

5th Grade WWII: Should the US Go To War?

Hook:

Good morning Representatives and Senators. Thank you for allowing me to address this joint session of congress today, December 6th 1941. As you know, we as a nation have tried to stay out of the conflict in Europe, but the situation grows more dangerous every day. Now you know, as president, I am also the Commander in Chief of our armed forces, and as such, I can send troops over to help our allies without a declaration of war, but with much of the rest of the world already fighting in this war, I think if we decide to send our boys over there, it should be nothing less than with a full declaration of war, which as we all know, only Congress can do.

Honestly, I don't know if we are to that point yet. I don't know if we should try to continue to remain neutral, or if it is time to act, time to enter this war. That is why I have called you all together. The Pentagon has prepared some classified documents to consider as you make this decision. Your packet includes some primary and secondary sources that can be used to support either point of view. I'd like to give you a few moments to look over your packets and see how close to agreement we are, open the floor up to debate, and then see if we can come to a consensus where we all agree on a course of action. So my question to you is "Is the United States of America ready to go to war, or are we going to stay out of it?"

Opening:

It is December 6th, 1941. Pearl Harbor **has not** yet happened. We do **not know** that Nazi Germany is killing 6 million Jewish people yet. You are a member of the United States Congress. As Commander in Chief of the armed forces the president can send armed forces into battle, but only Congress can declare war. The president has asked you to look at the documents provided by the CIA (Central Intelligence Administration) below to come to a decision, and advise him as to whether the US should enter into the WWII or not. Weigh your decision carefully. Lives hang in the balance.

Work Period:

Step 1: Ms. Balaun does a close read of the FDR Fireside chat and Charles Lindbergh's speech (number paragraphs and read first sentence).

Step 2: Each student holds up a colored card stating how they feel right now (Green is for Go – go to war. Red means Stop – don't go to war)

Step 3: Look at your group mates – do you match? You will have to convince each other and pick a side after you go through all of the documents.

Step 4: Go through the documents – move quickly, but make notes – find supporting evidence that answers your question.

Step 5: Your group must agree on a side and write a short "speech" that uses evidence from the documents to convince congress to vote your way.

If time we will give groups a chance to change their side.

Document 1: Table showing timeline of German occupation

Country	Date Occupation Began
Austria*	March 13, 1938
Czechoslovakia**	March 15, 1939
Poland	September 1, 1939
Denmark	April 9, 1940
Luxembourg	May 10, 1940
Netherlands	May 14, 1940
Belgium	May 27, 1940
Norway	June 10, 1940
France	June 22, 1940
Yugoslavia	April 17, 1941
Greece	April 30, 1941
Soviet Union***	June 22, 1941
Monaco	September 9, 1943
Albania	September 10, 1943
Hungary	March 19, 1944

*Austria was willingly annexed by Germany.

**Germany had occupied a small, mostly German portion of Czechoslovakia months earlier.

***The occupied portions of the Soviet Union included the Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia.

SOURCES: Museum of Tolerance Multimedia Learning Center; albanianhistory.net; Holocaust Research Project

