

Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: World War I Unit

This lesson was created by educators working with the Alabama Department of Archives as part of the "[Using Primary Sources in the Classroom](#)" project in 1996.

Lesson 2: A Question of Honor - The Selective Service

Background information for teachers:

Even before America entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson had embarked on a "preparedness program" to marshal the resources of the nation for war if it should come. The program included plans to stimulate industrial production, augment the number of merchant and naval ships, and increase the size of the army. All were underway by the time the United States declared war on April 6, 1917. Efforts in each of these areas would have a strong impact on the state: Birmingham was a leading steel producer, Mobile was an important shipbuilding center, and Alabama would contribute 74,000 draftees to the cause.

While Alabamians united with their fellow Americans behind the war effort, some doubts remained about their country's involvement in a fight primarily between distant European powers. Some were suspicious of the blind patriotism of those who urged American participation, while others had reservations about the legality or necessity of conscription, the first "draft" of Americans to fight since the Civil War. They expressed these concerns to their representatives in Washington, D.C., who themselves had some misgivings about America's entry into the war.

Content Standards:

Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies (2010)

- 4th Grade:
 - 11. Describe the impact of World War I on Alabamians, including the migration of African Americans from Alabama to the North and West, utilization of Alabama's military installations and training facilities, and increased production of goods for the war effort.
 - Recognizing Alabama participants in World War I, including Alabama's 167th Regiment of the Rainbow Division
 - Identifying World War I technologies, including airplanes, machine guns, and chemical warfare
- 6th Grade:
 - 3. Identify causes and consequences of World War I and reasons for the United States' entry into the war.
 - Examples: sinking of the Lusitania, Zimmerman Note, alliances, militarism, imperialism, nationalism
 - Describing military and civilian roles in the United States during World War I
 - Explaining roles of important persons associated with World War I, including

Woodrow Wilson and Archduke Franz Ferdinand

- Analyzing technological advances of the World War I era for their impact on modern warfare
 - Examples: machine gun, tank, submarine, airplane, poisonous gas, gas mask
 - Locating on a map major countries involved in World War I and boundary changes after the war
 - Explaining the intensification of isolationism in the United States after World War I
 - Example: reaction of the Congress of the United States to the Treaty of Versailles, League of Nations, and Red Scare
 - Recognizing the strategic placement of military bases in Alabama
- Grade:
- 11th Grade:
 - 4. Describe causes, events, and the impact of military involvement of the United States in World War I, including mobilization and economic and political changes.
 - Identifying the role of militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism in World War I
 - Explaining controversies over the Treaty of Versailles of 1919, Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the League of Nations
 - Explaining how the Treaty of Versailles led to worsening economic and political conditions in Europe, including greater opportunities for the rise of fascist states in Germany, Italy, and Spain
 - Comparing short- and long-term effects of changing boundaries in pre- and post-World War I in Europe and the Middle East, leading to the creation of new countries

National Standards for History

- Era 7 The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930)
 - Standard 1: How Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption
 - Standard 2: The changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I
 - Standard 3: How the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression:

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

- Standard 2 – Time, Continuity, and Change
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of the past and its legacy
- Standard 3 – People, Places, and Environments
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments
- Standard 5 – Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutions
- Standard 6 – Power, Authority, and Governance

- Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of how people create, interact with, and change structures of power, authority, and governance.

Learning Objectives:

Upon completion of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define conscription.
2. Define jingoism and jingoism.
3. Relate the chronological order of documents to the events of the specified time period.
4. Describe the preparedness program as presented by President Wilson.
5. Describe the importance of a non-voting portion of the population to a democracy.
6. Analyze the importance of economic concerns upon national policy.
7. Synthesize a response to the issue of conscription.

