

**Winter 2010 Teaching with Primary Sources Quarterly
Learning Activity – Secondary Level**

Why did Congress Reject the League of Nations?

OVERVIEW

Overview

In this activity, students think like historians to understand arguments in favor of and against President Woodrow Wilson’s proposed League of Nations as part of the 1919 Congressional battle over the Treaty of Versailles. Intended for use within a larger unit of study about the end of World War I and its legacy, students practice historical thinking strategies as they read and listen to the speeches for insight into the Senate’s ultimate rejection of the League of Nations.

Objectives

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- describe the historical context surrounding Wilson’s League of Nations proposal;
- recognize that the Senate ultimately rejected the League of Nations; and
- use evidence from speeches delivered by Senators Gilbert Hitchcock and Henry Cabot Lodge to discuss the arguments for and against the League of Nations.

Time Required

Two class periods (90 minutes)

Recommended Grade Range

9-12

Topic/s

Government, Law; Presidents

Subject

U.S. History

Standards

McREL 4th Edition Standards & Benchmarks

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

Historical Understanding

Standard 2. Understands the historical perspective

United States History

Standard 21. Understands the changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I

Language Arts

Standard 7. (Reading) Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

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http://www.loc.gov/teachers/tps/quarterly/historical_thinking/pdf/secondary_activity.pdf

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OVERVIEW (CONT'D)

Credits

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PREPARATION

Materials

Have these selected materials ready before the activity.

-Prepare to play the following sound recordings from the Library of Congress online collection, *American Leaders Speak: Recordings from World War I and the 1920 Election, 1918-1920*:

- “League of Nations.” Henry Cabot Lodge.
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field\(DOCID+@range\(90000014+90000015\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field(DOCID+@range(90000014+90000015)))
- “The trouble with senators who oppose the League of Nations.” Gilbert M. Hitchcock.
[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field\(DOCID+@range\(90000047+90000048\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field(DOCID+@range(90000047+90000048)))

-Print and prepare to distribute transcripts of the speeches (one copy of each per student):

- “League of Nations.” Henry Cabot Lodge. (see attached)
- “The trouble with senators who oppose the League of Nations.” Gilbert M. Hitchcock. (see attached)

-Prepare to display and distribute the following graphic organizer (one copy per student):

- *League of Nations* graphic organizer (see attached)

Resources

Before guiding students through the activity, teachers can familiarize themselves with the Senate debate over the Treaty of Versailles and Wilson’s League of Nations proposal by reviewing:

- Library of Congress, Today in History:
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/today/jun28.html>
- U.S. Senate, Art & History Home, Historical Minute Essays, Origins of the Modern Senate: 1878-1920:
http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/history/one_item_and_teasers/1878.htm
 - Woodrow Wilson Addresses the Senate*, July 10, 1919
 - A Bitter Rejection*, November 19, 1919
- U.S. Senate, Art & History Home: Featured Biographies
 - Gilbert Hitchcock: A Featured Biography
http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_HitchcockGilbert.htm
 - Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr.: A Featured Biography
http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/generic/Featured_Bio_Lodge.htm
- U.S. Senate, Reference Home
 - The Senate and the League of Nations (Henry Cabot Lodge, 1925)
http://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_item/Versailles.htm

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PROCEDURE

1. Before introducing the activity, review with students the historical context of the end of World War I. This synopsis should highlight the following key points:
 - *European Allies, furious with Germany after WWI, wanted a treaty that punished Germany and made them pay for the damage of the war.*
 - *President Wilson, instead, thought that the treaty should try to lay the groundwork to end all wars; for example, he didn't think that the Allies should punish Germany too harshly or make a land-grab for German colonies.*
 - *Wilson drafted his plan, called the Fourteen Points, and brought it to Paris. The Fourteenth point proposed a League of Nations, an international governing body that would try to resolve international differences and support democratic nations.*
 - *European nations rejected almost all of Wilson's ideas, but they agreed to set up a League of Nations--this became part of the Treaty of Versailles.*
 - *But when Wilson returned to the U.S. and tried to get Congress to ratify the treaty, they refused, mostly because they opposed the League of Nations.*

2. Introduce the activity's focus:
 - *Today, we're going to try to figure out why Congress rejected the League of Nations. What are some possible reasons?*

Elicit student hypotheses and write on the board.

