

Inquiry: WAR AND SOCIAL CONFLICT



Exhibition Areas:

American Entry into the War | "Over Here": The Home Front | The War at Home



EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

LESSON

4

GRADES 8–11

This curriculum is aligned with
the New York State
P–12 Learning Standards.


New York State
Museum

The New York State Museum is a program of
The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department
Office of Cultural Education



Food is
Ammunition -
Don't waste it.

N95

UNITED STATES FOOD ADMINISTRATION

"Food is Ammunition" (1918)

Artist: J.E. Sheridan

Printer: Heywood Strasser & Voigt Litho. Co.

Publisher: U.S. Food Administration

New York State Museum Collection, H-1975.107.2

LESSON

4

OBJECTIVES

- ✦ Students will be able to analyze the methods used by the government to mobilize the population.
- ✦ Students will assess how and why different groups reacted to the government's efforts.

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RATIONALE

It is difficult for large groups of people to come to a consensus, even during times of conflict and hardship. This was especially true during World War I, as the civilian population had to contend with the draft, rationing, and conflicts of interest or beliefs while the federal government was extending its powers.

This lesson, **War and Social Conflict**, delves into the reactions of New Yorkers to the sacrifices the federal government was asking of them. It specifically focuses on the sacrifices at home, along with the conflicts that arose due to diminished rights and goods.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

With Congress' declaration of war, the United States looked to expand its armed forces from a peacetime level of less than 200,000 to four million men at arms. Thousands of New Yorkers volunteered as the state's National Guard was called into federal service. However, the need for soldiers was greater still. On May 18, 1917, Congress passed the Selective Service Act authorizing the President to increase the size of the United States military via a **draft** (compulsory enlistment). Men who refused to join the army were seen as “slackers,” or cowardly sluggards, hiding from their duty to the nation; although some pacifist religious groups were exempt from service.

As wartime industrial production increased, the fear of sabotage grew high, especially in New York City where a great number of immigrants entered the United States. Ethnic groups suspected of disloyalty faced significant repression, censorship, and harassment, both from official government representatives as well as from private citizens' groups. German espionage and coded wireless communications were a serious concern. Expressions of German and Austrian heritage and culture became especially unpopular and sometimes even considered anti-American. Jewish immigrants were also under pressure to denounce socialism, and Irish immigrants were suspected of undermining pro-British efforts.

After three years of war, food supplies were desperately short in Europe. By the time war was declared, the United States already supplied 90 percent of the wheat consumed in Great Britain. A poor wheat crop in 1915–16 exacerbated the need for the United States to both increase production and decrease consumption. This placed an extraordinary burden on Americans in lower economic classes, who were already struggling with the rising cost of foodstuffs. On February 21, 1917, nearly 400 women marched on New York City Hall to petition the Mayor for assistance with rising food prices.

New Yorkers sacrificed much for the conflict by sending family members into deadly combat, and by rationing food, time, money, and raw materials. By the end of the war in 1918, a total of 2.8 million men had been drafted into American military service—of whom over 500,000 were citizens of New York State. This was the largest contribution of men from any state in the Union. An unknown number of others enlisted with the Canadian, British, and even Central forces prior to American entry into the war.



LEARNING STANDARDS



New York State P–12 Learning Standards: <http://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-p-12-common-core-learning-standards-for-english-language-arts-and-literacy>

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

NYS K-12 Social Studies Framework: <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>

8.4 WORLD WAR I AND THE ROARING TWENTIES:

Various diplomatic, economic, and ideological factors contributed to the United States decision to enter World War I. Involvement in the war significantly altered the lives of Americans. Postwar America was characterized by economic prosperity, technological innovations, and changes in the workplace. (Standards: 1, 2, 4; Themes: SOC, GOV, ECO, TECH)

8.4a European militarism, the alliance system, imperialism, and nationalism were all factors that contributed to the start of World War I.

8.4b International, economic, and military developments swayed opinion in favor of the United States siding with the Allies and entering World War I. Domestic responses to World War I limited civil liberties within the United States.

8.4c New military technologies changed military strategy in World War I and resulted in an unprecedented number of casualties.

11.6 THE RISE OF AMERICAN POWER (1890–1920):

Numerous factors contributed to the rise of the United States as a world power. Debates over the United States' role in world affairs increased in response to overseas expansion and involvement in World War I. United States participation in the war had important effects on American society. (Standards: 1, 2, 3, 4; Themes: GEO, SOC, GOV, ECO)

11.6b While the United States attempted to follow its traditional policy of neutrality at the beginning of World War I, the nation eventually became involved in the war. President Woodrow Wilson led the nation into war with the hope of reforming the international order through his Fourteen Points.

LESSON 4

WARM-UP:

In the classroom, brainstorm with students what problems might arise in the civilian population when a country goes to war—imagining a scenario where they themselves might be drafted and called to fight in foreign conflicts, or what life might be like if food, clothing, or luxuries were rationed. Discuss the problems posed by citizens who held loyalty to our opponents or those that did not support the war. Then ask students what critical contributions non-combatant civilians can make towards victory.

GUIDED INSTRUCTION:

Visit this exhibition gallery via field trip or access our accompanying online exhibition (www.nysm.nysed.gov/exhibitions/WWI) in a classroom setting, focusing especially on Exhibition Areas: *American Entry into the War*, *“Over Here”: The Home Front*, and *The War at Home*. Using the Historical Background information given above, highlight:

- The antebellum ideas of neutrality, nationalism, and pacifism
- What sectors of the civilian population were most opposed to the war and why
- Patriotism and self-sacrifice
- Shortages, including food production and clothing, and how the government and groups attempted to compensate
- New York State’s diverse population

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE:

After fully viewing the exhibition, students will break into discussion groups to share feedback on what they learned. Students will use historical context to draw parallels to issues in modern America and Europe. Each discussion group will then share with the class their thoughts regarding the nation’s need for citizen action, and the different ways people reacted to this need. Focus the discussion on differences or similarities between these reactions at the national level as well on New York State specifically.

ADVANCED PRACTICE:

Relating these ideas to today, ask students to write a short essay comparing modern-day conflicts in which civilian groups react negatively in various ways to broader political conflicts around them to civilians who did not support World War I.

ASSESSMENT:

Students will be assessed on how well they comprehend the different domestic issues present in American society in the following areas:

- Patriotism and self-sacrifice
- Food production and shortages
- Neutrality, Pacifism and Nationalism
- New York State’s diverse ethnic population