**Should America Join WWI?**

**Reasons for USA NOT to Join the War (to remain “isolationist”)**

1. WWI is far away (Europe) & is not their problem
2. American wants to trade with many European nations & joining the war could force them to only trade with only one side
3. Until 1917, most Americans & President Wilson did NOT want to go to war
4. Trench warfare = many casualties, yet little land gained (stalemate)
5. Germany warned passengers on the Lusitania (in American newspapers) that even civilian ships could get attacked by submarines (U-boats)
6. The Lusitania was carrying war supplies (ammunition), so it was NOT just carrying civilians
7. Newspaper reports about Germany being the “bad guy” are exaggerated (news stories are “propaganda” & not always completely factual)

**Reasons for USA to Join the War**

1. USA feels connected with the English because it shares a common background, ancestry, language, and democratic traditions
2. Germany killed innocent American civilians (128 on the Lusitania and many others on other civilian ships)
3. Germany is ignoring President Wilson’s warnings to stop unrestricted submarine warfare
4. The Zimmerman Telegram = Germany & Mexico developing threatening future relationships vs. the USA
5. Germany started the war by attacking first?

**Reasons the USA Joined WWI**

**The Sinking of the *Lusitania***

Despite Germany’s dangerous blockade of Great Britain, on May 19, 1915, the British passenger liner *Lusitania* sailed as scheduled for England from New York City. That very day, the German embassy had run an advertisement in various New York newspapers, starting,” Travelers intending to embark on the Atlantic voyage are reminded that a state of war exists between Germany and Great Britain and her allies,” and that “travelers sailing in the war zone on ships to Great Britain or her allies do so at their own risk.” As the *Lusitania* neared Great Britain, its captain, William Thomas Turner, received several telegraphs informing him that there were “submarines active off [the] south coast of Ireland.” Despite the warnings, Captain Turner pressed on. On the afternoon of May 7, a German U-boat stationed off the Irish coast launched a torpedo at the *Lusitania*, sinking the massive 790-foot ship in less than 18 minutes. The submarine’s log notes reported,” The [ship’s] superstructure above the point of impact and the bride are torn asunder, fire breaks out, smoke envelops the high bridge…Great confusion is rife on board.” Of the almost 2,000 people on board the *Lusitania*, over 1,200 died, including 128 Americans and 125 children. The *Lusitania*’s secret cargo of war materials – including 4,200 cases of gun cartridges – also went down with the ship. The sinking of the *Lusitania* outraged the American public, and many people demanded that Wilson repeal the U.S. declaration of neutrality. Tensions between Germany and the United States reached new levels when three Americans were killed in 1916 after a German U-boat fired on an unarmed French ship in the English Channel. Wilson threatened to break off diplomatic relations with Germany unless it stopped violating international law at sea.

**The Zimmerman Telegram**

The death knell for U.S. neutrality came in the form of a telegram sent by German foreign secretary, Arthur von Zimmermann, to the German ambassador to Mexico in January 1927. Intercepted and deciphered by British intelligence, the telegram state that Germany would resume its campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare to force an Allied surrender. Most significantly, Zimmermann proposed that Mexico ally itself with Germany should the United States enter the war. Zimmermann wrote that Mexico and Germany should “make war together and together make peace.” The telegram went on the promise Mexico “general financial support…to reconquer [Mexico’s] lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona.” True to Zimmermann’s word, in February 1917 Germany vowed that it would sink any and all ships – Allied or neutral – that entered waters around Great Britain. Furious, President Wilson broke off all diplomatic relations with Germany. Wilson’s anger intensified when Britain presented him with the decoded Zimmermann note on February 25. When U.S. newspapers published the note on March 1, outraged Americans across the country called for a declaration of war against the German empire. After German U-boats sank three American ships on March 16, Wilson’s rival, former president Theodore Roosevelt, declared, “There is no question about going to war. German is already at war with us!” Wilson agreed – it was time for the United States to enter World War I.

**The United States Declares War on Germany**

On April 2, 1917, Wilson went before Congress and asked for a declaration of war against Germany. Congress approved and war was declared on April 6, 1917.