

Civil Liberties in the Wilson Era
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Lesson Plan Summary:

During World War I, the Federal government was concerned about potential disloyalty of certain groups within America. President Wilson, the Congress, and U.S. Supreme Court took action to restrict anti-war efforts. Some of the actions of the national government threatened civil liberties in the United States.

Objectives:

SS.C.2.4.3 Students will understand the importance of Civil Liberties.

SS.C.1.4.3 Students will understand the specific features of the Constitution which prevent abuse of power

U.S. History Era:

Woodrow Wilson Presidency

Grade Level

High School or Middle School American History

Materials:

Document A	Woodrow Wilson's Flag Day Speech	1917
Document B	The Sedition Act	1918
Document C	Abrams v U.S.	1919
Document D	Jersey City <i>Journal</i> , "As Gag-Rulers Would Have It"	1918

Lesson Time:

180 minutes

Lesson Procedures:

The lesson should start with a review of civil liberties and the Bill of Rights. Students will then read the documents to examine the threats to civil liberties during World War I.

Activities:

Students will read each document and answer the questions. Each student will write an essay that deals with civil liberties and the Wilson administration during World War I.

Assessment:

Students will write an FCAT style essay examining challenges to civil liberties by the Federal government during the First World War. Students will support their position with details from the various documents used in the lesson.

Rubric:

6. Strong thesis, clearly developed, well organized, significant use of documents
5. Partially developed thesis, well organized, adequate use of documents
4. Limited thesis, partially developed, adequate organization, limited use of documents
3. Limited thesis, partially developed, limited organization, limited use of documents
2. Poorly developed thesis, poor organization, weak use of documents
1. Lacks a thesis, lacks organization, fails to make use of documents

Resources:

Government Printing Office pamphlet; Cary T. Grayson Papers, Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library.

The Oyez Project, *Abrams v. United States*, 250 U.S. 616 (1919),
available at: <http://www.oyez.org/cases/1901-1939/1919/1919_316/>

Jersey City *Journal*, "As Gag-Rulers Would Have It" www.newman.baruch.cuny.edu/.../Gag_Rulers.gif

The Sedition Act of 1918, wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_U.S._Sedition_Act

Stone, Geoffrey R., *Perilous Times, Free Speech in Wartime*. W.W. Norton and Company, New York, 2004

Document A
Woodrow Wilson's Flag Day Speech

Name _____
April 14, 1917

Two months after the declaration of war on Germany, President Wilson gave a speech on Flag Day, 1917. In the speech, Wilson stated the administration's position on the opposition to the war. Read the following excerpts from the president's speech and answer the following questions.

"My Fellow Citizens: We meet to celebrate Flag Day because this flag which we honour and under which we serve is the emblem of our unity, our power, our thought and purpose as a nation. It has no other character than that which we give it from generation to generation. The choices are ours. It floats in majestic silence above the hosts that execute those choices, whether in peace or in war. ...

It is plain enough how we were forced into the war. The extraordinary insults and aggressions of the Imperial German Government left us no self-respecting choice but to take up arms in defense of our rights as a free people and of our honour as a sovereign government.

... the masters of Germany do not hesitate to use any agency that promises to effect their purpose, the deceit of the nations? ... They are employing liberals in their enterprise. They are using men, in Germany and without, as their spokesmen whom they have hitherto despised and oppressed, using them for their own destruction,—socialists, the leaders of labour, the thinkers they have hitherto sought to silence. ... The sinister intrigue is being ... actively conducted in this country

But they will make no headway. The false betray themselves always in every accent. It is only friends and partisans of the German Government whom we have already identified who utter these thinly disguised disloyalties.

For us there is but one choice. We have made it. Woe be to the man or group of men that seeks to stand in our way in this day of high resolution when every principle we hold dearest is to be vindicated and made secure for the salvation of the nations. ...

1. According to President Wilson, who was responsible for the war?
2. Identify the groups which Wilson believes are either intentionally or unintentionally assisting the Germany war effort?
3. What threat does Wilson make to those individuals and groups that may be disloyal to the war effort?

Document C

Name _____

Jacob Abrams, Mollie Steimer, Hyman Lachowsky, Samuel Lipman, and Jacob Schwartz were arrested under the Sedition Act of 1918. The defendants were charged and convicted for inciting resistance to the war effort and for urging curtailment of production of essential war material. They were sentenced to 20 years in prison. Their case eventually reached the U.S. Supreme Court. Read the following excerpts from *Abrams v. U.S.*, 250 U.S. 616 (1919) and answer the following questions.

“Each of the first three counts charged the defendants with conspiring, when the United States was at war with the Imperial Government of Germany, to unlawfully utter, print, write and publish: in the first count, "disloyal, scurrilous and abusive language about the form of Government of the United States;" in the second count, language "intended to bring the form of Government of the United States into contempt, scorn, contumely and disrepute;" and in the third count, language "intended to incite, provoke and encourage resistance to the United States in said war." The charge in the fourth count was that the defendants conspired, "when the United States was at war with the Imperial German Government, unlawfully and willfully, by utterance, writing, printing and publication, to urge, incite and advocate curtailment of production of things and products, to-wit, ordnance and ammunition, necessary and essential to the prosecution of the war."

