

# Teaching American History Project

## **U.S. Involvement in WWI – The Zimmerman Note**

By: Bobby Skarvelas

**Grade:** 9-12

**Length of Period:** 1

**Inquiry:** Students will investigate several reasons why the United States eventually entered WWI on the side of England and France. This lesson is used in a unit after the reasons for WWI have been examined and several other motives like submarine warfare have been identified as factors leading to U.S. involvement. This lesson specifically focuses on the Zimmerman note and how it may be viewed as a reason for U.S. involvement in WWI. It is an easy read, but holds many underlying big ideas which the students find interesting. The question the students will be answering is: To what extent was the Zimmer note effective in drawing the U.S. into the war? Some guiding questions that may assist students are: Do you think it is possible for just a telegram to draw the U.S. into war? What is the basic premise of the telegram?

\* This lesson uses a SOAPSTone method to analyze primary sources, which may take some modeling and practice.

### **Objectives:**

Students will know and be able to:

- Identify reasons for U.S. involvement in WWI
- Analyze primary source documents
- Analyze multiple perspectives
- Create conclusions dealing with the impact of the Zimmerman note

### **Materials:**

- Zimmer Note
- SOAPSTone analysis sheet
- PowerPoint with pictures of WWI

### **Activities:**

- **Initiation-** Begin a PowerPoint of soldiers in WWI. After several pictures ask the students “what drives people to fight in wars” students should have some prior knowledge of U.S. History and WWI. Discuss possible answers as a class.

- Brief Lecture- Discussing that the class will be examining a primary source that may be an indirect or direct cause for U.S. involvement in WWI. That is for them to decide. Here would be a good time to review the SOAPStone Analysis method or if they are comfortable with that to review some other cause previously examine for potential U.S. involvement, for example trade dependency with England or submarine warfare.
- Distribute copy of the Zimmerman note. Have the students read to note on their own. Then hand out the analysis sheet. After the students complete the sheet go through as a class and discuss possible answers. More of a focus should be placed on the latter questions because they build up bloom's taxonomy.
- Have the class free write answering the question: To what extent do you believe the Zimmer note may have been effective in drawing the U.S. into the war?
- Closure- Ask the class as they get ready to pack up if they believe war can be caused from a singular reason or it is more likely for a combination of motives to be present? Have them cite an example.

**Assessment:**

- Informal assessment takes place in the form of student interaction and participation within the class.
- Class discussion.
- Check and monitor progress.
- Formal assessment takes place through the completion of analysis sheets and free write.

**CT State Standards:**

Educational experiences in **Grades 9-12** will assure that students:

- formulate historical questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives, using multiple sources
- use primary source documents to analyze multiple perspectives

# **19 January, 1917: The Zimmerman Note to the German Minister to Mexico**

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Berlin, January 19, 1917

On the first of February we intend to begin submarine warfare unrestricted. In spite of this, it is our intention to endeavor to keep neutral the United States of America.

If this attempt is not successful, we propose an alliance on the following basis with Mexico: That we shall make war together and together make peace. We shall give general financial support, and it is understood that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in New Mexico, Texas, and Arizona. The details are left to you for settlement....

You are instructed to inform the President of Mexico of the above in the greatest confidence as soon as it is certain that there will be an outbreak of war with the United States and suggest that the President of Mexico, on his own initiative, should communicate with Japan suggesting adherence at once to this plan; at the same time, offer to mediate between Germany and Japan.

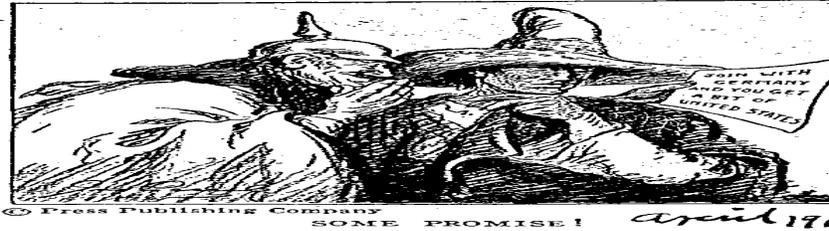
Please call to the attention of the President of Mexico that the employment of ruthless submarine warfare now promises to compel England to make peace in a few months.

Zimmerman  
(Secretary of State)

**Primary Source Analysis: SoapsTONE**

**Name:**

Who is the Speaker in this note?



What is the **Occasion** of note? (date, time)

Who is the **Audience** of the note? (for whom is it intended)

What is the **Purpose** of the note? (why was it written)

What is the **Subject** of the note? (what is being written about)

What is the **Tone** of the note? (what emotion does it carry)

What is the attitude Zimmerman has about submarine warfare? How do you know?

What impact may this have had on the American Public and President Wilson's decision to eventually enter the war?