MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE ZIMMERMANN TELEGRAM

All documents and text associated with this activity are printed below, followed by a worksheet for student responses.

Introduction

You will examine what’s known as the Zimmermann Telegram; but it’s really three documents. You will need to figure out how they go together to understand the full telegram.

For each document you see, carefully analyze and consider the following:
What kind of document is it?
Are there any symbols, letterhead, stamps, seals, notations or other markings?
When was the document created? Who created it?
Why did they create it?
TELEGRAM RECEIVED, SPECIAL GREEN

FROM

London,
Dated Feb. 24, 1917,
Rec’d 9:50 p.m.

Secretary of State,
Washington.

Mr. fifty-seven forty-six, February 24, 8 a.m.

CONFIDENTIAL FOR THE PRESIDENT AND THE SECRETARY OF STATE.

Balfour has handed me the text of a cipher telegram from Zimmerman, German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the German Minister to Mexico, which was sent via Washington and relayed by Bernstorff on January nineteenth. You can probably obtain a copy of the text relayed by Bernstorff from the cable office in Washington. The first group is the number of the telegram, one hundred and thirty, and the second is thirteen thousand and forty-two, indicating the number of the code used. The last group but two is ninety-seven thousand five hundred and fifty-six, which is Zimmerman’s signature. I shall send you by mail a copy of the cipher text and of the de-code into German and meanwhile I give you the English translation as follows:

"Ye
We intend to begin on the first of February unrestricted submarine warfare. We shall endeavor in spite of this to keep the United States of America neutral. In the event of this not succeeding, we make Mexico a proposal of alliance on the following basis: make war together, make peace together, generous financial support and an understanding on our part that Mexico is to reconquer the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona. The settlement in detail is left to you. You will inform the President of the above most secretly as soon as the outbreak of war with the United States of America is certain and add the suggestion that he should, on his own initiative, commence Japan to immediate adherence and at the same time mediate between Japan and ourselves. Please call the President's attention to the fact that the ruthless employment of our submarines now offers the prospect of compelling England in a few months to make peace.

Signed, ZIMMERMANN.

The receipt of this information has so greatly exercised the British Government that they have lost no time in communicating it to me to transmit to you, in order that our Government may be able without delay to make such disposition as may
TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

I. Office of the Sec. of War

Authority: letter 1-0-03

R. M. Anderson, State Dept.

FROM 3rd from London # 5747.

Date Oct 29, 14

May be necessary in view of the threatened invasion of our territory.

The following paragraph is strictly confidential.

Early in the war, the British Government obtained possession of a copy of the German cipher code used in the above message and have made it their business to obtain copies of Bernstorff’s cipher telegrams to Mexico, amongst others, which are sent back to London and deciphered here. This accounts for their being able to decipher this telegram from the German government to their representative in Mexico and also for the delay from January nineteenth until now in their receiving the information. This system has hitherto been a jealously guarded secret and is only divulged now to you by the British Government in view of the extraordinary circumstances and their friendly feeling towards the United States. They earnestly request that you will keep the source of your information and the British Government’s method of obtaining it profoundly secret but they put no prohibition on the publication of Zimmermann’s telegram itself.

The copies of this and other telegrams were not obtained in Washington but were bought in Mexico.

I
TELEGRAM RECEIVED.

FROM 4th from London #5747.

I have thanked Balfour for the service his Government has rendered us and suggest that a private official message of thanks from our Government to him would be beneficial.

I am informed that this information has not yet been given to the Japanese Government but I think it not unlikely that when it reaches them they may make a public statement on it in order to clear up their position regarding the United States and prove their good faith to their allies.
The Zimmermann Telegram

Making Connections

Examine the documents and text included in this activity. Fill in any blanks in the sequence with your thoughts and write your conclusion response in the space provided.

Answer the following questions in the next available blank text box. Cite specific evidence from the documents in your responses. What details can you decode/extract from the first two documents? How do the two documents relate to each other?
Answer the following questions in the next available blank text box. Cite specific evidence from the document in all of your responses. Focus particular attention on the decoded message on page 2 of the document (from “We intend to begin” through “Signed, Zimmermann”). According to the document: Who is the author of the telegram? Who was the intended audience? What was the overall purpose of the telegram?

Response
MAKING CONNECTIONS

THE ZIMMERMANN TELEGRAM

Conclusion
Do you think the United States should have entered World War I based on the Zimmermann Telegram alone? Why or why not?