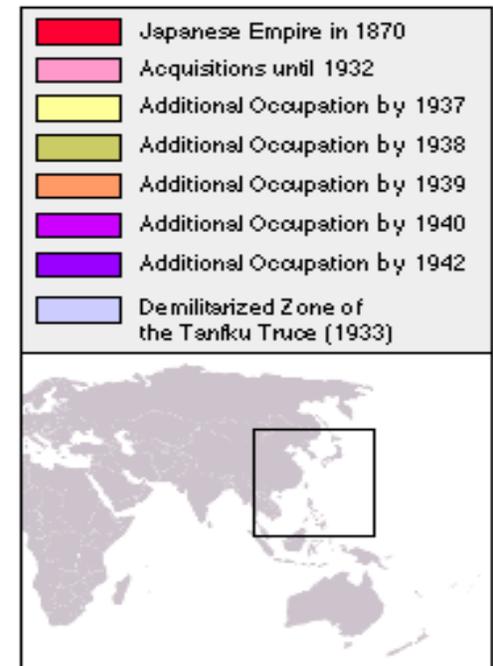


Allowed under fair use https://library.ucsd.edu/dc/object/bb5461618q/_2.jpg

Document 3: Map showing Japanese occupation



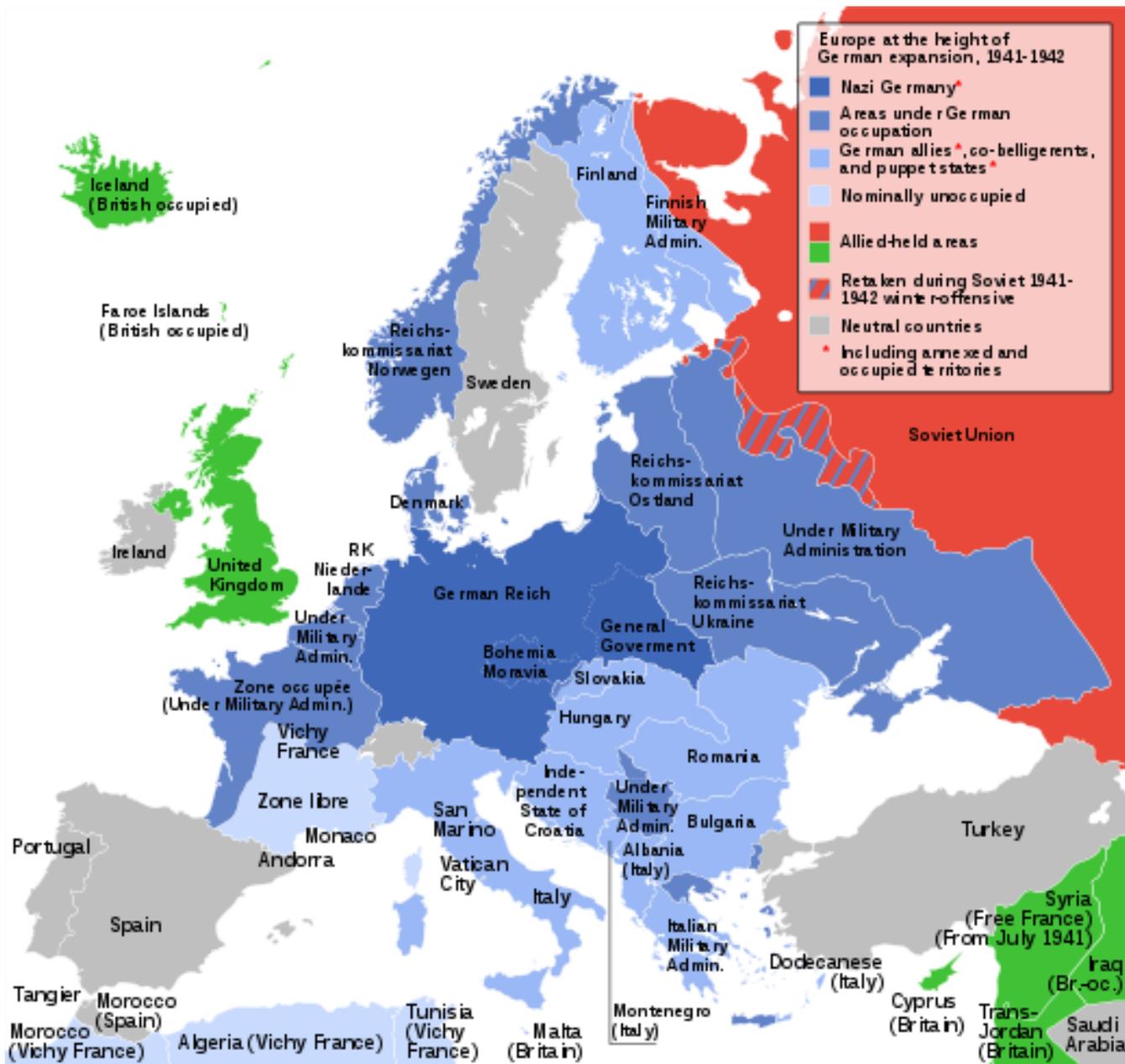
Document 4: Map showing German expansion in Europe



What area of the map shows Japan's original land area?

