

Activity 1: Should the Neutrality Acts be revised?

Student Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Read the following document, using the questions below to guide your reading.

Question	Answer
What is Roosevelt's purpose in making this speech?	
What role does Roosevelt see for the United States relative to the European war?	
Why, according to Roosevelt, should Americans care about what is going on in Europe?	
Why does the president make a point of saying that he "cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought"?	

Excerpts from Franklin D. Roosevelt, Radio Address, September 3, 1939:

http://www.millercenter.virginia.edu/scripps/digitalarchive/speeches/spe_1939_0903_roosevelt

President Roosevelt delivered the following radio address to the American people just after the outbreak of World War II in Europe.

Tonight my single duty is to speak to the whole of America.

Until 4:30 this morning I had hoped against hope that some miracle would prevent a devastating war in Europe and bring to an end the invasion of Poland by Germany.

For 4 long years a succession of actual wars and constant crises have shaken the entire world and have threatened in each case to bring on the gigantic conflict which is today unhappily a fact.

It is right that I should recall to your minds the consistent and at times successful efforts of your Government in these crises to throw the full weight of the United States into the cause of peace. In spite of spreading wars I think that we have every right and every reason to maintain as a national policy the fundamental moralities, the teachings of religion, and the continuation of efforts to restore peace—for some day, though the time may be distant, we can be of even greater help to a crippled humanity.

It is right, too, to point out that the unfortunate events of these recent years have been based on the use of force or the threat of force. And it seems to me clear, even at the outbreak of this great war, that the influence of America should be consistent in seeking for humanity a final peace which will eliminate, as far as it is possible to do so, the continued use of force between nations....

You must master at the outset a simple but unalterable fact in modern foreign relations. When peace has been broken anywhere, peace of all countries everywhere is in danger.

It is easy for you and me to shrug our shoulders and say that conflicts taking place thousands of miles from the continental United States, and, indeed, the whole American hemisphere, do not seriously affect the Americas—and that all the United States has to do is to ignore them and go about our own business. Passionately though we may desire detachment, we are forced to realize that every word that comes through the air, every ship that sails the sea, every battle that is fought does affect the American future.

Let no man or woman thoughtlessly or falsely talk of America sending its armies to European fields. At this moment there is being prepared a proclamation of American neutrality. This would have been done even if there had been no neutrality statute on the books, for this proclamation is in accordance with international law and with American policy....

We have certain ideas and ideals of national safety, and we must act to preserve that safety today and to preserve the safety of our children in future years.

That safety is and will be bound up with the safety of the Western Hemisphere and of the seas adjacent thereto. We seek to keep war from our firesides by keeping war from coming to the Americas. For that we have historic precedent that goes back to the days of the administration of President George Washington. It is serious enough and tragic enough to every American family in every State in the Union to live in a world that is torn by wars on other continents. Today they affect every American home. It is our national duty to use every effort to keep them out of the Americas....

This Nation will remain a neutral nation, but I cannot ask that every American remain neutral in thought as well. Even a neutral has a right to take account of facts. Even a neutral cannot be asked to close his mind or his conscience.

I have said not once but many times that I have seen war and that I hate war. I say that again and again. I hope the United States will keep out of this war. I believe that it will. And I give you assurances that every effort of your Government will be directed toward that end.

As long as it remains within my power to prevent, there will be no blackout of peace in the United States.

Activity 1: Should the Neutrality Acts be revised?

Student Name _____ Date _____

Directions: Imagine that you are a member of Congress in 1939, and must decide whether or not to support President Roosevelt’s proposal to revise the neutrality laws. Read the following documents to help make up your mind. As you read, complete the graphic organizer that follows to help lay out your arguments.

Excerpts from Franklin D. Roosevelt, Address before Congress, September 21, 1939:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=706>

Less than three weeks after making his neutrality pronouncement the president made the following speech before a joint session of Congress, asking for a repeal of the arms embargo provisions of the neutrality laws.

For many years the primary purpose of our foreign policy has been that this Nation and this Government should strive to the utmost to aid in avoiding war among other nations. But if and when war unhappily comes, the Government and the Nation must exert every possible effort to avoid being drawn into the war.

The executive branch of the Government did its utmost, within our traditional policy of noninvolvement, to aid in averting the present appalling war. Having thus striven and failed, this Government must lose no time or effort to keep the Nation from being drawn into the war.

In my candid judgment we shall succeed in these efforts.

Beginning with the foundation of our constitutional government in the year 1789, the American policy in respect to belligerent nations, with one notable exception, has been based on international law. Be it remembered that what we call international law has had as its primary objectives the avoidance of causes of war and the prevention of the extension of war.

The single exception was the policy adopted by this Nation during the Napoleonic Wars, when, seeking to avoid involvement, we acted for some years under the so-called Embargo and Non-Intercourse Acts. That policy turned out to be a disastrous failure—first, because it brought our own nation close to ruin, and, second, because it was the major cause of bringing us into active participation in European wars in our own War of 1812. It is merely reciting history to recall to you that one of the results of the policy of embargo and non-intercourse was the burning in 1814 of part of this Capitol in which we are assembled.

Our next deviation by statute from the sound principles of neutrality and peace through international law did not come for 130 years. It was the so-called Neutrality Act of 1935—only 4 years ago—an act continued in force by the joint resolution of May 1, 1937, despite grave doubts expressed as to its

wisdom by many Senators and Representatives and by officials charged with the conduct of our foreign relations, including myself. I regret that the act. I regret equally that I signed that act.

On July fourteenth of this year I asked the Congress in the cause of peace and in the interest of real American neutrality and to take action to change that act.

I now ask again that such action be taken in respect to of the act which is wholly inconsistent with ancient precepts of the law of nations—the [arms] embargo provisions. I ask it because they are, in my opinion, most vitally dangerous to American neutrality, American security, and American peace.

I seek a greater consistency through the repeal of the embargo provisions and a return to international law. I seek reenactment of the historic and traditional American policy which...has served us well for nearly a century and a half.

It has been erroneously said that return to that policy might bring us nearer to war. I give to you my deep and unalterable conviction, based on years of experience as a worker in the field of international peace, that by the repeal of the embargo the United States will more probably remain at peace than if the law remains as it stands today. I say this because with the repeal of the embargo this Government clearly and definitely will insist that American citizens and American ships keep away from the immediate perils of the actual zones of conflict....

To those who say that this program would involve a step toward war on our part, I reply that it offers far greater safeguards than we now possess or have ever possessed to protect American lives and property from danger. It is a positive program for giving safety. This means less likelihood of incidents and controversies which tend to draw us into conflict, as they did in the last World War. There lies the road to peace!

I should like to be able to offer the hope that the shadow over the world might swiftly pass. I cannot. The facts compel my stating, with candor, that darker periods may lie ahead. The disaster is not of our making; no act of ours engendered the forces which assault the foundations of civilization. Yet we find ourselves affected to the core; our currents of commerce are changing, our minds are filled with new problems, our position in world affairs has already been altered.

In such circumstances our policy must be to appreciate in the deepest sense the true American interest. Rightly considered, this interest is not selfish. Destiny first made us, with our sister nations on this hemisphere, joint heirs of European culture. Fate seems now to compel us to assume the task of helping to maintain in the western world a citadel wherein that civilization may be kept alive. The peace, the integrity, and the safety of the Americas—these must be kept firm and serene. In a period when it is sometimes said that free discussion is no longer compatible with national safety, may you by your deeds show the world that we of the United States are one people, of one mind, one spirit, one clear resolution, walking before God in the light of the living.

Excerpts from a Radio Address by Charles Lindbergh, “Neutrality and War,” October 13, 1939:
<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1598>

One of the country’s leading opponents to Roosevelt’s foreign policy was Charles Lindbergh, the famous pilot who in 1927 became the first man to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. During the late 1930s he traveled widely in Europe, and was particularly impressed by the air power of Nazi Germany.

Like most of the opponents of revision, he recognized that because the British and French navies had almost complete control of the seas, lifting the arms embargo would in practice only help the Allies.

It is argued that the repeal of this embargo would assist democracy in Europe, that it would let us make a profit for ourselves from the sale of munitions abroad, and, at the same time, help to build up our own arms industry.

I do not believe that repealing the arms embargo would assist democracy in Europe—because I do not believe this is a war for democracy. This is a war over the balance of power in Europe; a war brought about by the desire for strength on the part of Germany and the fear of strength on the part of England and France. The munitions the armies obtain, the longer the war goes on, and the more devastated Europe becomes, the less hope there is for democracy. That is a lesson we should have learned from participation in the last war. If democratic principles had been applied in Europe after that war, if the "democracies" of Europe had been willing to make some sacrifice to help democracy in Europe while it was fighting for its life, if England and France had offered a hand to the struggling republic of Germany, there would be no war today.

If we repeal the arms embargo with the idea of assisting one of the warring sides to overcome the other, then why mislead ourselves by talk of neutrality? Those who advance this argument should admit openly that repeal is a step toward war. The next step would be the extension of credit, and the next step would be the sending of American troops.

