coming over, And we won't come back till it's over over there.

Verse 2

Johnnie get your gun, get your gun, get your gun, Johnnie show the Hun, you're a son-of-a-gun, Hoist the flag and let her fly, Like true heroes do or die.

Pack your little kit, show your grit, do your bit, Soldiers to the ranks from the towns and the tanks, Make your mother proud of you, And to liberty be true.

Chorus

Over there, over there, Send the word, send the word over there, That the Yanks are coming, the Yanks are coming, The drums rum-tumming everywhere. So prepare, say a prayer, Send the word, send the word to beware, We'll be over, we're coming over, And we won't come back till it's over over there.