



Pluriliteracies making meaning happen

A Pluriliteracies Approach to Teaching for Learning

Arguing History II - America and WWI



Advanced
learners

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4.3 The American Entry into the First World War

Historical Context

When the Great War broke out in Europe in August 1914, the USA declared itself to be a neutral power. This stance was supported by a large majority of Americans. It reflected the idea of non-interventionism, a long-standing doctrine of American foreign policy. Far back in time, in March 1801, President Jefferson had coined the famous phrase: “peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.”

However, things changed abruptly in April 1917, when the United States declared war on the German Empire and entered the struggle by the side of Great Britain and its allies. In this unit, you are asked to discuss to what extent this step was justified.

US recruitment poster, 1917:



(Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1d/Unclesamwantyou.jpg>)

Step 1: Collecting Arguments

Assignments

1) In your group, analyze one of the Sources A to E and find out arguments about the propriety of America's entry into the First World War. Sum them up in one sentence each. Use **colloquial language**.

Here you can write down your answer for Assignment No.1:

2) Tell the class about your source and present the argument(s) you have found.

3) Write both your argument(s) and those which other students have found out into the list on Worksheet No.5. Use **colloquial language**.

Source A: President Woodrow Wilson: War Message to Congress, April 1917

In this address, Wilson (1856-1924) explains why the USA has to depart from its policy of neutrality with respect to the war in Europe.

On the 3rd of February last I officially laid before you the extraordinary announcement of the Imperial German Government that on and after the 1st day of February it was its purpose to put aside all restraints of law or of humanity and use its submarines to sink every vessel that sought to approach either the ports of Great Britain and

Ireland or the western coasts of Europe or any of the ports controlled by the enemies of Germany within the Mediterranean. [...] This new policy has swept every restriction aside. Vessels of every kind, whatever their flag, their character, their cargo, their destination, their errand, have been ruthlessly sent to the bottom without warning and without thought of help or mercy for those on board, the vessels of friendly neutrals along with those of belligerents. [...]

It is a war against all nations. American ships have been sunk, American lives taken, in ways which it has stirred us very deeply to learn of, but the ships and people of other neutral and friendly nations have been sunk and overwhelmed in the waters in the same way. There has been no discrimination. The challenge is to all mankind.

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 are glad, now that we see the facts with no veil of false pretence 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.

(http://www.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Wilson%27s_War_Message_to_Congress)

US poster of WWI



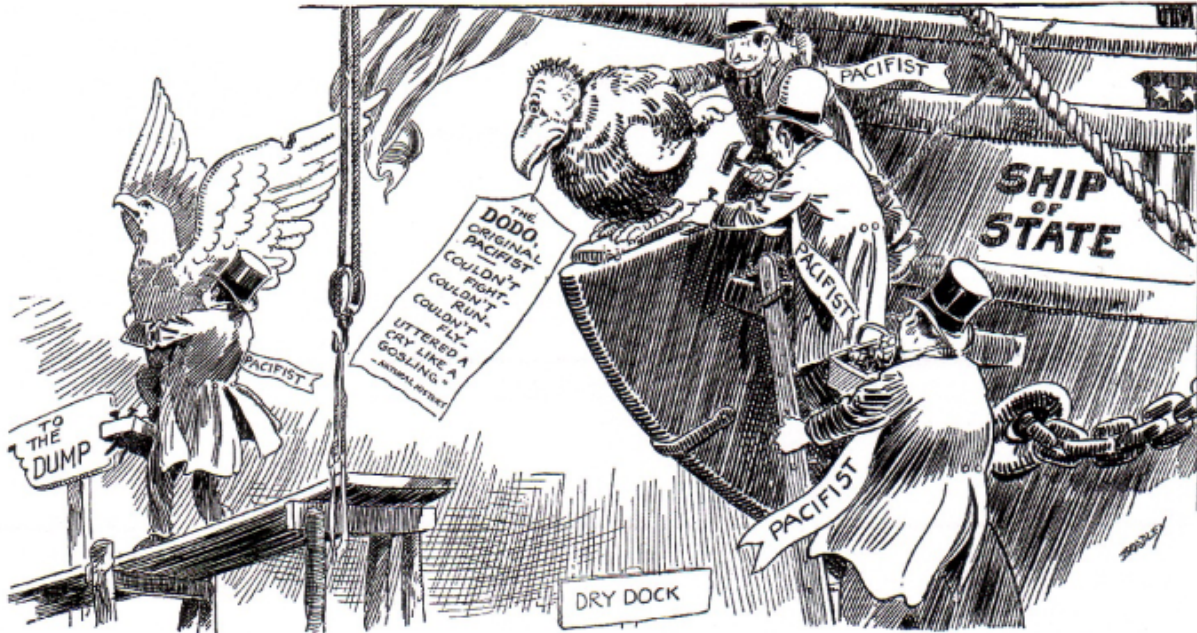
(Image source: http://www.google.de/imgres?imgurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ww1propaganda.com%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2F3g03349u-1591.jpg%253F1311563397&imgrefurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.ww1propaganda.com%2Fworld-war-1-posters%2Fww1-war-bond-posters%3Fpage%3D29&h=924&w=600&tbnid=LpMQhrnXCXOPsM%3A&docid=jCKWJlIZvolNM&ei=DTQqVe-sMISM5AHJi4PACQ&tbn=isch&iact=rc&uact=3&dur=501&page=1&start=0&ndsp=67&ved=0CMUBEK0DMDVqFQoTCK_nlM-E5MYCFQQGLAodycUAmA)

