Name _____

The United States Enters World War I

By Sharon Fabian

When World War I began in 1914, it seemed like something far away. The war was between nations on the other side of the world, and the people of the United States were glad that it was so far away. We were content with things the way they were here and had no wish to become involved in Europe's war.

Gradually that feeling of isolationism began to change. As early as 1915, an event occurred that brought the war to the attention of United States' citizens. That event was the sinking of the *Lusitania.* The *Lusitania* was a British ship that carried both cargo and passengers. It made the trip back and forth across the Atlantic Ocean, carrying travelers between Great Britain and the United States. Fast and luxurious, the *Lusitania* was a popular ship; it had been described as a floating palace.

In May 1915, the *Lusitania* was crossing the Atlantic Ocean. In addition to about 2,000 passengers, it was also carrying a cargo of ammunition for the Allies. On May 7, German submarines torpedoed the *Lusitania.* In twenty minutes, the *Lusitania* was gone, sunk to the bottom of the ocean. About 1,200 passengers went down with the ship, including many Americans. After that, U.S. citizens began to think of Germany as a "bully" and to side with the Allies.

Germany made promises not to sink ships without first giving a warning so that passengers could leave the ship. However, this was wartime, and Germany did not always keep its promises. Then, Germany began to blockade Great Britain, attacking more and more ships.

These attacks caused problems for the U.S. economy. It made it difficult for U.S. businesses to make money. Businesses needed to be able to travel freely on the seas to deal with foreign countries, especially Great Britain.

Government officials in the United States began to think that maybe the U.S. would have to enter the war to protect its own interests. They began to try to change people's minds about the war. The government began a propaganda campaign which included parades in support of the Allies and leaflets that pictured the Germans as fierce barbarians. They also began to build up the number of troops in the Army, the Navy, and the Reserves. They began building more Navy ships. A National Security Committee was formed.

While all of this was going on, many Americans still hoped to stay out of the war. President Wilson still hoped for the United States to remain neutral. He did not want the U.S. to be pulled into the war. In a speech, he said, "There is such a thing as a man being too proud to fight."

Then, on January 16, 1917, another event occurred that brought us even closer to war. Great Britain showed the United States a telegram that it had intercepted and decoded. The telegram was from the German Foreign Minister, Arthur Zimmerman, to the German Ambassador in the United States. The telegram said that he should invite Mexico to join an alliance with Germany. The telegram said that if Mexico joined the alliance, Germany would help it win back Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona from the United States. The war had come closer to home.

Germany continued its submarine attacks against U.S. ships. Our economy and our independence on the seas were threatened. Finally, President Wilson felt that he had no other choice. He decided that the U.S. should enter the war. Many reasons had led up to his decision, but he wanted to give the American people one good reason to support the war. So he only said, "The world must be made safe for democracy," when he declared war on April 6, 1917.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

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Questions

_____ 1. The United States entered World War I in _____.

A. 1914
B. 1915
C. 1917
D. none of the above

_____ 2. Events that led up to the U.S. entering the war included _____.

A. sinking of the *Lusitania*
B. German submarine blockade of Great Britain
C. the Zimmerman telegram
D. all of the above

_____ 3. President Wilson _____.

A. wanted the U.S. to enter the war in 1914
B. decided to enter the war in 1917
C. planned a blockade of Great Britain
D. wanted to support Germany in the war

_____ 4. The U.S. entered the war on the side of _____.

A. Germany
B. Great Britain
C. Texas
D. Mexico

_____ 5. Which happened last?

A. the U.S. enters the war
B. the Zimmerman telegram
C. the sinking of the *Lusitania*
D. World War I begins

_____ 6. From the information in this article, you can tell that _____.

A. There were other people in the U.S. who were more anxious to enter the war than Wilson.
B. Wilson was not anxious to enter the war because he could not decide which side to support.
C. Mexico decided to support Germany in the war.
D. all of the above

_____ 7. What happened in the German blockade of Great Britain?

A. Germany invaded Great Britain.
B. Germany prevented ships from traveling to Britain.
C. Germany joined forces with the British Navy.
D. none of the above

_____ 8. The German submarine blockade affected the U.S. economically by _____.

A. making it illegal to travel by ship
B. preventing trade with Mexico
C. preventing trade with Great Britain
D. making it illegal to travel to Europe

Before finally making the decision to enter the war, President Wilson tried to keep the United States neutral. He even tried to negotiate an agreement between the Allies and the Central Powers. What suggestions do you think he might have made to the two sides if he had gotten them together to discuss a peace treaty?

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List two arguments against the United States entering World War I.
List two arguments for entering the war.

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