

THE GREAT WAR and the Shaping of the 20th Century

Lesson Plan One: World War I: Beginnings and Progression

Overview

Historically, it has been noted that WWI erupted after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne) in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. However, historians continue to debate other underlying causes, including changing political and economic situations in major European nations, the Industrial Revolution, and social turmoil. Whatever the cause, The World War of 1914-18 - The Great War, as contemporaries called it -- was the first man-made catastrophe of the 20th Century.

In this lesson, students will examine the events and people that led the world toward global war.

Learning Objectives

As a result of completing these activities, students will:

- Investigate and document the main causes of WWI
- Describe the factors contributing to the war's stalemate
- Assess and reshape events and decisions key to the start and continuation of WWI

Estimated Time

3-4 classroom periods (some research and writing to be conducted at home)

Standards

This lesson meets the following standards set by the Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/search.asp>):

World History

Standard 39

Understands the causes and global consequences of World War I

Benchmarks

Understands events that contributed to the outbreak of World War I (e.g., diverse long-range causes of World War I, such as political and economic rivalries, ethnic and ideological conflicts, militarism, imperialism, and nationalism; how nationalism threatened the balance of power among the Great Powers in Europe, and why it was considered one of the causes of World War I)

Understands the role of the U.S. and other countries in World War I (e.g., how the Russian Revolution and the entry of the United States affected the course and outcome of the war, motivations behind the entrance of the U.S. into the war)

United States History

Standard 6

Understands the changing role of the United States in world affairs through World War I

Benchmarks

Understands the development of World War I (e.g., the influence of industrial research in aviation and chemical warfare on military strategy and the war's outcome, how technological developments contributed to the war's brutality, the system of alliances through which European nations sought to protect their interests, how nationalism and militarism contributed to the outbreak, how the war expanded to become a world war)

Understands the United States' intervention in World War I (e.g., the impact of U.S. public opinion on the Wilson administration's evolving foreign policy during the period 1914 to 1917, Wilson's leadership during the period of neutrality and his reasons for U.S. intervention)

Understands the causes, course, and impact of World War I prior to U.S. entry (e.g., motivations of leading world powers, the relative success of nations in mobilizing their resources and populations, the relative success of their propaganda campaigns to influence neutral nations, the successes of military strategies, and the general spirit of disillusionment)

Materials

- Computers with Internet access
- WWI timelines
- Print and online sources about WWI's beginnings
- Handout: Causes of World War I worksheet
- Chart paper
- Large magic markers
- Chalkboard and chalk

Teaching Strategy

After this lesson, students should have a strong understanding of WWI, particularly its causes, nations involved, key political and military leaders, and overall impact on countries at its center.

First, have students share what they understand about how WWI started—basic causes, key figures, nations involved. Create a schematic map to record and synthesize student responses. Note that perhaps the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand <link to http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch1_explosion.html> was the breaking point, but prior to that, several monumental changes were occurring in major European nations that fueled the start of the war early on. (Causes include: industrialization and resultant wealth in some nations, nationalism, imperialism, Bismarck and alliances, arms races, crisis in Africa, Archduke Francis Ferdinand's assassination, and British suffragettes seeking the vote for British women.)

Divide students into small groups. Direct all groups to the following resources on The Great War and other sites or assign each group one or two to review.

- The Great War: Explosion
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch1_explosion.html
- The Great War: Europe in 1914
<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/>
- The Great War: 1900 A Transforming World
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_01_1900.html
- The Great War: The War as Detective Story
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_05_detective.html
- Germany at the Turn of the Century
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_02_germany.html
- The Great War: Total War – Everyone is a Target
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_11_totalwar.html
- Causes of World War I
http://www.pvhs.chico.k12.ca.us/~bsilva/projects/great_war/causes.htm
- World War I Timeline
<http://www.america-at-war.net/wwi.htm>
- The Origins of World War I
http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/origins_01.shtml

Instruct each team to review the links to determine the primary causes of WWI, the nations involved and/or affected by the identified situation, and its result (other than the resultant war) Students will document their findings on the Causes of World War I worksheet.

Ask each group to discuss what it has learned. Chart and synthesize group findings to come to consensus on what the students, as a class, believe were the primary contributors to the start of the war.

Then divide the class into pairs or small groups, each assigned a different cause. Distribute several sheets of chart paper magic markers to each group. Instruct each team to research its topic and to space out the events to include in a narrated timeline format. (See the timeline (<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/timeline/>) on the Great War site) Each event has a date and a brief narrative that describes its contribution to the start of WWI. (Students may opt to provide visuals to accompany their timelines—maps, pictures, etc.) Ask students to post their timelines around the class in chronological order.

Have students assume the roles of historians who analyze the causes and the stalemate to determine how the events, if altered, might have averted war. For example, what might have occurred if trench warfare had not been the battle mode of choice? Or, what might have happened had the major powers established a treaty about an equal balance of global industrialization to benefit nations as alliances rather than as competitors? Students can review WWI historians' perspectives to guide their thoughts and model their analyses, which should be written.

Students can sit on mock panels or participate in scholarly discussion related to their perspectives, and compile their papers to create a study packet for use by other students.

Online Resources

The Great War: Chapter I

http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch1_overview.html

WWI Timeline

<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/timeline/>

Summary of World War I

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/summary_01.shtml

World War I Timeline

<http://www.america-at-war.net/wwi.htm>

The Causes of the First World War

<http://www.schoolshistory.org.uk/firstworldwar2.htm>

Causes of World War 1

http://sdsd.essortment.com/worldwaricaus_nbk.htm

First World War.com

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/>

WWI: Attack to Stalemate

<http://mars.acnet.wnec.edu/~grempe/courses/ww1/lectures/stalemate.html>

Trench Warfare

http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761585472/Trench_Warfare.html

Assessment Recommendations

Assess students' research and analysis skills with regards to their timeline development and evaluation of WWI's progression. Students can create a multiple-choice quiz to administer to one another to test their understanding of key WWI issues, events, and leaders.

Extension Activities:

- Explain to students that WWI historians offer varied perspectives on what caused the war to begin. Refer students to featured historians on The Great War ([http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/.](http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/)) Using the scholars' analyses as models, instruct students to select and analyze a cause of WWI, presenting their perspectives to their classmates with a historian's eye.
- Assume the roles of key leaders who figured prominently in WWI and write in their voices about the war, either its potential or its actuality.
- Write a journal entry from someone experiencing the changes in their countries (new technologies, the British suffragettes, etc.) that led to the start of WWI.

About the Author

Michele Israel has been an educator in varied capacities for more than 20 years. As founder and director of Educational Consulting Group, Israel currently serves nonprofit and educational institutions, providing services including strategic planning, educational product development and project management. In addition, she produces learning materials and writes articles for companies such as PBS, Education World and CNN/Turner Learning.

Student Handout
The Causes of World War I

CAUSE

NATION(S) INVOLVED/AFFECTED

RESULT
