

In-Progress Viewing Notes

Documentary: *The Century: America's Time* — 1914–1919: “Shell Shock”

Theme: *What happens to democracy during total war?*

Name:

Date:

How to use this sheet: Keep this sheet open as you watch. Each section is keyed to a segment of the documentary. Write specific names, scenes, and direct quotes when you can catch them. The laws from the pre-screening deck — Espionage Act, Sedition Act, Schenck, CPI — will not appear in the film. **You are the connection.** Photograph your completed notes and upload to Canvas (10 pts).

Section A — Opening: The Lusitania and the Road to War (approx. 0–13 min)

"Everyone thought the war would be over by Christmas — but they wanted to get to France to get the fighting."

— British veteran, Shell Shock

1. The film opens with the Lusitania sinking (May 1915). How does it frame this event emotionally — as a cause of U.S. entry, or as something else? What feeling is the film trying to create?

2. Wilson tells Congress in April 1917: "Right is more precious than peace." Write down his exact words if you can catch them — and note: what work is this phrase doing? Is it an argument, an appeal, or something else?

3. The film shows American life during the war years — Ford assembly lines, baseball, movie houses, the Great Migration. What does this portrait of America suggest about why going to war required a propaganda campaign?

Section B — The Trenches: Industrial Slaughter (approx. 13–27 min)

"We put dead bodies at the bottom of the trench... dead bodies on top to make it higher so we could walk a bit better."

— Eyewitness account, Shell Shock

4. Alan Seeger's diary describes life in the trenches as "living like animals in our holes in the ground." Write down any specific detail from the film about trench conditions that stands out to you.

5. The narrator describes men who "broke" — the victims of what was called shell shock. Write down how the film describes the condition. What language does it use? What does it suggest about how these men were viewed?

6. The Battle of the Somme: "It was the bloodiest day in British history — 20,000 men killed, 40,000 wounded." How does the film describe what soldiers were ordered to do the day after?

Section C — America Enters / The Home Front (approx. 27–40 min)

7. American soldiers arrive in France in 1917. The narrator says they were "untouched by the exhaustion that had affected everybody else." How are they described — and how does that contrast with what they were about to face?

8. The Russian Revolution appears mid-film. Lenin and the Bolsheviks are introduced. How does the film frame them? Does it present the revolution as a threat, a side story, or something more complicated?

9. Notice any moment in the film where dissent, hesitation, or opposition to the war appears — even briefly. Write it down. Who? What did they say or do? If you see none, note that absence.

Section D — Armistice, Veterans, and Versailles (approx. 40 min–end)

"I lost all my youth. I lost the best years of my life... a few medals don't make up for that, you know."

— WWI veteran, Shell Shock closing sequence

10. The armistice comes on November 11, 1918. The narrator describes the silence after four years of gunfire. How do veterans in the film describe the moment the guns stopped?

11. The film's closing veteran says: "Nobody wins in a war. They lost. We didn't win." He fought on the winning side. What does this mean? Write your interpretation here.

12. Versailles: the narrator says "the peace treaty was the politics of hatred." How does the film describe what Wilson hoped for vs. what actually happened? Note any specific detail.