

1812: Congress's First Declaration of War Under the Constitution

Worksheet 4: Document Study—The “War Manifesto,” House Foreign Relations Committee Report on a Declaration of War, June 3, 1812

Instructions: Answer the following questions about the House Foreign Relations Committee Report. Select a spokesperson to report your discussion to the class.

1. Identifying key evidence in the text:
 - a. On what occasion was the Foreign Affairs Committee reporting to the full House of Representatives?
 - b. What facts related to foreign affairs did the Committee report?
 - c. What was the Committee asking Congress to do?
2. Determining the central ideas:
 - a. To what extent did this report repeat allegations from President James Madison's Annual Message of November 5, 1811?
 - b. In what ways did this report draw upon the Declaration of Independence as a model? Cite from the report to support your answer.
3. Identifying the logic of their argument:
 - a. Why did the committee feel war was the only appropriate response to the situation the nation faced?
 - b. What was the importance of the “impartial world” in this report?
 - c. Against what British passions was the logic of the United States contrasted? How did this contrast contribute to the power of the report?

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4. Taking stock of the vocabulary used in the document: Define the following words:
 - dispassionate
 - forbearance
 - vindicate
 - degradation
 - tyranny
 - sovereignty
 - edicts
 - redress
 - degeneracy
5. Understand how a text presents information:
 - a. Approximately how much of the information presented in the report was factual and how much was intended to persuade readers to act?
 - b. Provide examples of each.
6. Identify point of view:
 - a. According to the Committee's report, how dangerous was the national situation?
 - b. How strongly did the Committee feel about the issue? Provide two examples of language the Committee used to convey its point of view.
7. Optional question: What details of the facsimile of the War Manifesto contribute to historical insights not conveyed by the transcript of the document?