**Title:** The United States Enters World War I: Analyzing Contemporary Sources in Order to Understand the Arguments For and Against

**Grade Level:** Grade 10

**Estimated Duration of Lesson:** 1-2 days, with additional time for students to prepare and submit projects/assignments.

**Relevant Content Standard(s):**
GLI: 10th grade, History, Benchmark D, 20th Century Conflict

6. Trace the development of the United States as a world power with emphasis on:
   a. The decision to enter into World War I.

**Primary Sources**
1. Woodrow Wilson’s speech to Congress: [http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943)
2. Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* excerpt (included, see attachment A)
5. Lyrics and and recording of a 1915 anti-war song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier” by lyricist Alfred Bryan and composer Al Piantadosi: [http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4942](http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4942)

**Lesson Summary** This is a 1-2 day activity designed to further, and reinforce, student understanding of the reasons for U.S. entry into WWI and the contemporary arguments against participation. This is designed to occur after a review of the causes of the war, review/discussion of the manner in which the war is being carried out, by whom and for what reasons. American homefront isolationist sentiment will have already been introduced and discussed.
Instructional Steps:

1. Introduce the topic and learning goal: students will increase their understanding of the arguments in favor of, and against, U.S. participation in World War I.

2. For this assignment, students may be assigned to work in a number of ways: individually, in small groups, or perhaps as part of a jigsaw activity (for jigsaw information and instructions, see http://www.jigsaw.org/steps.htm).

3. Have students will read Woodrow Wilson’s April 2, 1917, speech to Congress: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4943. This may be in handout form, or via computer.
   - Remind students that pro-involvement arguments centered around a few ideas: that our economic interests and well-being were being threatened, that our cultural and economic ties with Great Britain were strong, worth defending, and required us to intervene, and that the institution of democracy was in jeopardy.
   - The teacher may choose to excerpt this speech, with particular attention paid to Wilson’s attempts to address isolationist arguments; specific references to incidents students will already be familiar with (e.g. Zimmerman telegram); famous/historical statements (e.g. “The world must be made safe for democracy.”).
   - Discuss the impact these words would or could have had on Congress, the public, pro-war individuals, anti-war individuals, young men of service age, etc. Would/could this speech have swayed opinions?

   - With these two items, the idea is to provide students with a contemporary view of how America and its’ soldiers were viewed by non-Americans.
   - Discuss Brittain’s use of language with students. How does she convey her feelings when she sees the Americans? What does she believe will happen now? Is that a reasonable assumption?
   - Have students look at the photo of American troops. Hand out National Archives Photo Analysis worksheet http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/ for students to complete using the photo. Can they see what Brittain saw? Can they put themselves in Brittain’s place - would they see the Americans as “saviors” too?

5. Next, have students examine the cartoon depicting Lusitania children: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/cai.2a14498/ entitled “Cousin William said you’d forgotten all about them, Samuel.”
   - Have students complete the National Archives Cartoon Analysis worksheet http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/cartoon.html as they work.
   - It is critical that the connection be made between “Austria” in the cartoon and Kaiser Wilhelm (Cousin William).
• Questions must include: Why would it matter to Germany if the U.S. had “forgotten” about the Lusitania? That is, what is the message regarding our “memory” of the Lusitania victims? Why would the cartoonist have used children to represent the innocent lives lost on the Lusitania? Would this have swayed opinion? Why or why not?

6. As the discussion transitions into anti-war positions, students need to shift to thinking about the reasons for non-involvement in the conflict. It may help to ask questions regarding current anti-war opinions regarding Iraq and Afghanistan - answers may include cost, “it’s not our fight” rhetoric, debate regarding the true impact of hostilities, etc.

7. Distribute lyrics to the anti-war song “I Didn’t Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier: http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/4942. Distribute the National Archives Sound Recording Analysis worksheet (some modifications may need to be made, e.g. references to “broadcaster”), then play the recording for students.
   • Discuss student answers and comments on the worksheet.
   • What is the predominant feeling of the song? Is it anger? Sadness? Defiance? How would this song have been received by the general public?
   • What is the larger purpose of protest songs? That is, why would they be a viable form of protest in our culture? Students will have some familiarity with Vietnam-era protest songs and singers - use that example to promote deeper thinking about the viability and significance of music and song for such a purpose.