Compared to the original size of Japan, how many times larger was the total area they had control of?

Why would this be a concern to the US?



What area on the map shows Germany's original land area? (Circle it)

Roughly what percent of Europe did Germany have control over?

Why do you think this would be a concern to the US?

By Goran tek-en, CC BY-SA 4.0,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=39101947>

Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Fireside Chat – given December 29, 1940:

"....For on September 27th, 1940 -- this year -- by an agreement signed in Berlin, three powerful nations, two in Europe and one in Asia, joined themselves together in the threat that if the United States of America interfered with or blocked the expansion program of these three nations -- a program aimed at world control -- they would unite in ultimate action against the United States.

The Nazi masters of Germany have made it clear that they intend not only to dominate all life and thought in their own country, but also to enslave the whole of Europe, and then to use the resources of Europe to dominate the rest of the world.... Some of our people like to believe that wars in Europe and in Asia are of no concern to us. But it is a matter of most vital concern to us that European and Asiatic war-makers should not gain control of the oceans which lead to this hemisphere. ...

Does anyone seriously believe that we need to fear attack anywhere in the Americas while a free Britain remains our most powerful naval neighbor in the Atlantic? And does anyone seriously believe, on the other hand, that we could rest easy if the Axis powers were our neighbors there? If Great Britain goes down, the Axis powers will control the Continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Austral-Asia, and the high seas. And they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us in all the Americas would be living at the point of a gun -- a gun loaded with explosive bullets, economic as well as military."

".....There are those who say that the Axis powers would never have any desire to attack the Western Hemisphere. That is the same dangerous form of wishful thinking which has destroyed the powers of resistance of so many conquered peoples. The plain facts are that the Nazis have proclaimed, time and again, that all other races are their inferiors and therefore subject to their orders. And most important of all, the vast resources and wealth of this American hemisphere constitute the most tempting loot in all of the round world...."

The America's First Committee bumper sticker – Use the cartoon analysis sheet



Herbert Hoover Presidential Library

Charles Lindbergh: We are assembled here tonight because we believe in an independent destiny for America. Such a destiny does not mean that we will build a wall around our country and isolate ourselves from contact with the rest of the world. But it does mean that the future of America will not be tied to these eternal wars in Europe. It means that American boys will not be sent across the ocean to die so that England or Germany or France or Spain may dominate the other nations.

An independent American destiny means, on the one hand, that our soldiers will not have to fight everybody in the world who prefers some other system of life to ours. On the other hand, it means that we will fight anybody and everybody who attempts to interfere with our hemisphere.

Source: Courtesy of the Michigan State University, G. Robert Vincent Voice Library. Obtained from <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5163/>.

America and European Wars

(Delivered by Charles Lindbergh, September 15, 1939)

In times of great emergency, men of the same belief must gather together for mutual counsel and action. If they fail to do this, all that they stand for will be lost. I speak tonight to those people in the United States of America who feel that the destiny of this country does not call for our involvement in European wars. We must band together to prevent the loss of more American lives in these internal struggles of Europe. We must keep foreign propaganda from pushing our country blindly into another war. Modern war with all its consequences is too tragic and too devastating to be approached from anything but a purely American standpoint. We should never enter a war unless it is absolutely essential to the future welfare of our nation.

This country was colonized by men and women from Europe. The hatreds, the persecutions, the intrigues they left behind, gave them courage to cross the Atlantic Ocean to a new land. ... In this country, they eventually found a means of living peacefully together – the same nationalities that are fighting abroad today. The quarrels of Europe faded out from American life as generations passed. Instead of wars between the English, French, and Germans, it became a struggle of the new world for freedom from the old – a struggle for the right of America to find her own destiny.

