From Neutral to War

Trace how a European conflict drew in the United States.

9-12.US2.5 "Explain the factors that led to World War One and describe the factors that were deterring the United States from involvement as well as the driving forces that eventually led to the United States' involvement."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two causes of the European war, circle two reasons Americans hesitated to join, and number two developments that pushed the United States toward war.

How the War Reached America

1. In June 1914, an assassin killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary in Sarajevo. Austria-Hungary blamed Serbia and issued harsh demands. Russia backed Serbia, while Germany supported Austria-Hungary. Alliances drew in France and Britain as leaders mobilized armies. Nationalist rivalries in the Balkans, competition for overseas power, and military buildup had made the crisis dangerous long before the killing. Germany's plan to attack France through neutral Belgium brought Britain into the fighting. A regional conflict had become a European war.

2. Across the Atlantic, President Woodrow Wilson declared the United States neutral. Many Americans wanted to avoid a distant war, and citizens with family roots in different European countries disagreed over which side to support. Trade with Britain and France expanded, but business ties did not erase fears about losing American lives in battle. Britain blocked supplies bound for Germany, while German submarines attacked ships near Britain. These actions challenged American trade and travel without immediately ending public support for neutrality.

3. In 1915, a German submarine sank the British passenger ship Lusitania, killing 128 Americans and intensifying anger in the United States. Germany later limited submarine attacks, but in early 1917 it resumed unrestricted submarine warfare, risking more American ships and lives. The Zimmermann Telegram, revealed in 1917, proposed a German alliance with Mexico if the United States entered the war, and offered support for recovering lost territory. Together, renewed attacks and the telegram shifted opinion. Wilson asked Congress for war, and Congress declared war on Germany in April 1917.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why did the assassination in Sarajevo grow into a European war?

2. Why did many Americans favor neutrality even as trade with Britain and France expanded?

3. How did Germany's submarine policy make neutrality harder to maintain by 1917?

4. Why did the Zimmermann Telegram add to pressure for U.S. involvement?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence newspaper editorial set in April 1917. Argue whether the United States should enter the war, weighing one reason to stay out against two reasons to enter and explaining why your choice fits the changed situation.

ANSWER KEY

From Neutral to War

HIGH SCHOOL · 9-12.US2.5

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two causes of the European war, circle two reasons Americans hesitated to join, and number two developments that pushed the United States toward war. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why did the assassination in Sarajevo grow into a European war?	**The killing triggered a crisis between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. Their supporters mobilized, alliances drew in other countries, and Germany's attack through Belgium brought Britain into the war.**
2	Why did many Americans favor neutrality even as trade with Britain and France expanded?	**Many wanted to avoid a distant war and the loss of American lives. Americans with ties to different European countries also disagreed about whom to support.**
3	How did Germany's submarine policy make neutrality harder to maintain by 1917?	**The sinking of the Lusitania had killed Americans. Germany's return to unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 put more American ships and lives at risk.**
4	Why did the Zimmermann Telegram add to pressure for U.S. involvement?	**It revealed that Germany had proposed an alliance with Mexico if the United States entered the war and had offered support for recovering territory lost to the United States.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The United States should enter the war in April 1917, despite the cost in lives. Earlier, Americans had good reason to stay out of a distant European conflict that divided families and communities. Now Germany's return to unrestricted submarine warfare threatens American ships, and its proposed alliance with Mexico raises a separate security concern. These new dangers outweigh the earlier case for neutrality because they bring the conflict closer to Americans at sea and at home.

Accept either position in the editorial if the student weighs one reason for staying out against two passage-supported reasons for entering and explains how circumstances changed by April 1917.