Suggested Activities:

1. Make a copy of each of the following documents for each student.
2. Ask the students to arrange the documents in chronological order.
3. The students should discuss the following questions:
 - a. Define the term *conscription*.
 - b. Using reference material, describe the preparedness program as outlined by Pres. Wilson. What were some of the major concerns of Alabamians concerning the preparedness program as advocated by President Wilson?
 - c. Define *jingoism* and *jingoism* as used by Senator Bankhead and by Mrs. C. J. Barnes in her letter to Senator Bankhead.
 - d. Why did Senator Bankhead support the increase of naval forces and oppose the increase of army forces? Would the shipbuilding activities of Mobile and the steel production activities of Birmingham have any impact on his decisions? Why or why not? Would the rural composition of Alabama have any impact upon his decisions? Why or why not?
 - e. Does Senator Bankhead's stance on conscription change by 1917? Why or why not?
 - f. Women got the right to vote in 1920 with the passage of the Nineteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Do you think that the letters from Alabama women were important to Senator Bankhead? Why or why not? Did he have an obligation to answer the concerns of women in Alabama? Why or why not?
 - g. What is a *petition*? What is the purpose of a petition? What is the purpose of this petition? What can you determine about the people who have signed the petition of May 10, 1917? What additional information would you wish to have if this petition had been mailed to you?
4. Assign each student one of the following roles. Have the students write a letter to Senator Bankhead which would explain their positions concerning conscription prior to the declaration of war. Remind students that educational and social backgrounds, as well as age, sex, religious beliefs and economic ability will affect the stance of the role which they are assigned concerning this issue.
 - a. Farmer, age 21
 - b. Sharecropper, age 45
 - c. Wife of cotton merchant, age 32
 - d. Wife of farmer, age 22

- e. Widow of merchant, age 56
- f. Widow of farmer, age 42
- g. County sheriff, age 39
- h. Teacher, age 60
- i. Farmer, age 64
- j. Carpenter, age 41
- k. Blacksmith, age 53
- l. Wife of Sharecropper, age 28
- m. Mayor of small town, age 64
- n. Cotton mill worker, age 19
- o. Cotton mill supervisor, age 48
- p. Rabbi, age 39
- q. Baptist minister, age 52
- r. Banker, age 31
- s. Doctor, age 69
- t. Domestic servant, age 48
- u. Prisoner, age 22
- v. City policeman, age 37
- w. Cook, age 58
- x. Rural veterinarian, age 37
- y. Male student, age 15
- z. Mine worker, age 29

Primary Sources:

[Document 1](#): Burgess, J. L., Huntsville, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 9 April 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 2](#): Burgess, J. L. , Huntsville, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 11 April 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 3](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H. , Washington, D.C., to J. L. Burgess, Huntsville, Alabama, 14 April 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama. (Documents 1-3 are on the same webpage)

[Document 4](#): Peete, B. B., D. C. Peete, J. F. Peete, James Owens, and Willie Williams, Madison, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 25 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 5](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H., Washington, D.C., to B. B. Peete, D. C. Peete, J. F. Peete, James Owens, and Willie Williams, Madison, Alabama, 28 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama. (Documents 4-5 are on the same webpage)

[Document 6](#): Statham, R. A., Lehigh, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 10 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 7](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H., Washington, D.C., to R. A. Statham, Lehigh, Alabama, 14 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama. (Documents 6-7 are on the same webpage)

[Document 8](#): Barnes, Mr. & Mrs. C. J., Birmingham, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 3 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 9](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H., Washington D.C., to Mr. & Mrs. C. J. Barnes, Birmingham, Alabama, 6 January 1916. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 30, Folder 8, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama. (Documents 8-9 are on the same webpage)

[Document 10](#): Elliott, Mrs. I. W., Talladega, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 10 January 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 11](#): Wallace, Mrs. Neil R. to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., [1917]. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 7, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 12](#): Thompson, Juney, Siluria, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 9 May 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 13](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H. , Washington, D.C., to Juney Thompson, Siluria, Alabama, 14 May 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.(Documents 12-13 are on the same webpage)

[Document 14](#): May, Sheriff John A., Dothan, Alabama, to Hon. John H. Bankhead, Washington, D.C., 23 April 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.

[Document 15](#): Bankhead, Hon. John H., Washington, D.C., to Sheriff John A. May, Dothan, Alabama, 27 April 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.(Documents 14-15)

[Document 16](#): "Petition Against Sending Our Young Men to War in Europe," 10 May 1917. John H. Bankhead Papers, LPR 49, Container 31, Folder 6, Alabama Department of Archives & History, Montgomery, Alabama.