

THE GREAT WAR and the Shaping of the 20th Century

Lesson Plan Five: Breaking Point

Overview

After three years of war, armies and individual soldiers were on the verge of open rebellion. The devastation of trench warfare and no end to the violence in sight fostered disillusionment with the war. Consequently, soldiers began to disobey orders and desert the front lines. As anti-war sentiment spread, Russia signed an armistice with Germany in 1918 and World War I soon drew to a close. In this lesson, students will explore how soldiers could be pushed to desertion and mutiny and how this decision affected the outcome of the war.

Lesson Objectives

As a result of completing these activities, students will:

- Brainstorm what could have led to the mutiny of soldiers on the front.
- Examine the basic components factors of the mutiny.
- Assess the mutiny's impact.
- Debate how one person's decision affect many.

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 1.

Benchmarks

Understands how different countries were aligned during World War I (e.g., the systems of alliances through which Europe organized itself into World War I, the role militarism played in these alliances, and the reasons for the war's expansion beyond European boundaries to become a world war; immediate causes for the entry of different nations into World War I)

Understands the strategies of the Allied and Central Powers at the beginning of the war and when these strategies changed

Understands the human cost and social impact of World War I (e.g., what sources, such as letters and books, illustrate about the mental and physical costs of the war to soldiers around the world; how the casualty figures for World War I compare to other wars, and reasons for the high casualty rate; the changes in women's roles during the Great War)

Estimated Time

Two to three classroom periods (with time allotted for research outside of class).

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Internet access, or copies of relevant pages from the Great War and online resources

Teaching Strategy**Activity 1: Soldiers Disillusioned**

Have students listen to Henri Desagneux, (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch3_voices2.html) a French soldier at Verdun, as he tells of life in the trenches.

After hearing the audio of Henri's diary account, ask students to list factors that contributed to soldiers' suffering. Pair students and have them share and synthesize their lists. Invite each team to then share their ideas with the class.

Have students read the "The End of Heroism" (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch3_mutiny.html) by Jay Winter. What were some of the searing "images" that haunted soldiers? Direct them to "The Trenches: Symbol of a Stalemate." (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch1_trench.html) and the photographs and video depicting life in the trenches.

Activity 2: Why Mutiny?

Write "Mutiny" on the chalkboard. Ask students to discuss what this term might mean. What thoughts, ideas or images does it connote? Does the word have a positive or negative connotation? Where and when do mutinies occur?

Engage students in discussion about how the events of World War I led to mutiny. Have students conduct additional research to identify concrete examples how dissension and disillusionment would eventually lead to the collapse of the armies. For example, use The Timelines (<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/timelines>) to lists events.

Resources can also be found in the Mutiny/Collapse section on The Great War site. The page specifically about mutiny among the soldiers (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch3_mutiny.html) offers links to primary source maps and historical resources. The Educational Resources page (<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/>) offers books by topic. The Additional Reading section (<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/reading.html>) of the site offers personal accounts, fiction, non-fiction sources, and references for Teacher or advanced students.

To organize research notes, students should create a chart with columns reflecting the above topics, and then draw several boxes under each topic for recording information.

Have each group share its information and, as a class, create a “Culture of War” fact sheet that draws from their research. On this sheet, students should list all factors in a soldier’s culture that could contribute to a mutiny during wartime.

Have students record their ideas on paper (preferably a post-it note). After they have shared their ideas have them place the written copy of the idea on a large sheet of butcher paper in the classroom. Have students brainstorm categories for grouping similar topics. For example, students may say that the trenches were an influence on the individual soldier’s personal “culture”; these might come under a heading entitled "Geographic." What about religion? Politics? Family life? For each category, engage students in brief discussion of how such examples influence each soldier’s culture and the decisions he makes.

Assessment Recommendations

- Students could create a questionnaire to test their peers' knowledge of
- A teacher- or student-created rubric can be used to measure the level of student understanding.
- Student research charts, fact sheets, and written debate arguments can be collected and graded.
- Students may be assessed on their group involvement, as well as participation in class discussion.

Extension Activities

- Read “How a Right can make a Wrong: The Fateful Encounter of Private Tandy.” (<http://www.firstworldwar.com/features/tandey.htm>) Tell students that they are going to discuss how one individual’s choice can affect many others. Private Tandy, in the closing months of World War I, encountered a young, wounded German soldier, who, because Tandy spared his life, was able to return to Germany and begin his political career. Ask students what beliefs in Tandy’s personal culture would have led him to make the decision regarding this young German’s life? Discuss with the class how one individual’s choices can literally have historic consequences. Who are some other figures—famous and unknown—who have had a similar impact?
- Discuss the historian Jay Winter’s statement, (<http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/thenandnow/>) “Terrorism was born well before the First World War. But its effects became worldwide in 1914. The assassination of the heir to the Austria-Hungarian throne created the diplomatic crisis that ultimately led to the war. So it's the provocation effect

of terrorism that I think was born in 1914.” How did the element of terrorism impact today’s society?

- Instruct students to create a script about being in a trench during the war, using the online resources recommended in this lesson to gather information about the conditions facing soldiers.

Online Resources

The Great War:

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

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>

First World War.com

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

About the Author

From classroom instructor to an executive director, Linda Ferguson has been an educator for nearly 20 years. She has developed curricula and educational materials, and designed and facilitated professional development for classroom and community educators locally and nationally. Currently operating the Geo-Literacy Project International she is involved with diverse projects, including strategic planning and product development. A PhD candidate her recent projects include online teacher materials for The George Lucas Educational Foundation, Intel, and Apple.