[George Washington] solemnly warned the people of America against becoming entangled in European alliances. For over one hundred years, his advice was followed. ... Then, in 1917, we entered a European war [WWI]. Europe has not yet recovered from the effects of this war and she has already entered another. ... even in America we are still paying for our part in that victory – and we will continue to pay for another generation. European countries were both unable and unwilling to pay their debts to us.

http://www.charleslindbergh.com/pdf/9_15_39.pdf

<http://www.thegreatfiction.com/2017/10/09/why-non-interventionists-opposed-american-entry-into-world-war-ii/>

America First Committee Creed: “I believe in an impregnable national defense,” the AFC’s creed began, adding, “I believe we should keep our country out of the Old World’s everlasting family quarrels....

I believe in the preservation of this Republic. Embroiled again in European affairs, we shall lose it. We shall be destroying the heritage our fathers fought for and sacrificed to leave us. In an effort to destroy totalitarianism, we shall be forced into totalitarianism ourselves. George Washington warned us of this day. His advice is better today than when he gave it.”

This mention of George Washington referred to his 1796 Farewell Address in which he struck a markedly similar chord. "Why quit our own to stand upon foreign ground?" Washington had asked. "Why, by interweaving our destiny with that of any part of Europe, entangle our peace and prosperity in the toils of European ambition, rivalry, interest, humor or caprice?" He warned against "inveterate antipathies against particular nations, and passionate attachments for others" and pleaded instead for Americans to "Observe good faith and justice towards all nations [and] cultivate peace and harmony with all."

A quarter century later, President James Monroe restated Washington's policy in a slightly amended form when he warned European nations that the United States would view their interference in the Americas unfavorably, but also promised that America would not take sides in European conflicts. Washington's Farewell Address and the Monroe Doctrine became the unofficial basis for American foreign policy for the remainder of the 19th century.

Republican Senator Robert Taft enunciated this position when he wrote in 1941 that "War is a vain policy, except a war fought at home to establish or preserve the freedom of a nation."

For many Americans, World War I supported this belief. Historians Burton and Anita Folsom wrote that when the traumatized American veterans of the Great War came home and began telling their stories, "the public was stunned by the carnage of World War I, by the raw destruction, by the sheer numbers of dead or maimed."

Two decades later, with war again raging in Europe and Americans again debating participation in it, non-interventionists worried that the hard-learned lessons from World War I would be forgotten. Herbert Hoover, who had personally witnessed the immense suffering of World War I, lamented that "Amid the afterglow of glory and legend we forget the filth, the stench, the death, of the trenches. We forget the dumb grief of mothers, wives, and children. We forget the unending blight cast upon the world by the sacrifice of the flower of every race."

Like Taft, Hoover was not arguing for pacifism, but rather for war as a defensive last resort. "We may need to go to war again," the former president wrote, "But that war should be on this hemisphere alone and in the defense of our firesides or our honor. For that alone should we pay the price."

War's Failure to Make the World Safe

World War I had further proven that wars to perfect society and liberate the world were fool's errands. Woodrow Wilson had famously rooted the case for American involvement in World War I in the idea that "The world must be made safe for democracy." Hoover had joined in this line of thinking, believing that by entering the war America "could impose an enlightened peace; that we could make it a war to end war."

But the actual experience of World War I changed Hoover's mind about war's ability to effect positive social change. "If experience has any value to nations," he wrote, "there are in the wrecking of these hopes a thousand reasons why we should never attempt it again..."

In a radio address in 1939, Hoover stated his new belief that, "This world can never reach peace by threats and force. If this is to be the blind leadership of men, nothing can save the world from a catastrophe to civilization." Little did he realize the immensity of the catastrophe to come.



After the War a Medal and Maybe a Job, antiwar cartoon by [John French Sloan](#), 1914 (cropped for 5th grade use by Nancy Balaun)

Use the cartoon analysis sheet.