To those who argue that we could make a profit and build up our own industry by selling munitions abroad, I reply that we in America have not yet reached a point where we wish to capitalize on the destruction and death of war. I do not believe that the material welfare of this country needs, or that our spiritual welfare could withstand, such a policy. If our industry depends upon a commerce of arms for its strength, then our industrial system should be changed.

It is impossible for me to understand how America can contribute civilization and humanity by sending offensive instruments of destruction to European battlefields. This would not only implicate us in the war, but it would make us partly responsible for its devastation. The fallacy of helping to defend a political ideology, even though it be somewhat similar to our own, was clearly demonstrated to us in the last war. Through our help that war was won, but neither the democracy nor the justice for which we fought grew in the peace that followed our victory.

Our bond with Europe is a bond of race and not of political ideology. We had to fight a European army to establish democracy in this country. It is the European race we must preserve; political progress will follow. Racial strength is vital politics, a luxury. If the white race is ever seriously threatened, it may then be time for us to take our part in its protection, to fight side by side with the English, French, and Germans, but not with one against the other for our mutual destruction.

Let us not dissipate our strength, or help Europe to dissipate hers, in these wars of politics and possession. For the benefit of western civilization, we should continue our embargo on offensive armaments. As far as purely defensive arms are concerned, I, for one, am in favor of supplying European countries with as much as we can spare of the material that falls within this category. There are technicians who will argue that offensive and defensive arms cannot be separated completely. That is true, but it is no more difficult to make a list of defensive weapons than it is to separate munitions of war from semi-manufactured articles, and we are faced with that problem today. No one says that we should sell opium because it is difficult to make a list of narcotics. I would as soon see our country traffic in

opium as in bombs. There are certain borderline cases, but there are plenty of clear cut examples: for instance, the bombing plane and the anti-aircraft cannon. I do not want to see American bombers dropping bombs which will kill and mutilate European children, even if they are not flown by American pilots. But I am perfectly willing to see American anti-aircraft guns shooting American shells at invading bombers over any European country. And I believe that most of you who are listening tonight will agree with me.

Reasons for Amending the Neutrality Acts	Reasons against Amending the Neutrality Acts

Activity 1: Should the Neutrality Acts be revised?

Student Name _____ Date _____

Directions: You and a partner have been assigned to debate silently the merits of President Roosevelt’s proposal to remove the arms embargo provisions of the Neutrality Acts. The student who has been selected to defend the president’s proposal should go first, writing in the left-hand column a reason why the embargo should be lifted. Then the other student should, in the right-hand column, offer a reason why it should be maintained. The silent debate should continue until one side or the other runs out of arguments.

The arms embargo should be lifted because...	The arms embargo should be kept because...

Student Name _____ Date _____

Activity 2: Should Aid be sent to Great Britain?

Directions: Use the interactive timeline “America on the Sidelines” [<http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/neh/interactives/neutralty>] to follow events in Europe from September 1939 through December 1940. For each event read the overview, then, on a blank map of Europe, mark the locations that are shown on the map to the left. When you are finished, click on “Select a Course of Action.” This will produce a menu of options on the right-hand site of the page; select the one that you think the Roosevelt administration actually chose. After you have chosen the correct option, read the paragraph at the bottom of the page before moving on to the next event. For a deeper understanding of these events, read the materials that appear when you click on the line “Click to read a contemporary document.”

After you have finished read the following documents. Based on your understanding of world conditions, and on the contents of the documents, imagine that you are President Roosevelt. Write a five-paragraph letter to Winston Churchill responding to his request for aid. Your letter should make reference to each of the things Churchill asks for, explaining why the United States will or will not do as he asks. Remember that your options as president are constrained by the provisions of the neutrality laws.

Winston Churchill to Franklin D. Roosevelt, December 7, 1940:
http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/website_online_version/psf/box34/a311s02.html

Winston Churchill had become Prime Minister of Great Britain in April 1940. He would remain the dominant figure in British politics throughout the war, and is most remembered today for his steadfast refusal to surrender to Hitler, even after all of Britain’s European allies had been defeated.

As we reach the end of this year I feel that you will expect me to lay before you the prospects for 1941. I do so strongly and confidently because it seems to me that the vast majority of American citizens have recorded their conviction that the safety of the United States as well as the future of our two democracies and the kind of civilization for which they stand are bound up with the survival and independence of the British Commonwealth of Nations. Only thus can those bastions of sea power, upon which the control of the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans depends, be preserved in faithful and friendly hands. The control of the Pacific by the United States Navy and of the Atlantic by the British Navy is indispensable to the security of the trade routes both our countries and the surest means to preventing the war from reaching the shores of the United States....

