Neutrality Under Pressure

Two German actions and the U.S. decision to enter World War I

USH.C.3.2.A "Examine the justification for the United States of America's movement from neutrality to engagement in World War I by explaining the intent and impact of the Zimmermann Telegram and threats to international trade caused by unrestricted..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the two German actions that challenged U.S. neutrality. For each action, circle a phrase showing what Germany wanted and a phrase showing its effect on Americans.

Why Neutrality Became Harder to Keep

1 In early 1917, a cargo ship leaving an American port could carry food or supplies across the Atlantic, but its crew could not count on a safe crossing. The United States had stayed neutral since war began in Europe in 1914, although American businesses traded heavily with Britain and France. Germany used submarines to attack ships heading toward its enemies. In February 1917, Germany resumed unrestricted submarine warfare: its submarines would sink ships in a declared war zone without warning, including neutral vessels. German leaders hoped to cut off supplies to Britain and force a quick victory before American troops could arrive.

2 That strategy made neutrality harder to maintain. Merchant ships carried international trade, and a torpedo could destroy cargo and kill civilians and sailors, including Americans. Earlier submarine attacks had already stirred outrage in the United States. Germany's renewed policy threatened Americans' ability to trade and travel at sea without being attacked simply for entering the war zone. In March 1917, German submarines sank several American merchant ships. To many Americans, protecting neutral rights at sea now required more than a protest. Yet some people still opposed entering a costly European war, and trade with the Allies made the American claim to impartiality complicated.

3 Another German move raised a different fear. In January 1917, German foreign secretary Arthur Zimmermann sent a secret message proposing that Mexico join Germany in a war against the United States if the United States entered the European war. Germany promised support for Mexico to regain Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. British intelligence intercepted the message, and Americans learned of it in March. Mexico did not accept the proposal, but its publication made Germany seem willing to threaten the United States on land as well as at sea. President Woodrow Wilson asked Congress for war in April, and Congress declared war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What did Germany hope unrestricted submarine warfare would accomplish, and how did that policy threaten U.S. trade?

2. What did Germany want from Mexico in the Zimmermann message, and why did the message alarm Americans even though Mexico refused?

3. How did the March sinkings make the danger of submarine warfare more immediate for the United States?

4. How did the two German actions together strengthen the case for entering the war?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a member of Congress in April 1917. Write a 70 to 95 word statement explaining your vote on entering the war, using Germany's aims, the effects on U.S. trade and security, and one reason Americans might hesitate.

ANSWER KEY

Neutrality Under Pressure

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.3.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the two German actions that challenged U.S. neutrality. For each action, circle a phrase showing what Germany wanted and a phrase showing its effect on Americans. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What did Germany hope unrestricted submarine warfare would accomplish, and how did that policy threaten U.S. trade?	**Germany hoped to cut off supplies to Britain and win quickly. Its attacks put American merchant ships, cargo, and crews at risk, making trade across the Atlantic dangerous.**
2	What did Germany want from Mexico in the Zimmermann message, and why did the message alarm Americans even though Mexico refused?	**Germany wanted Mexico to join a war against the United States if the United States entered the European war. The proposal suggested Germany was willing to threaten U.S. territory, even though Mexico did not accept it.**
3	How did the March sinkings make the danger of submarine warfare more immediate for the United States?	**German submarines sank several American merchant ships, turning the threat to Americans and their trade into actual attacks.**
4	How did the two German actions together strengthen the case for entering the war?	**Submarine attacks threatened American lives and trade at sea, while the Zimmermann message suggested a threat to U.S. territory. Together, they made neutrality seem less able to protect the country.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I will vote to enter the war, though I understand why many Americans fear the cost. Germany resumed sinking ships without warning to cut off supplies to Britain, but that policy has also put American crews and overseas trade in danger. German submarines have already sunk American merchant ships. The Zimmermann message offered Mexico support to regain U.S. territory if we entered the war. Mexico refused, yet the proposal shows that Germany was ready to threaten our country beyond the sea. Neutrality no longer protects our trade or our security.

Accept either vote if the statement accurately connects both German actions to U.S. trade and security and acknowledges a reason for hesitation. Do not accept claims that Mexico joined the war or attacked the United States.