restraints = Beschränkungen, Hemmungen
vessel = Schiff
errand = Weg, Botengang
belligerents = Kriegsteilnehmer
stirred = (emotional) aufgewühlt
discrimination = hier: Unterscheidung
feasible = realisierbar, durchführbar
menace = Bedrohung
veil = Schleier
false pretence = falscher Vorwand, falsche Behauptung
obedience = Gehorsam, Folgsamkeit

Source B: Changing the Figurehead

This cartoon was published in Chicago Daily News on April 10, 1916.

PERHAPS THEY WOULD LIKE IT FOR A FIGUREHEAD?



(Source: Praxis Geschichte 1/2007, p.30.)

Embedded text: to the dump / pacifist / the Dodo, original pacifist – couldn't fight – couldn't run – couldn't fly – uttered a cry like a gosling – natural history / dry dock / pacifist / pacifist / pacifist / ship of state

Source C: Senator Robert La Follette: Reply to the President's War Message, April 1917

La Follette (1855-1925) was a Republican politician and Senator from Wisconsin.

Countless millions are suffering from want and privation; countless other millions are dead and rotting on foreign battlefields; countless other millions are crippled and maimed, blinded, and dismembered; upon all and upon their children's children for generations to come has been laid a burden of debt which must be worked out in poverty and suffering, but the "whole force" of no one of the warring nations has yet been expended; but our "whole force" shall be expended, so says the President. We are pledged by the President, so far as he can pledge us, to make this fair, free, and happy land of ours the same shambles and bottomless pit of horror that we see in Europe today. [...]

The President proposes alliance with Great Britain, which, however liberty-loving its people, is a hereditary monarchy, with a hereditary ruler, with a hereditary House of Lords, with a hereditary landed system, with a limited and restricted suffrage for one class and a multiplied suffrage power for another, and with grinding industrial conditions for all the wageworkers. The President has not suggested that we make our support of Great Britain conditional to her granting home rule¹ to Ireland, or Egypt, or India.

(<http://spartacus-educational.com/USAla1follette.htm>)

¹ self-government

want and privation = Mangel und Armut
crippled and maimed = verkrüppelt und verstümmelt
dismembered = zerstückelt
burden of debt = Schuldenlast
shambles = Trümmerhaufen
hereditary monarchy = Erbmonarchie
landed system = Grundrechtssystem
suffrage = Wahlrecht

Source D: US Poster Advertising War Bonds¹



(Source: http://www.us-foreign-policy-perspective.org/uploads/RTEmagicC_germany-ww1-poster.jpg)

¹ debt securities issued by a government to finance military operations and other expenditures in times of war

Source E: Senator George Norris: Reply to the President's War Message, April 1917

Norris (1861-1942) was a long-serving Republican Member of the House of Representatives and Senator from Nebraska.

The reason given by the President in asking Congress to declare war against Germany is that the German government has declared certain war zones, within which, by the use of submarines, she sinks, without notice, American ships and destroys American lives. The first war zone was declared by Great Britain. This zone so declared by Great Britain covered the whole of the North Sea. [...] The German war zone covered the English Channel and the high seawaters around the British Isles. [...] Our government has officially declared both of them to be illegal and has officially protested against both of them. The only difference is that in the case of Germany we have persisted in our protest, while in the case of England we have submitted. [...] To my mind, what we ought to have maintained from the beginning was the strictest neutrality. If we had done this, I do not believe we would have been on the verge of war at the present time. [...]

We have loaned many hundreds of millions of dollars to the allies¹ in this controversy. While such action was legal and countenanced by international law, there is no doubt in my mind but the enormous amount of money loaned to the allies in this country has been instrumental in bringing about a public sentiment in favor of our country taking a course that would make every bond worth a hundred cents on the dollar and making the payment of every debt certain and sure. [...] The enormous profits of munitions manufacturers, stockbrokers, and bond dealers must be still further increased by our entrance into the war. [...] We are going into war upon the command of gold. We are going to run the risk of sacrificing millions of our countrymen's lives in order that other countrymen may coin their lifeblood into money.