3. The form which this war has taken, and seems likely to hold, does not enable us to match the immense armies of Germany in any theatre where their main power can be brought to bear. We can however by the use of sea power and air power meet the German armies in the regions where only comparatively small forces can be brought into action. We must do our best to prevent German

domination of Europe spreading into Africa and into Southern Asia. We have also to maintain in constant readiness in this Island armies strong enough to make the problem of an overseas invasion insoluble. For those purposes we are forming as fast as possible, as you are already aware, between fifty and sixty divisions. Even if the United States was our ally instead of our indispensable partner we should not ask for a large American expeditionary army. Shipping, not men, is the limiting factor and the power to transport munitions and supplies claims priority over the movement by sea of large numbers of soldiers....

5. The danger of Great Britain being destroyed by a swift overwhelming blow has for the time being very greatly receded. In its place there is a gradually maturing danger, less sudden and less spectacular but equally deadly. This mortal danger is the steady and increasing diminution of sea tonnage. We can endure the shattering of our dwellings and the slaughter of our civilian population by indiscriminate air attacks and we hope to parry these increasingly as our science develops and to repay them upon military objectives in Germany as force more nearly approaches the strength of the enemy. The decision for 1941 lies upon the seas; unless we can establish our ability to feed this Island, and to import munitions of all kinds which we need, unless we can move our armies to the various theatres where Hitler and his confederate Mussolini must be met, and maintain them there and do all this with the assurance of being able to carry it on till the spirit of the continental dictators is broken, we may fall by the way and the time needed by the United States to complete her defensive preparations may not be forthcoming. It is therefore in shipping and in the power to transport across the oceans, particularly the Atlantic Ocean, that in 1941 the crunch of the whole war will be found. If on the other hand we are able to move the necessary tonnage to and fro across the salt water indefinitely, it may well be that the application of superior air power to the German homeland and the rising anger of the German and other Nazi-gripped populations will bring the agony of civilization to a merciful and glorious end. But do not let us underrate the task.

6. Our shipping losses...have been on a scale...comparable to that of the worst years of the first war [World War I]. In the 5 weeks ending November 3rd they have reached a total of 420,500 tons. Our estimation of the annual tonnage which ought to be imported in order to maintain our war effort at full strength 43,000,000 tons; the tonnage entering in September was only at the rate of 37,000,000 tons and in October at 38,000,000 tons. Were the diminution to continue to continue at this rate it would be fatal, unless indeed immensely greater replenishment than anything at present in sight could be achieved in time....

12. The prime need is to check or limit the loss of tonnage on the Atlantic approaches to our Islands. This may be achieved both by increasing the naval forces, which cope with attacks, and by adding to the number of merchant ships on which we depend. For the first purpose there would seem to be the following alternatives:

(1) the reassertion by the United States of the doctrine of the freedom of the seas from illegal and barbarous warfare in accordance with the decisions reached after the late Great War.... From this, the United States ships should be free to trade with countries against which there is not an effective legal blockade.

(2) It would, I suggest, follow that protection should be given to this lawful trading by United States forces i.e. escorting battleships, cruisers, destroyers and air flotillas.... I think it is improbable that such protection would provoke a declaration of war by Germany upon the United States though probably sea incidents of a dangerous character would from time to time occur. Hitler has shown himself inclined to avoid the Kaiser's mistake [that is, of having German submarines sink U.S. merchant ships]. He does not

wish to be drawn into war with the United States until he has gravely undermined the power of Great Britain. His maxim is "one at a time". The policy I have ventured to outline, or something like it, would constitute a decisive act of constructive non-belligerency by the United States, and more than any other measure would make it certain that British resistance could be effectively prolonged for the desired period and victory gained.

(3) Failing the above, the gift, loan or supply of a large number of American vessels of war, above all destroyers already in the Atlantic, is indispensable to the maintenance of the Atlantic route. Further, could not United States naval forces extend their sea control over the American side of the Atlantic, so as to prevent molestation by enemy vessels of the approaches to the new line of naval and air bases which the United States is establishing in British islands in the Western Hemisphere. The strength of the United States rival forces is such that the assistance in the Atlantic that they could afford us, as described above, would not jeopardize control over the Pacific....

