Separated from the European continent by the Atlantic Ocean, President Wilson and many American citizens believed that the United States could remain isolated and maintain a neutral position when Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey waged an imperialistic war on their European neighbors. Wilson sought to bring peace between the aggressive Central Powers and the Allies (England, France, Italy, Russia, and Japan). However, one incident after another finally drew the United States into the Great War. German submarines sank ships, including American vessels and passenger ships, without warning. German forces overran peaceful Belgium. Finally, a telegram came to light in which Germany tried to persuade Mexico to declare war on the United States to win back Texas and New Mexico, land Mexico had lost in the nineteenth century. Woodrow Wilson asked Congress to declare war on April 2, 1917. It was, he said, a war in which America had no selfish interest, but rather a war to make the world “safe for democracy.”

Teacher Directions

1. Write the following sentences on the chalkboard or on chart paper or make a transparency.

   - President Wilson and many Americans did not want to take sides in a European War; they wanted to maintain neutrality.
   - The Atlantic Ocean between Europe and the American continent gave many Americans the hope that they could remain isolationists and not be drawn into Europe’s problems.
   - President Wilson saw the role of Americans not as imperialists, taking advantage and gaining power over other nations, but rather as peacemakers who would keep the world safe for democracy.

2. Ask the students to use context clues in the sentences to define the underlined words.

3. Make sure students understand the following points in discussing the words neutrality, isolationists, and imperialists.

   When the Great War broke out in Europe in 1914, President Wilson called it “a distant event.” Why should the United States become involved in problems that only affected Europe? People who believe that the country should keep out of foreign affairs are called isolationists. The United States maintained neutrality; it did not take sides, for nearly three years. But by
1917, events had drawn the United States into the Great War. The United States did not enter the war for imperialist purposes (to take advantage of other nations), but because as President Wilson said, “The world must be made safe for democracy.”

4. Explain to the students that unlike the United States, the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey) were imperialist powers. They wanted to conquer neighboring European countries to build their own powerful, rich empires. Ask the students.
   - How does imperialism make the world unsafe for democracy?

Teacher Directions

1. Distribute the Student Sheet: *Events that Drew the United States into the Great War.*

2. Students work in their small teams or in partnerships to study the artifacts and answer the questions that follow.

3. Teams share their answers in a class discussion.

4. Explain to the students that in addition to these acts, German submarines regularly attacked and sunk other American ships that came near England or France on the pretext that they carried supplies to the Allies.

5. Ask the students.
   - Do you think the acts of the Central Powers should have drawn the United States out of its neutrality? Why or why not?

Teacher Directions

Discuss with the students the following questions.

- What would you have thought if you sat in Congress and heard President Wilson’s speech?
- Would you have cheered the United States’ entry into the war? Why or why not?
- To what extent is America responsible to make the rest of the world safe for democracy?
Teacher Directions

1. Share and discuss the following information with students.

   In every preceding war in America’s history, African Americans had fought and died. Still, in the opening years of the twentieth century, they did not share fully in the American dream. In 1913, President Wilson, yielding to the pressure of southern states, even allowed the segregation of federal employees. The army drafted both blacks and whites but put them in segregated units.

   How should African Americans respond to the call to war from a nation that had never rewarded them for past sacrifices nor granted them their basic rights? This question caused debate among black Americans.

   A. Phillip Randolph, an outspoken advocate for African American rights and the publisher of a radical Harlem newspaper, questioned why men of his race should fight in yet another war for a country that would not grant them full citizenship. W.E.B. DuBois, another African American leader and founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (N.A.A.C.P.), argued that “…while the war lasts [we should] forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and allied nations that are fighting for democracy.”

   The people agreed with W.E.B. DuBois. Three hundred eighty thousand African Americans joined the army. Two hundred thousand went to Europe, but only about a quarter of that number saw combat. The rest worked as laborers, building roads, digging trenches, and unloading ships. Again, African Americans showed their willingness, even in the face of ongoing discrimination, to fight for freedom.

2. Discuss with the students the willingness of African Americans to fight in World War I.

   - What kinds of jobs did the army assign to African American soldiers?
   - Did the army treat African American soldiers fairly? Explain your response.
   - Would you have agreed with A. Phillip Randolph or with W.E.B. DuBois? Explain your response.
   - Why do you think so many African Americans agreed with W.E.B. DuBois?
Teacher Directions

Use the following activities with your students.

Research/Art — Students research an incident that occurred during America’s neutrality, from 1914 to April 1917. Students draw propaganda postcards to convince America to enter the war.

Language Arts — Students develop a simple code and use it to send messages to classmates to decode.

Geography — Students locate England, Germany, Mexico, and Japan on a world map or globe. Students indicate on the map or globe the territory offered by the Germans to the Mexicans in the Zimmerman telegram.

Technology/Library — Students research how new inventions and technology changed the face of war.

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Events that Drew the United States into the Great War

Germany Marches on Belgium!

- What act of the Central Powers does this artifact depict?
- How does this act demonstrate imperialism?
- How did this act affect the United States even though it is an ocean away from Europe?
Events that Drew the United States into the Great War

German Submarine Sinks Lusitania!

• What act of the Central Powers does this artifact depict?
• How does this act demonstrate imperialism?
• How did this act affect the United States even though it is an ocean away from Europe?
### Events that Drew the United States into the Great War

#### Zimmerman Telegram

![Zimmerman Telegram Image](image-url)

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Events that Drew the United States into the Great War

Zimmerman Telegram Decoded!

What act of the Central Powers does this artifact depict?
How does this act demonstrate imperialism?
How did this act affect the United States even though it is an ocean away from Europe?

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TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

FROM 2nd from London 7 5747.

Oct 22, 1915.

"We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, Persuade Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace." Signed, ZIMMERNAG.