The first of the two articles attached to the indictment is conspicuously headed, "The Hypocrisy of the United States and her Allies." After denouncing President Wilson as a hypocrite and a coward because troops were sent into Russia, it proceeds to assail our Government in general, saying: "His [the President's] shameful, cowardly silence about the intervention in Russia reveals the hypocrisy of the plutocratic gang in Washington and vicinity." It continues: "He [the President] is too much of a coward to come out openly and say: 'We capitalistic nations cannot afford to have a proletarian republic in Russia.'"

Growing more inflammatory as it proceeds, the circular culminates in: "The Russian Revolution cries: Workers of the World! Awake! Rise! Put down your enemy and mine!" "Yes! friends, there is only one enemy of the workers of the world and that is CAPITALISM."

The purpose of this obviously was to persuade the persons to whom it was addressed to turn a deaf ear to patriotic appeals in behalf of the Government of the United States, and to cease to render it assistance in the prosecution of the war.

... the plan of action which they adopted ... could be realized, defeat of the war program of the United States, ... persuade persons ... not to aid government loans, and not to work in ammunition factories where their work would produce "bullets, bayonets, cannon" and other munitions of war ...

... the manifest purpose of such a publication was to create an attempt to defeat the war plans of the Government of the United States... the plain purpose of their propaganda was to excite, at the supreme crisis of the war, disaffection, sedition, riots, and, as they hoped, revolution, in this country for the purpose of embarrassing, and, if possible, defeating the military plans of the Government...

.. it is clear not only that some evidence, but that much persuasive evidence, was before the jury tending to prove that the defendants were guilty as charged in both the third and fourth counts of the indictment, and, under the long established rule of law hereinbefore stated, the judgment of the District Court must be *Affirmed*.

7. List the charges against the defendants.

8. In their pamphlets, how did the defendants describe President Wilson?

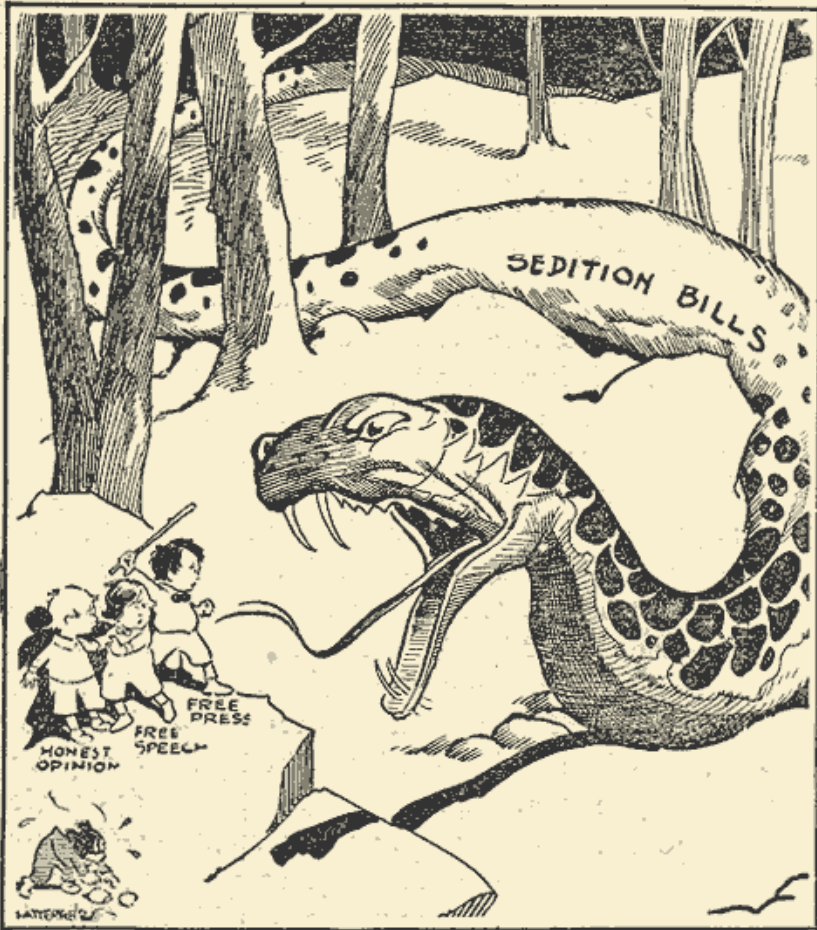
9. According to the U.S. Supreme Court, what was the result of the distribution of the pamphlets?

10. The defendants were convicted in lower court. Did the Supreme Court uphold the conviction of the lower court or reversed the decision of the lower court?

Document D

Name _____

Use the political cartoon published in the Jersey City *Journal* to answer the questions below.



AS GAG-RULERS WOULD HAVE IT.

—Satterfield in the Jersey City *Journal*.

www.newman.baruch.cuny.edu/.../Gag_Rulers.gif

11. How does the cartoonist represent the Sedition bills?

12. What is the snake attempting to devour?

13. What do the children represent?

14. What do you think is the cartoonist's opinion of the government's attempt to stifle civil liberties?

Essay**Name** _____

Write a five paragraph essay that agrees or disagrees with the quotation. Support your opinion with information from the various document used in the lesson, information from class, and information acquired from your own research.

“Civil liberties came under attack in the United States during the years World War I as a result of actions of the Federal government.”