13. The object of the foregoing measures is to reduce to manageable proportions the present destructive losses at sea. In addition it is indispensable that the merchant tonnage available for supplying Great Britain and for the waging of the war by Great Britain with all vigor, should be substantially increased beyond the one and a quarter million tons per annum which is the utmost we can now build. The convoy system, the detours, the zig zags [to avoid torpedoes], the great distances from which we now have to bring our imports, and the congestion of our western, harbors, have reduced by about one third the value of our existing tonnage. To ensure final victory, not less than three million tons of additional merchant shipbuilding capacity will be required. Only the United States can supply this need....

14. Moreover we look to the industrial energy of the Republic for a reinforcement of our domestic capacity to manufacture combat aircraft. Without that reinforcement reaching us in a substantial measure, we shall not achieve the massive preponderance in the air on which we must rely to loosen and disintegrate the German grip on Europe....

15. You have also received information about our armies. In the munitions sphere, in spite of enemy bombing, we are making steady progress. Without your continued assistance in supply of machine tools and in the further release from stock of certain articles we could not hope to equip as many as 50 divisions in 1941.... But when the tide of dictatorship begins to recede, many countries, trying to regain their freedom, may be asking for arms, and there is no source to which they can look except to the factories of the United States. I must therefore also urge the importance of expanding to the utmost American productive capacity for small arms, artillery and tanks....

17. Last of all I come to the question of finance. The more rapid and abundant the flow of munitions and ships which you are able to send us, the sooner will our dollar credits, be exhausted.... The moment approaches when we shall no longer be able to pay cash for shipping and other supplies. While we will do our utmost and shrink from no proper sacrifice to make payments across the exchange, I believe that you will agree that it would be wrong in principle and mutually disadvantageous in effect if, at the height of this struggle, Great Britain were to be divested of all saleable assets so that after victory was won with our blood, civilization saved and time gained for the United States to be fully armed against all eventualities, we should stand stripped to the bone. Such a course would not be in the moral or economic interests of either of our countries....

18. Moreover I do not believe the Government and people of the United States would find it in accordance with the principles which guide them, to confine the help which they have so generously promised only to such munitions of war and commodities as could be immediately paid for. You may be

assured that we shall prove ourselves ready to suffer and sacrifice to the utmost for the Cause, and that we glory in being its champion. The rest we leave with confidence to you and to your people, being sure that ways and means will be found which future generations on both sides of the Atlantic will approve and admire.

19. If, as I believe, you are convinced, Mr. President, that the defeat of the Nazi and Fascist tyranny is a matter of high consequence to the people of the United States and to the Western Hemisphere, you will regard this letter not as an appeal for aid, but as a statement of the action necessary to the achievement of our common purpose.

Telegram from the Ambassador to Great Britain (Joseph P. Kennedy) to the Secretary of State, June 12, 1940: <http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/psf/box3/a38o01.html>

Although he is perhaps best known today as the father of President John F. Kennedy, Joseph P. Kennedy was an important figure in his own right. A millionaire financier and major contributor to the Democratic Party, he served in several prominent positions during Franklin Roosevelt's administration, and was ambassador to Great Britain from 1938 to 1940. His time in England convinced him that Germany was likely to win any war between the two powers; he therefore supported a policy of "appeasement"—that is, offering concessions to Hitler in the hope that his government might become more reasonable.

[...] The condition of Britain's preparedness...still appears to be appallingly weak. I am of the opinion that...the real defence of England will be with courage and not with arms. No matter what action the United States takes towards this war it is only fair to say that short of a miracle this country...will hold on in the hope that the United States will come in. Churchill said quite definitely to me he expects the United States will be in right after the election; that when the people in the United States see the towns and cities of England, after which so many American cities and towns have been named, bombed and destroyed they will line up and want war. The people here are kept buoyed up by the inference [that is, the inference that the American people will demand a declaration of war against Germany] in the papers and the publication of clippings from the NEW YORK TIMES, HERALD TRIBUNE and political speeches. This morning an American correspondent of an English paper mentions that all it needs is an "incident" to bring the United States in. If that were all that were needed desperate people will do desperate things. The point of all this is the fact that the preparedness for carrying on a war here is pitiful, this in spite of the fact that production and war effort are now for the first time going ahead in urgently fashion. We should know this in the light of any action we in America might see fit to take. A course of action that involves us in any respect that presupposes the Allies have much to fight with except courage is, as far as England goes, I think fallacious. The United States would have nothing to work with with [England] in [its] present condition. Unless...England...[can] deal Germany really crippling blows [aimed] at her industrial production and seriously affect her strength in the air and in tanks..., the United States will have plenty to worry about in their own country....