

THE GREAT WAR and the Shaping of the 20th Century

Lesson Plan Three: Killing Fields

Overview

WWI remains one of the bloodiest and most destructive wars ever. Its global impact on humanity was devastating. The allied and central powers leading the battles -- Germany, France, and Britain -- did not make any great gains, despite their efforts to advance their positions, and suffered and inflicted extraordinary casualties. The Battle of Verdun, for example, lasted nine months and resulted in 300,000 dead and 7500,000 injured.

Learning Objectives

As a result of completing these activities, students will:

- Describe several of the WWI's bloodiest battles
- Track the battles' progression to determine advances made by leading nations
- Write frontline journalistic accounts of one or more of the battles

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
- LCD projector (optional)
- Print and online sources about WWI's major battles
- A world map representative of geography relevant to WWI time period or printouts of the battle maps (see Online Resources)

Estimated Time

3 to 4 classroom periods (with some research and writing done at home)

Teaching Strategy

Prior to this lesson, students should have basic understanding of WWI causes, nations involved, key political and military leaders, and overall impact worldwide.

Provide students with some background on the outbreak of WWI, referring to The Great War's Slaughter section, http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch2_slaughter.html.

Explain to students that historically, some of the bloodiest battles ever fought occurred were fought during WWI, resulting in terrible devastation and a tremendous loss of human lives. The nations heading these battles – France, Germany, and Britain – made few gains. Tell students they will explore three of the major battles – The Battle of the Somme, The Battle of Verdun, and The Battle of Ypres.

Using a world map, pinpoint with the students the locations of the three battles, and using a marker, chart the routes of each one. (If possible, project The Great War's animated maps to accompany this activity.)

Divide students into small groups, each one representing one of the battles (two or more groups may have the same assignment, depending on the number of students in the class). Direct students to The Great War site to begin their research on the battles (to be supplemented by the additional web resources, noted below.)

Verdun

- Battle of Verdun
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/maps_verdun.html
- Verdun—The Battle of France
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_audoin_03_verdun.html
- Battle of Verdun: The Crucible
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_15_verdun.html
- Map - Battle of Verdun, Overview of Battle, Feb-Dec 1916
[http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_33_wfront_verdun_\(1600\).jpg](http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_33_wfront_verdun_(1600).jpg)

Somme

- The Battle of Somme
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/maps_somme.html
- John Keegan: The Battle of Somme
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_keegan_04_shells.html
- Too Few Doctors at the Front
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_keegan_05_doctors.html
- July 1, 1916: The Somme
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_simkins_06_somme.html
- Map - Third Battle of Ypres
[http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_61_wfront_cambrai_\(1600\).jpg](http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_61_wfront_cambrai_(1600).jpg)
- Map - Battle of the Somme, Overview of Battle, Jul-Nov, 1916
[http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_34_wfront_somme_\(1600\).jpg](http://www.firstworldwar.com/maps/graphics/maps_34_wfront_somme_(1600).jpg)

Ypres

- The Battle of Ypres

http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/maps_ypres.html

- The Battle of Passchendaele (Ypres)
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_wilson_06_passchendaele.html

Have each team conduct further research into one of the battles (depending on the number of students, groups may share battles.) Key aspects to note:

- where the battle occurred,
- what led to its occurrence,
- battle conditions, such as the weather
- who was involved,
- how many casualties,
- types of weapons used,
- the end result of the war (who "won" the battle and its effect on everything around it, including civilians).

Instruct students to assume the roles of journalists to write individual news accounts of one of the battles (all three should be equally represented). Students can write a day-to-day account of life on the battlefield, an article reflecting soldiers' feelings about the war, etc. Students can create a newspaper in which to run these stories, maybe a special WWI edition.

Online Resources

The Great War

http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch2_overview.html

Interpretation: Battle of the Somme What happened at the Battle of the Somme

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/worldwarone/hq/wfront3_01.shtml

Battles: The Battle of the Somme, 1916

<http://www.firstworldwar.com/battles/somme.htm>

Battle of Passchendaele: 31 July - 6 November 1917

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

World War I/Primary Documents

<http://www.historyteacher.net/APEuroCourse/WebLinks/WebLinks-WorldWar1.htm>

The First World War: Battles

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWbattles.htm>

First World War.com: Battles

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

Battles of World War I

http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/battles_of_world_war_one.htm

Battle of the Somme

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWsomme.htm>

Wars & Conflict. World War I: Western Front Animation

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/games/western_front/index.shtml

Assessment Recommendations

Quiz students, or have them quiz one another, on the various battles. Assess student involvement in collaborative learning. Have students keep a writing portfolio to review their writing process.

Extension Activity

- Read the two historians' perspectives on Gallipoli. (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/maps_gallipoli.html) How did the Turkish view the battle as a "Holy War"? Why was the invasion doomed to failure?

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.