

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

Discussion Guide: Why did the U.S. go to war?

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 a quick discussion on why the United States became involved in the World War.

Join us on the web:

- Stream with us! Watch the full national ceremony live on April 6, 2017 starting at 10 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: 15 Minutes

Age Level: Middle/High School

Interdisciplinary: Social Studies, Language Arts

Materials Needed: Copies of reading

Words to Know:

Gage: An offer or challenge

Nullify: To make useless or void

Indemnities: Protection against loss

Dominion: Rule or control

Rancor: Hatred, ill-will

Punctilio: A fine point, exactness

Objectives:

- Identify conflicts that faced the United States in this era
- Understand the cause and objective for U.S. entry into WWI

Directions:

1. Ask students to read the provided section of Woodrow Wilson's Proclamation of War.
2. Either in discussion or written response, ask students to answer the two questions below.

Did you know?

President Woodrow Wilson was a professor at Princeton University before becoming president. He was the last president to work without a speech writer.



Woodrow Wilson's Address to Congress

(Excerpt)

Our object now, as then, is to vindicate the principles of peace and justice in the life of the world as against selfish and autocratic power and to set up amongst the really free and self-governed peoples of the world such a concert of purpose and of action as will henceforth ensure the observance of those principles. 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 backed by organized force which is controlled wholly by their will, not by the will of their people. We have seen the last of neutrality in such circumstances. 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.... We are now about to accept gage of 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, 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. Just because we fight without rancor and without selfish object, seeking nothing for ourselves but what we shall wish to share with all free peoples, we shall, I feel confident, conduct our operations as belligerents without passion and ourselves observe with proud punctilio the principles of right and of fair play we profess to be fighting for.

Think: According to Wilson, what were the United States goals as they entered into the war?

Relate: How has the phrase “The world must be made safe for democracy” influenced the 20th and 21st centuries?