

SECRET CODES FROM THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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Secret Codes from the First World War

Skill Level

Grades 6-8

Learner Outcomes

The learner will be able to:

- Understand the role secret codes played in the First World War
- Identify the reasons the United States joined the First World War
- Discuss ways to use secret codes in today's society

Educational Standard(s) Supported

School Counseling and Career Guidance, Standard 7

Success Indicator

Learners will be successful if they:

- Understand the reasons why the US entered World War I
- Create secret codes for modern messages

Time Needed

45 Minutes

Materials List

Copies of the deciphering grid, 10 copies
Copies of each sentence in the Zimmermann Telegraph

Introduction to Content

This lesson explores secret codes used during the First World War. Students are introduced to the history of the codes and why they were used. Students then learn about how codes are made, and finally create their own.

Introduction to Methodology

This lesson begins by introducing students to the concept of secret codes by giving some background information. Students are then given the opportunity to decode a secret code that triggered the US's entrance into the First World War. Students then create their own secret coded tweets.

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Terms and Concepts Introduction

Zimmermann Telegraph- A secret diplomatic communication issued from the German Foreign Office in January 1917 that proposed a military alliance between Germany and Mexico in the event of the United States entering World War I against Germany.

Setting the Stage and Opening Questions

Say to the students, **“Codes have been used for a long time to send secret messages. Today, you will decipher the code that led to the US entering World War I.”**

Share the following video with the students to allow them to gain a background knowledge of the Zimmermann Telegraph:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXjLEMHbTgo>

After students have watched the video, write the word “cypher” on the board. Ask students to brainstorm a definition of the word, then share the definition of cypher with the students.

Cypher- A secret or disguised way of writing. A code.

Tips for Engagement

Experience

Ask students to form 10 groups. After the groups have been formed, pass out the decoding cypher to each group and one line of the telegraph.

Say to the students, **“You all now have a copy of the decoding cypher, which is a secret way of writing, and a line from the Zimmermann telegraph. You’ll use the cypher to decode the telegraph. To give you an example of how to use the cypher, we are going to decode our own short message.”**

Write the following text on the board: FFGDD AVVFX AVAFD GVX. Say to the students **“Each pair of letters in the code corresponds to one letter in the message. The first letter of each pair corresponds to the vertical axis on the cypher, and the second letter corresponds to the horizontal axis. Let’s look at each pair and decode the message as a class.”**

Work through decoding the message above as a class. When finished, the message should read: 4H IS GREAT

Share

After students have decoded the message as a class, say to them, “Now it’s your turn. In your team, work to decide your line from the Zimmermann Telegraph. When you have finished, come up to me to check it, and if it’s correct, we will write it on the board.”

The text of the decoded message has been included in the supplemental information.

Process

After each line has been decoded, ask students to interpret what was meant by the telegraph and share it with the class.

Generalize

Ask students to write a tweet (280 characters) about something appropriate they want to share using the secret message. After they have written the tweet, ask them to convert it into a coded message using the cypher.

Apply

After students have converted their tweets, ask them to share their tweet with someone else in the class and have them decode it.

Life Skill(s) from TIPP(s) for 4-H

6th Grade

Understand why knowledge of different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups are important (Heart Relating)

Clearly state your needs and feelings to others (Heart Relating)

Make an action plan to achieve a goal (Head Thinking)

Understand the meaning of the information (Head Thinking)

7th Grade

Identify possible solutions to a problem or situation (Head Thinking)

8th Grade

Communicate effectively (Hands Working)

Share some interest and goals with others (Heart Caring)

Supplemental Information

Educational Standards Met

Standard 7: Self Knowledge and Interpersonal Skills

Students will acquire the attitudes, knowledge, and interpersonal skills to help them understand and respect self and others

February 22, 1917

To: von Eckhardt

Mexico City

British crack top secret code. U.S. press may leak German plot with Mexico. Prepare to leave embassy on short notice.

Bernstorff
Washington, DC