3. Pass out the *League of Nations* graphic organizer and the transcript of Henry Cabot Lodge's speech. Read **source** for Lodge speech out loud and have students share responses to the **sourcing** and **contextualizing** questions.
4. Play the sound recording of Lodge's speech. Encourage engaged listening:
 - *Now I'm going to play a sound recording of Henry Cabot Lodge reading this speech. As you listen, follow along with the transcript and underline reasons he gives for opposing the League of Nations.*

Ask students: what reasons does the Senator give for opposing the League of Nations? Compare responses to the class list of possible reasons for many members of Congress's opposition to the League of Nations, adding to the list as needed.

5. Pass out the transcript of Gilbert Hitchcock's speech. Read **source** for Hitchcock speech out loud and have students share responses to the **sourcing** questions.
6. Play the sound recording of Hitchcock's speech. Encourage engaged listening:
 - *Now I'm going to play a sound recording of Gilbert Hitchcock reading this speech. Again, as you listen, follow along with the transcript and underline reasons he gives for supporting the League of Nations.*

Ask students: what reasons does the Senator give for supporting the League of Nations? Write these reasons as a second list on the board.

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PROCEDURE (CONT'D)

7. Have students answer the **close reading** questions independently for both speeches before sharing responses.
 - *How did the audio recordings of these speeches reinforce or change your understanding of each speech's written tone?*
8. As a class, discuss possible ways to answer the **corroboration** question.
9. Explain the concept of a forced choice to students.
 - *You will now each take on the role of a senator in this debate. You **MUST** choose a side: do you agree with Senator Lodge or Senator Hitchcock?*
10. Ask students to get out of their seats and move to one side of the room or the other, depending on their choice.
11. Elicit student responses for why they chose one side or the other. If all students go to one side, play devil's advocate. Possible arguments include:

Senator Hitchcock would say:

- Lodge is nationalistic and small-minded
- The U.S. needs to create global and international relations; must work together with other countries.
- We need to try to prevent future wars.

Senator Lodge would say:

- Hitchcock, like Wilson, is really naïve.
- The U.S. needs to take care of itself first.
- There is no way that other nations are going to look out for American interests.

EVALUATION

- Students' active participation in guided class discussions
- Teacher-developed rubrics to rate the quality of graphic organizers completed by students
- Students' active participation in choice activity

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[The trouble with Senators who oppose the League of Nations]

Senator Gilbert Hitchcock

Transcript of speech (audio recording)

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field\(DOCID+@range\(90000047+90000048\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field(DOCID+@range(90000047+90000048)))

The trouble with Senators who oppose the League of Nations is that they are thinking of the days that are gone and gone forever. The conquering empires of the world have been wiped out. The fall of Russia and Germany and Austria-Hungary removed from the world the last representatives of the conquering spirit and of autocratic power. The world is now democratic. Senators should cease to turn their eyes to the past and should turn them to the future, and see what we have before us.

The spirit of democracy has come into its own. We have come into a new world. We are about to organize the democracies of the earth to establish law and order among the nations. And we can do it now for the first time in the history of the world. We need take in no despots. We need take into consideration no conquering empire. That day has gone, and we have come into a new era. The senators should realize it. Let them grasp the fact that the spirit of the age is to end conquest. That the spirit of the age is to have the people rule. That the spirit of the age is that government shall be content to serve their own people and not to despoil others. Let them see the New World as it is, and the new spirit which inspires it. Let them appreciate the fact that humanity is not willing to sacrifice itself further, that men and women demand of their government that as the fruit of this terrible war an agreement shall be entered into for the preservation of world peace in the future. If senators will turn from the past towards the future, they will behold a new heaven and a new earth, not a millennium perhaps, but a world in which the affairs of nations are to be administered in justice and reason and humanity. A world in which the chief affair of government shall be peace and development and progress. A world in which man shall attain its highest destiny and happiness. This was impossible in the days of tyrants and autocrats and conquerors, but it is possible in the new age of liberty, statesmanship, and philanthropy.

The late war cost seven million lives, and millions more of cripples. It has destroyed hundreds of towns, it has widowed millions of wives, it has brought in its train the inevitable consequences of war, pestilence, and famine. One of the war diseases alone has cost this country over three hundred thousand lives of the civilian population. It has let loose and inflamed the passions and lusts of man, and crushed and humiliated millions of women. Massacre, torture, and assassinations have accompanied it. Law and order have been overthrown. Bolshevism and anarchy have been profligated. The confidence of men in government has been shaken. It will never be restored until governments devise some way to end war. The League of Nations is that way.

Source: Gilbert Hitchcock, speech, August, 1919, Washington D.C. Democratic Senator Gilbert Hitchcock was a leading supporter of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson.

“League of Nations”

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge

Transcript of speech (audio recording)

[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field\(DOCID+@range\(90000014+90000015\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/nfor:@field(DOCID+@range(90000014+90000015)))

I am as anxious as any human being can be to have the United States render every possible service to the civilization and the peace of mankind. But I am certain that we can do it best by not putting ourselves in leading strings, or subjecting our policies and our sovereignty to other nations. The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves, but to the world, than any single possession.

Look at the United States today. We have made mistakes in the past; we have had shortcomings. We shall make mistakes in the future and fall short of our own best hopes. But nonetheless, is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with this in ordered liberty, in peace, and in the largest freedom? I feel that I can say this without being accused of undue boastfulness, for it is a simple fact. And in taking on these obligations, all that we do is in the spirit of unselfishness, and it is a desire for the good of mankind. But it is well to remember that we are dealing with nations, every one of which has a direct individual interest to serve, and there is grave danger in an unshared idealism. Contrast the United States with any country on the face of the earth today and ask yourself whether the situation of the United States is not the best to be found.

I will go as far as anyone in world service that the first step to world service is the maintenance of the United States. You may call me selfish if you will, conservative or reactionary, or use any other harsh adjective you see fit to apply. But an American I was born, an American I've remained all my life. I can never be anything else but an American, and I must think of the United States first. And when I think of the United States first in an arrangement like this, I am thinking of what is best for the world. For if the United States fails, the best hopes of mankind fail with it. I have never had but one allegiance; I cannot divide it now. I have loved but one flag and I cannot share that devotion and give affection to the mongrel banner invented for a league. Internationalism, illustrated by the Bolshevik and by the men to whom all countries are alike, provided they can make money out of them, is to me repulsive. National I must remain and in that way I, like all other Americans, can render the amplest service to the world.

The United States is the world's best hope, but if you fetter her in the interest through quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the intrigues of Europe, you will destroy her powerful good, and endanger her very existence. Leave her to march freely through the centuries to come, as in the years that have gone. Strong, generous, and confident, she has nobly served mankind. Beware how you trifle with your marvelous inheritance -- this great land of ordered liberty. For if we stumble and fall, freedom and civilization everywhere will go down in ruin.

Source: Henry Cabot Lodge, August 1919, Washington D.C. Republican Senator Henry Cabot Lodge was a staunch opponent of Democratic President Woodrow Wilson.

The League of Nations

		Gilbert Hitchcock	Henry Cabot Lodge
Sourcing	Why is he giving this speech?		
	What do you predict he will say in this speech?		
Contextualization	What is going on at this time? (same answer for both sources)		
Close Reading	What is one word you would use to describe the TONE of this speech? Find a quote to support your answer.		
	What is Hitchcock's/Lodge's strongest argument for why the U.S. should/ shouldn't join the League of Nations?		
Corroboration	Why do you think Henry Cabot Lodge won this fight? Use the documents to support your answers.		