(Quoted by: Michael H. Hunt (ed.): *Crises in U.S. Foreign Policy*. Yale 1996, pp.54 f.)

¹ the powers of the Triple-Entente: Great Britain, France and Russia

<p><i>to persist</i> = auf etwas bestehen <i>to submit</i> = sich beugen <i>to maintain</i> = etwas beibehalten, bewahren <i>to be on the verge of war</i> = am Rande eines Krieges stehen <i>to loan</i> = leihen <i>countenanced</i> = gebilligt, geduldet</p>

<p>☺ The USA should enter the War ☺</p>	<p>☹ The USA should not enter the War ☹</p>
<p>Suitable nominalization (cf. Step 2):</p>	<p>Suitable nominalization (cf. Step 2):</p>
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Step 2: Nominalization

Below, you will find several phrases including complex nouns.

unrestricted submarine warfare	death and destruction	autocratic political regime
abstention from the war	breach of international law	German atrocities
necessity of fighting	freedom of all peoples	profit
		cowardice

Assignments

1) Use a school dictionary or the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online on <http://www.ldoceonline.com/> and write down the meaning of the complex nouns.

2) The phrases above refer to the arguments you have collected in colloquial language on Worksheet No.5. Match the phrases with your arguments and add them to the list. You are going to write proper sentences with them in Step 3.

Step 3: Connecting Arguments

Assignment

With the help of **connectives** from Word Bank 1, link the arguments from both lists (*pro* and *con*) according to their significance (from your point of view). Make use of the **nominalized phrases** that you matched with your arguments in Step 2.

Here you can write down your solutions:

[illegible]

Step 4: Establishing the Appraiser Voice

Now that you have a list of arguments in favor of and against the American entry into the war, you are ready to write a thesis. In order to do so more convincingly, you can add **appraising adjectives and adverbs**. Here are some such phrases which you are welcome to avail yourself of:

thoroughly

utterly

absolutely

entirely

partly

slightly

unwise

rash

proper

necessary

imprudent

wise

proper

Assignment

Write one **thesis** in favor of America's entry into the war and one **thesis** in opposition to it. Use the **appraising adjectives and adverbs** from the list above or come up with other suitable adjectives and adverbs.

Step 5: Adding a Conclusion

With a proper exposition, you do not just stop with the last argument in line. Instead, you should draw a **conclusion** from your prior reasoning which consolidates the introductory thesis. In order to do so effectively, you can resort to **connectives of consequence and conclusion**, which you will find in Word Bank 2.

Assignment

Write **conclusions** to the lines of reasoning of Step 3.

Here you can write down your solution:

Step 6: Adding a Background

Providing a historical **background** to your reasoning is an optional feature in writing an exposition. It helps you to cushion your thesis and to prevent the impression of abruptness.

For instance, in Step 3 A), a functional background might read:

There is, to be sure, a cherished tradition of non-intervention in American foreign policy. This doctrine has served the nation well for many decades. However, things have changed considerably, and the situation of 1917 is unique in world history.

→ thesis: *There are plenty of good reasons to argue that it is a wise and proper course for the USA to declare war on Germany.*

Assignment

Write a **background** for the reasoning of Step 3 B).

Here you can write down your solution:

Step 7: Visualizing a Historical Controversy

Assignments

1) Create a functional chart about the historical controversy of this unit.

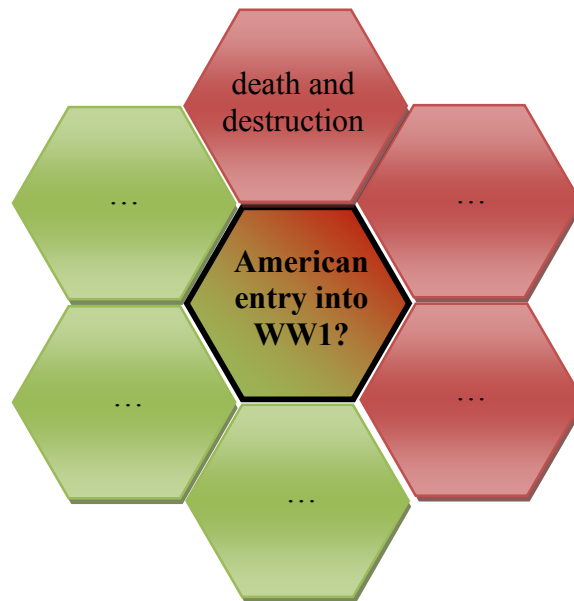
- Include the theme of the historical controversy and arguments.

- Use **nominalization**.

- You may use Microsoft Office or any other electronic device.

Below, you find a model for your chart, but feel free to come up with a different version.

