

THE GREAT WAR and the Shaping of the 20th Century

Lesson Plan Seven: The “Failed Peace”

Overview

With the November, 1918, signing of the Armistice ending hostilities in World War I, an even greater task befell the Allies and Central Powers—how to rebuild Europe and re-define the “world order.” US President Woodrow Wilson believed he had the answer, a peace proposal he simply called the “Fourteen Points”. Wilson was certain that his proposal would make the world safe for democracy and avoid any future conflict. However, several other world leaders as well as some of Wilson’s fellow citizens felt otherwise.

In this lesson, students will investigate why it was impossible to achieve a lasting peace after the end of fighting in the First World War.

Learning Objectives

As a result of completing these activities, students will:

- Investigate how policies and tactics utilized by the Allies to mobilize national unity and raise patriotism made it more difficult to achieve a humane peace after the war.
- Speculate how the writings of poets and authors who served in the First World War served to shape views of the war and how the idea of war and the conflict were seen in their eyes.
- Learn about how the views and self-interests of the Allies doomed any chance of a long lasting peace
- Investigate how Wilson’s proposals were unpopular at home as well as with his fellow Allied leaders.

Estimated Time

Four to five class periods, depending on number of activities desired for students to complete, and the depth of investigation desired by the teacher.

Standards

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

United States History

Standard 6

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

Benchmarks

Understands how the home front influenced and was influenced by U.S. involvement in World War I (e.g., the impact of public opinion and government policies on constitutional interpretation and civil liberties, the events of Wilson's

second term; the role of various organizations in the mobilization effort; the "Great Migration" of African Americans to northern cities)

Understands influences on the outcome of World War I (e.g., how point six of the Fourteen Points dealt specifically with Russia, the effectiveness of the Versailles Treaty)

Understands the impact of the United States involvement in World War I (e.g., U.S. military and economic mobilizations for war and the role of labor, women, and African Americans in the war effort; World War I military engagements and the campaigns in which the American Expeditionary Force participated; the impact of the war on American troops; Wilson's goals in recommending the establishment of a League of Nations)

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 extent to which different sources supported the war effort (e.g., how nationalism and propaganda helped mobilize civilian populations to support "total war;" ways in which colonial peoples contributed to the war effort of the Allies and the Central Powers by providing military forces and supplies, and what this effort might have meant to colonial subjects; the effectiveness of propaganda to gain support from neutral nations; how and why original support and enthusiasm to support the war deteriorated)

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)

Understands how the treaties ending World War I and the League of Nations addressed different groups of people (e.g., how treaties ending World War I accorded with Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points and the processes by which the treaties were established, the varied reactions of the Chinese to the provisions of the Versailles Peace Treaty, the goals and failures of the "racial equality clause" in the preamble to the Covenant of the League of Nations)

Understands how World War I influenced demographics and the international economy (e.g., the impact of the war on the international economy and the effects of industrial conversion from war to peace in Britain, France, Italy, and Germany; significant refugee populations created as a result of World War I, and their movements and dispersion)

Materials

- Computers with Internet access
- WWI timelines
- Print and online sources about the end of WWI
- Large magic markers
- Paper for posters
- Chalkboard or overhead projector

Teaching Strategies

Activity 1: The End of the War

As a preview to this lesson, the teacher should take some time and discuss the final days of the First World War, and how the end of the fighting took place through an armistice which was signed in a railroad car in the French town of Compiègne. Explain to the students that the armistice was not a peace treaty, only an agreement to stop the fighting in order for a formal peace treaty to be negotiated, although it was obvious with the abdication of Kaiser Wilhelm II and the military situation in November, 1918, that the Germans had been defeated.

To further prepare students for the lesson, the teacher should also discuss the cost of World War I, both in terms of total casualties as well as monetary costs. Two resources that the teacher can use for this are <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/FWWcosts.htm> for monetary costs, and “War Without End” (http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch4_war.html) for casualties from the war. (Scroll down to the link for WWI Casualties and Deaths under the “Explore Further” section of the page.) The teacher may also wish to ask students to compare the number of civilian casualties. The “First World War By the Numbers” site (<http://www.worldwar1.com/sfnum.htm>), estimates the total number of civilian casualties to be approximately 8,000,000 persons. Ask students to compare the number of civilian casualties to military, in terms of percentages of total dead and wounded.

Next, ask the students to speculate on why it was so difficult for the Versailles delegates to come up with a reasonable peace treaty that would have avoided a second world war less than a generation later. Some questions the teacher might ask to stimulate discussion include, “Why didn’t the new Russian government have a presence at the Versailles conference?”, or, “Why did the delegates to Versailles refuse to allow a German delegation to participate in treaty negotiations?”, or, “Was it wise for the Versailles

delegates not to allow other nations or ethnic group representatives, such as Ho Chi Minh or WEB DuBois, to speak at the conference?”

Activity 2. Effect of Propaganda

In this lesson, students will examine the effect of propaganda on the war effort, how the use of propaganda made it more difficult for nations to search for a “peace without victory” rather than a vindictive peace, and will create propaganda posters or write persuasive propaganda speeches on some issue/event/condition during World War I.

To open the lesson, ask several students, in their own words, to define *propaganda*. Write their answers on the chalkboard or overhead projector. Once there are several definitions, ask a student to look up the definition in a dictionary.