8. Next, have students read the text of Eugene V. Debs’ 1918 anti-war speech in Canton, Ohio: http://www.milestonedocuments.com/documents/full-text/eugene-v-debss-antiwar-speech/
   • As with Wilson’s speech, this is a long document and the teacher may choose to use excerpts; this may be presented via handout or computer.
   • Students will already be familiar with Debs through previous discussions regarding early labor unions and the 1912 election.
   • Debs’ speech is pro-Socialist and he targets a number of American political issues in addition to the war. Ask the question “Who was Debs’ audience?”
   • Students should be directed to analyze Debs’ argument that it is the lower classes that fight the war while upper classes manage war. Is this a valid argument?
   • Would listening to this speech sway your opinion about the war or about joining the military service? Why or why not?

   • Owens’ 1917 poem is a graphic account of life in the trenches. Have a student read the poem aloud to the class, then have students discuss the message and the language used to convey the message. While the title suggests that it is heroic to die for one country, is that Owens’ message? Specifically, how is “Dulce” the antithesis of some images we have of war? (Possible answers here include the lack of nobility in dying in battle, the lack of glory of fighting for a
cause, the fact that war is no adventure, that it is possible to die in horrible, pointless ways.)

• Would reading this poem change the way someone thought about the war? Could it change someone’s mind about enlisting?

• (Optional) A reading of the poem voiced over some startling photos: http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/poetryowen/1owen_dulcesubjectact.shtml

Assessment and Grading Rubric
• After examining and studying the materials presented, students will be required to produce their choice of newspaper editorial, song lyrics, poem, or cartoon. This product will be designed to sway an audience (to be defined by the student) to support or not support America’s entrance into World War I.
• Assessment rubric requirements would include: clear presentation from one side of the argument, either pro or con; for written material, at least two valid (i.e. realistic) reasons to support the chosen position; for cartoon, at least one attempt at propaganda-like portrayal of information (e.g. graphic depiction of “the enemy,” or use of particular words or phrasing to elicit emotion).
• If time permits, or if it is applicable to a particular class, students may be required to present their product, explaining their argument and the method chosen for presenting the position taken.

Additional materials needed
• None, other than sources and National Archives worksheet links provided.

Opportunities for Further Learning
• In additional to innumerable books on the subject, there are numerous websites available to pursue further information regarding World War I. Two blogs that have proven interesting to students are linked below. Both blogs are based upon WWI letters from an American and British serviceman, respectively, and serve to provide a “you-are-there” feel to discussions of daily life in and out of the trenches:
  • http://worldwar1letters.wordpress.com/
  • http://wwar1.blogspot.com/
Attachment A

**Excerpt Note:** Vera Brittain was a British army nurse who left Oxford in 1915 to enlist. The event in the following passage takes place when Brittain was serving at a field hospital in Étaples, in northern France.

Only a day or two afterwards I was leaving quarters to go back to my ward, when I had to wait to let a large contingent of troops march past me along the main road that ran through our camp. They were swinging rapidly towards Camiers, and though the sight of soldiers marching was now too familiar to arouse curiosity, an unusual quality of bold vigour in their swift stride caused me to stare at them with interest.

They looked larger than ordinary men; their tall, straight figures were in vivid contrast to the under-sized armies of pale recruits to which we had grown accustomed. At first I thought their spruce, clean uniforms were those of officers, yet obviously they could not be officers, for there were too many of them; they seemed, as it were, Tommies in heaven. Had yet another regiment been conjured out of our depleted Dominions? I wondered, watching them move with such rhythm, such dignity, such serene consciousness of self-respect. But I knew the colonial troops so well, and these were different; they were assured where the Australians were aggressive, self-possessed where the New Zealanders were turbulent.

The I heard an excited exclamation from a group of Sisters behind me.

“Look! Look! Here are the Americans!”

I pressed forward with the others to watch the United States physically entering the War, so god-like, so magnificent, so splendidly unimpaired in comparison with the tired, nerve-racked men of British Army. So these were our deliverers at last, marching up the road to Camiers in the spring sunshine! There seemed to be hundreds of them, and in the fearless swagger of their proud strength they looked a formidable bulwark against the peril looming from Amiens.

Somehow the necessity of packing up in a hurry, the ignominious flight to the coast so long imagined, seemed to move further away. An uncontrollable emotion seized me -- as such emotions often seized us in those days of insufficient sleep; my eyeballs pricked, my throat ached, and a mist swam over the confident Americans going to the front. The coming of relief made me realise all at once how long and how intolerable had been the tension, and with the knowledge that we were not, after all, defeated, I found myself beginning to cry.