Make sure that your chart is functional and clearly arranged.



2) Send your result to your teacher. The most interesting ones will be published on our international learning community platform in Edmodo.

3) Comment on two of the works published. Be *polite* and *constructive*.

4) Feel free to respond to comments. Always be polite and constructive.



Model solutions

Step 1: Collecting Arguments

3)

The students' answers in colloquial language are not displayed. The arguments that can be found in sources A-E are listed with nominalized terms in Step 2.

Step 2: Nominalization

1)

- **warfare:** the activity of fighting in a war - used especially when talking about particular methods of fighting
- **regime:** a government, especially one that was not elected fairly or that you disapprove of for some other reason
- **destruction:** the act or process of destroying something or of being destroyed
- **abstention:** when you do not do something you enjoy doing
- **breach:** an action that breaks a law, rule, or agreement
- **atrocities:** extremely cruel, violent actions, especially during a war (usually plural)
- **profit:** money that you gain by selling things or doing business
- **necessity:** when something is necessary
- **cowardice:** lack of courage

2)

- Source A: - The USA should enter the war because the fact that Germany wages an **unrestricted submarine** war is illegal and destroys both American and alien lives and goods.
- The USA should enter the war because the German **autocratic political regime** threatens peace and the **freedom of all peoples**.
- Source B: - The USA should enter the war because not doing so would be **cowardice** and a shame to a great nation.
- Source C: - The USA should not enter the war because doing so will bring **death and destruction** to the nation.
- The USA should not enter the war because the alleged **necessity of fighting** against the German autocratic regime is a hoax, considering the fact that Britain is a monarchy, too, which oppresses other countries.
- Source D: - The USA should enter the war because the atrocious and ruthless warfare of the Germans must be stopped. (**German atrocities**)
- Source E: - The USA should not enter the war because Great Britain has broken international law just as much as Germany has. (**breach of international law**)
- The USA should not enter the war because the real reason for those who advertise war is financial **profit**.

Step 3: Connecting Arguments

A) First of all, the German strategy of unrestricted submarine warfare is illegal and destroys both American and aliens lives and goods. Secondly, peace and the freedom of all peoples are threatened by the German autocratic political regime. Moreover, abstention from the war would be cowardice and a shame to our great nation. Finally, German atrocities must be stopped.

B) To begin with, entering the war will bring death and destruction to the nation. Furthermore, the alleged necessity of fighting against the German autocratic regime is a hoax, considering the fact that Britain is a monarchy, too, which oppresses other countries. To boot, the breach of international law by Britain is just as severe as that by Germany. Above all, entering the war will only serve the interests of those who seek financial profit.

Step 4: Establishing the Appraiser Voice

A) There are plenty of good reasons to argue that it is a **wise** and **proper** course for the USA to declare war on Germany.

B) Declaring war on Germany would be a **rash** and **imprudent** step which would turn out most badly for the USA.

Step 5: Adding a Conclusion

A) For all these reasons, there can be no doubt that taking up the gauntlet is the only thing to do for the USA.

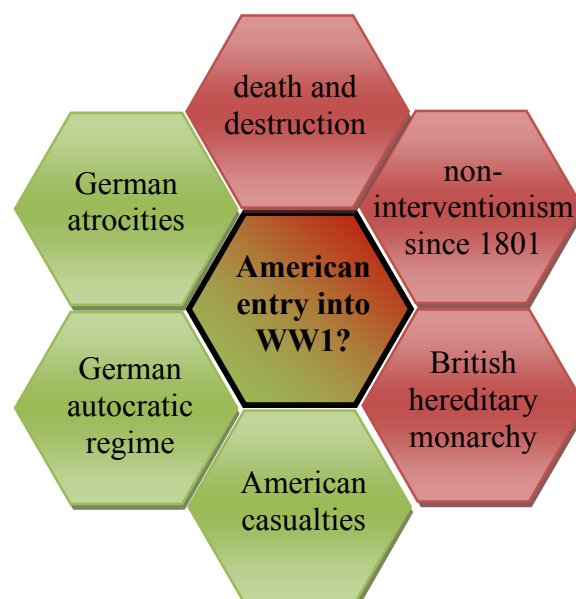
B) Therefore, no one can deny that entering the war is a thoroughly unwise political option for the USA.

Step 6: Adding a Background

International relations have become more complex in recent decades, and there can be no denying that the USA is more closely connected with other nations than in the days of Washington and Jefferson. Still, sticking to the doctrine of non-interventionism has always benefitted the nation, and there is no reason to assume that this has changed in any way.

→ thesis: *Declaring war on Germany would be a rash and imprudent step which would turn out most badly for the USA.*

Step 7: Visualizing a Historical Controversy





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ENG

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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It includes 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union.

All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