Next, ask the class to brainstorm for current sources/forms of propaganda being used, either by government or private groups. Some students may note that political parties use propaganda to convey a particular message that favors their view or supports a state, local, or national candidate. Others may recall propaganda that was promoted by Nazi Germany in World War II, and other students may have more current examples.

Once students have come up with several recent propaganda sources, ask the class to review instances of World War I propaganda from the several poster sites included in the Online Resources section of this lesson. Select two or three posters from the site, and ask students to reflect on what message(s) the poster is trying to convey. Ask students if the poster is effective in conveying the message, and what sorts of positive and negative feelings and ideas would the poster cause a World War I era viewer to have?

The teacher may wish to either print examples of posters for the students to see, project the images onto a screen using a computer and projector, or simply guide students to view each selected poster on individual or group computer monitors.

Ask students if they can predict what effect or impact propaganda would have on the peacemaking process. What sorts of feelings would citizens of the United States, Britain, or France have regarding making peace with Germany after being exposed to several years of propaganda similar to what the Allied governments exposed them to? How would the Germans react to Allied peace proposals considering the types of propaganda about the Allies they had been exposed to throughout the war years?

Now, instruct the students that they will be drawing “propaganda posters”, but their assignment is to draw posters that can be used to sway popular opinion in favor of the Versailles Treaty, as well as joining the League of Nations. Divide the class into four groups, one group to draw a poster that will be used to convince American citizens to favor the treaty and admission into the League, another to convince French citizens, one to convince British citizens, and finally, one to convince German citizens.

If desired, the French and German posters might be written in those nations' native language, presuming students in the class are somewhat proficient in that language.

Each poster should contain the following elements:

1. A persuasive "headline"
2. At least one original graphic that will serve to help convince the viewer to favor the treaty and the League
3. Some sort of statement that the viewer can read to help convince him/her of the author's view
4. The poster should be written in a style and format that would convince the viewer that it was created in the country that the students "represent" (Britain, France, Germany, or the United States).

The teacher may also wish to require that each poster be completed in color as well, or may wish that students use pictures or drawings of real persons associated with *Great War* (for example, Woodrow Wilson, Georges Clemenceau, David Lloyd-George, etc.).

Activity 3. The Fourteen Points: Making it work

In this activity, students act as "diplomatic advisers" to President Woodrow Wilson during negotiations at Versailles. They will write correspondence to the President suggesting strategies and suggestions to him to get the other members of the "Big Four" to accept as many of Wilson's Fourteen Points as possible, but most importantly, the idea of the League of Nations.

Inform the class that while the President has the constitutional authority to negotiate treaties, he seldom does it alone. Instead, he has a staff of State Department advisors who assist him in making important decisions about treaty provisions, negotiations, and ratification. These advisors have several duties, including knowing the facts regarding the President's position, the views, concerns, and political issues facing the other delegates to the conference, as well as their own expertise in foreign policy. In other words, if they believe the President is taking the wrong course, they should explain to him their views and suggest alternative policies and ideas.

Next, tell the class that they will be working as State Department diplomats, working with the President as he negotiates the treaty. It will be their job to provide President Wilson with advice on how to best approach the other delegates to the Versailles Conference to agree to the ideas put forth in the Fourteen Points. In addition, it is their job to provide the President with reasonable alternatives and compromise suggestions to present to the other delegates.

In order for them to adequately serve the President, they should have a working knowledge of the following:

- How the map of Europe looked at the end of hostilities of World War I (direct students to “The Western Front In 1918” map:
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/maps/maps_western.html)
- Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” peace proposal:
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wilson14.htm>
- Biographical information about the other “Big Four” delegates:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/peopleevents/index.html>
- Background information about the philosophy and views of Woodrow Wilson:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/index.html>
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch4_voices1.html.
- The League of Nations:
(http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/portrait/wp_league.html)
<http://www.library.northwestern.edu/govpub/collections/league/background.html>)

Students should write their advice papers as formal letters, for the President’s perusal. They should use acceptable grammar and spelling, be persuasive, and be respectful to the office of the President, as well as to Wilson himself.

Assessment Recommendations

The teacher should develop some sort of evaluation instrument based on whatever criteria desired. Criteria might include:

- Does the poster include information that is realistic and accurate?
- Does the poster include correct grammar and is free of spelling errors?
- Is the poster written in a correct style?
- Does it “work” to persuade the viewer to a particular course of action?
- Is the information in the letter correct?
- Did the student adequately research the positions stated in the letter?
- Did the student reach realistic conclusions and effectively analyze the situation and possible alternative solutions?

Extension Activity

- Rather than have each student write a separate letter of advice to the President, divide the class into groups, and have them investigate a specific point or group of points, and work together to advise the President on what action to take. Ask the groups to read their work to the rest of the class asking for ideas and critiques of their work.

Online Resources

PBS American Experience - Woodrow Wilson:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/index.html>

PBS American Experience - Woodrow Wilson: Poster Art of World War I
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/gallery/posters.html>

Posters from the Great War:
<http://www.worldwar1.com/posters.htm>

“First Call” (American Posters from World War I):
<http://www.library.georgetown.edu/dept/speccoll/amposter.htm>

Woodrow Wilson’s “Fourteen Points” Speech:
<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/wilson14.htm>

Biographies of Georges Clemenceau and David Lloyd-George:
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/wilson/peopleevents/index.html>

Documents Relating to World War I:
<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/ww1.htm>

Modern History Sourcebook (Terms of the Treaty of Versailles):
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1919versailles.html>

BBC World War I site:
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/war/wwone/>

About the Author

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