Ready or Neutral?

Competing arguments about U.S. policy during World War I

SS24.US2.1d "Compare and contrast the arguments of those in the United States who advocated for preparedness and those who sought neutrality from 1914 to 1917."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two reasons people supported preparedness, circle two reasons people supported neutrality, and write the number 1 beside a concern both sides shared.

A Country Debates Its Next Move

1 In 1916, a newspaper reader in Ohio could find urgent arguments about the war in Europe on the same page. President Woodrow Wilson had declared the United States neutral in 1914, but German submarines attacked ships in the Atlantic, including the British liner *Lusitania* in 1915, killing 128 Americans. Some citizens argued that a neutral nation still needed stronger defenses. They called for a larger army, a stronger navy, and training before any emergency. To them, readiness might deter an attack or prevent a rushed, costly response if the country was drawn into war.

2 Other Americans wanted the United States to stay out of the fighting. They feared that a buildup could make war seem inevitable or encourage leaders to use force rather than diplomacy. Many also believed Europe's rivalries were not worth American lives. Peace activists opposed military expansion, while some Americans supported defensive measures but rejected joining the war. German and Irish Americans, among others, often questioned policies that seemed to favor Britain. Neutrality was not one single opinion: people disagreed about arms, trade, and how firmly the United States should protest attacks on its ships.

3 The two sides argued over what would best protect Americans, not simply whether danger existed. Preparedness supporters pointed to submarine attacks as evidence that the nation could not wait to build defenses. Neutrality advocates warned that shipping goods to the Allies and lending them money already pulled the country toward one side; stronger forces might deepen that pull. Congress expanded the army and navy in 1916, even as Wilson campaigned for reelection while emphasizing that the country had remained out of war. After Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917, Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war. These debates had not produced a lasting agreement.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did supporters of preparedness and neutrality differ in their responses to the danger of submarine attacks?

2. What concern did the two sides share, and why did they disagree about whether a military buildup would address it?

3. How did neutrality advocates' concerns about trade and loans differ from preparedness supporters' argument for stronger defenses?

4. How do the 1916 military expansion and Wilson's reelection message reflect the competing arguments?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence exchange set in 1916 between a preparedness advocate and a neutrality advocate, with two sentences per speaker. Have both respond to submarine attacks, but give each a different reason for the policy they favor.

ANSWER KEY

Ready or Neutral?

GRADE 11 · SS24.US2.1d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two reasons people supported preparedness, circle two reasons people supported neutrality, and write the number 1 beside a concern both sides shared. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did supporters of preparedness and neutrality differ in their responses to the danger of submarine attacks?	**Preparedness supporters saw the attacks as a reason to build defenses before an emergency. Neutrality advocates worried that military expansion could draw the United States into war.**
2	What concern did the two sides share, and why did they disagree about whether a military buildup would address it?	**Both wanted to protect Americans. Preparedness supporters thought a buildup could deter attacks or make a response less costly, while neutrality advocates feared it could make war more likely.**
3	How did neutrality advocates' concerns about trade and loans differ from preparedness supporters' argument for stronger defenses?	**Neutrality advocates worried that trade and loans to the Allies pulled the United States toward one side and that stronger forces might deepen that pull. Preparedness supporters argued that stronger defenses would help the country face threats.**
4	How do the 1916 military expansion and Wilson's reelection message reflect the competing arguments?	**Expanding the army and navy reflected the call for preparedness. Wilson's emphasis on remaining out of war reflected the desire for neutrality.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Preparedness advocate: German submarine attacks show that American ships may be in danger. A stronger navy could protect them and discourage further attacks. Neutrality advocate: Those attacks worry me too, but a larger fleet might bring us closer to fighting. We should rely on diplomacy rather than risk joining the war.

Accept other passage-supported reasons for either position. For the exchange, look for a shared threat, distinct arguments, two sentences per speaker, and no references to events after 1916.