

# Peace Without Victory

## An Agreement Built on Quicksand

Prior to entering the war on the side of the Allies, President Woodrow Wilson stood before a joint session of Congress on 22 January 1917, and declared that America must maintain neutrality in the Great War that was ravaging Europe. In his congressional address he outlined a vision for a just and peaceful world including freedom of the seas, and an international agreement to avoid arms races while positioning the United States to act as a mediating force when calling for peace without victory. Stating that "victory would mean peace forced upon a loser, a victor's terms imposed upon the vanquished," Wilson predicted that in a conflict of such scale, any declaration of victory by one side would force the other to accept under duress "an intolerable sacrifice and humiliation" by admitting defeat. This type of peace would leave a sting of bitter resentment on which terms of peace would rest, but not last.



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King and People Alike Rejoiced In London Over Signing of Armistice



VAST THRONGS GATHERED BEFORE BUCKINGHAM PALACE IN LONDON NOV. 11 AND CHEERED THE KING WHEN HE APPEARED ON THE BALCONY.  
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When President Wilson's policy of cautious neutrality evaporated, America entered the fight on the European continent. By 1918, Americans turned the tide in favor of the Allies to overwhelm the collapsing Central Powers with the difficult decision of peacemaking to follow.

While both the French and British wanted to ensure Germany paid a heavy price, armed with his Fourteen Points, President Wilson urged for “peace without victory” at the Paris Peace Conference. Advocating for the creation of the League of Nations and the establishment of a new international system as part of the Treaty of Versailles, President Wilson thought it would not be wise to force an agreement upon a reluctant and defeated Germany. Placing peaceful hopes in an unprecedented organization for resolving interstate conflicts between larger and smaller countries, the League of Nations proved an ideal too early for the times with the American Congress refusing to join the league or ratify the treaty imposed on Germany. Ultimately, President Wilson’s years of well-intended international diplomacy turned to tragedy as his own partisanship proved a major factor in bringing about an Allied victory making lasting peace impossible.

**Directions:** Examine what the future held for a defeated Germany and ponder the alternatives should an alternative treaty have been negotiated. Evaluate the terms of the Armistice signed with Germany and other belligerent nations in the primary documents provided, then in pairs or as a class complete the activities provided.

1. Role-play the various nations that made up the Paris Peace Conference and discuss their positions. Alternate turns role-playing diplomats advocating and conversely criticizing the stipulations in the Treaty of Versailles.
2. Reach a consensus as a class on a treaty that would have been reasonable for Germany to accept after World War I.

*Treaty of Versailles:* <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf>