THE GREAT WAR

Research Skills and Critical Thinking With World War I

Links to Classroom Videos Included
World War I was one of the most transformative events of the 20th century, with consequences that have influenced almost every area of modern life today. The Great War classroom program, sponsored by the National WWI Museum and Memorial in Kansas City, Missouri, is designed to help students in grades 9-12 understand the significance of the war, while practicing research skills and critical thinking. Use this collection of lessons, activities, and videos to teach global history and to demonstrate to students the enduring impact of the war meant “to end all wars.”

** A TEACHER PRIMER **

Before you get started, a refresher on the Great War.

**ITS CAUSES**
- There’s no one “cause” of World War I. The war erupted after decades of growing conflicts around the world. Major factors included a system of alliances that tied the countries of Europe together; an escalating arms race that amassed unprecedented military might; an age of imperialism that sparked the global expansion of empires; and the rise of nationalism in areas like the Balkans, where the 1914 assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand triggered the outbreak of war.

**ITS PLAYERS**
- Over 30 countries were involved in WWI. The primary Allies were Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, and the United States. The Allies faced the Central Powers of Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria.

**ITS EFFECTS**
- The war was one of the most transformative events in human history. In 1914, Europe was a continent of empires. But four years later, at war’s end, the monarchies of Russia, Germany, and Austria-Hungary had collapsed. The end of the Ottoman Empire gave birth to the modern Middle East, but laid the groundwork for the region’s violence that exists today. The Treaty of Versailles’s harsh treatment of Germany contributed to the outbreak of another world war 20 years later.

- The first fully industrialized war, WWI created a legacy that remains internationally relevant. Deadly weapons like tanks, machine guns, and flamethrowers were widely used; submarines and aircraft were first employed on a large scale; and the debate over chemical warfare continues today. When we wear a wristwatch, change clocks for Daylight Saving Time, eat canned food, or do Pilates, we’re utilizing items and ideas rooted in WWI.

- WWI introduced new roles to those who were marginalized in their home countries. In the United States, millions of women volunteered or worked outside the home for the first time. Their contributions helped secure a different victory: women’s right to vote. Hundreds of thousands of African Americans served, despite facing prejudice at home and abroad.

- The war marked the true entry of the United States onto the global stage, but the country did not join the League of Nations, greatly weakening it.

- The U.S. commemoration of Veterans Day originated with WWI. First called Armistice Day, November 11 was a day to remember those who served and died, including over 9 million military personnel and over 5 million civilians worldwide. A federal holiday since 1938, Armistice Day was renamed Veterans Day after WWII and the Korean War to reflect all who served.

**Key Resources**

Visit [scholastic.com/thegreatwar](http://scholastic.com/thegreatwar) for:
- grade-level-appropriate classroom videos
- extension activities
- interactive quizzes
- links to an interactive timeline

**Student Reading**

- All Quiet on the Western Front, Erich Maria Remarque
- The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen, Wilfred Owen
- A Farewell to Arms, Ernest Hemingway
- The Grand Escape, Neal Bascomb
- The Harlem Hellfighters, Max Brooks
- Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World, Margaret MacMillan
- War Horse, Michael Morpurgo

**ON THE COVER**

TOP: Indian Shikarris officers serving in the British military, Pas-de-Calais, France, 1915.
BOTTOM LEFT: Female driver for the Royal Air Force. BOTTOM RIGHT: The U.S.S. Agamemnon filled with soldiers on deck waving to the camera.

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All images courtesy of the National World War I Museum and Memorial, except where noted.
LESSON 1

World War I “Firsts”

Technological advances help WWI usher in modern warfare, creating a legacy of physical, emotional, and environmental destruction.

TIME
50 minutes; additional time for research and student activity

MATERIALS
▶ Internet access
▶ Video: Section 1, “The Start of WWI”; Section 2, “Life in the Trenches”
▶ Activity sheet 1: Life in the Trenches

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Share Section 1 of the video at scholastic.com/thegreatwar and discuss the start of WWI using the Teacher Primer as well as key video points: the tensions among the Great Powers, the fight over control of territories, nationalism, and the archduke’s assassination.
2. As a class, listen to audio of soldiers’ accounts of gas attacks and ask students to take notes:
   ▶ bit.ly/GreatWarAudio1
   ▶ bit.ly/GreatWarAudio2
Write out terms as they are mentioned in the audio, for instance: artillery, infantry, gas, machine guns, trenches, parapet. Then discuss how these made WWI the first modern war. Ask: What are the moral implications of chemical war? Also have students consider the value of hearing firsthand historical accounts.
3. Assign the following research topics:
   The stalemate on the Western Front, including the idea that the war would be “over by Christmas”; the Schlieffen Plan.
   Chemical warfare and the devastating use of poison gas, which injured and killed hundreds of thousands of people; postwar chemical weapons ban.
   Trench life on the Western Front, including days of monotony and routine, followed by sudden battle and terror; unsanitary conditions; diseases like trench foot; psychological damage/shell shock.
4. Have students use their research to discuss the realities of being a WWI soldier. Wrap up by showing

3. million that came from Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean.
▶ The global nature of the war, including over 5 million civilian deaths, starvation and famine, the Armenian Genocide, the 1918 flu pandemic.

LESSON 2

Military Personnel of the Great War

The spread of WWI’s battlefields draw in participants from around the globe.

TIME
50 minutes; additional time for research and student activity

MATERIALS
▶ Internet access
▶ Video: Section 3, “Global Impact of WWI”
▶ Activity sheet 2: Where Did They Fight?

INSTRUCTIONS
1. Share Section 3 of the video at scholastic.com/thegreatwar and discuss how the war impacted people around the world. Review the involvement of countries and European colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Cover different service roles, including soldiers, laborers, and porters. Also discuss the different theaters of the war that existed outside of the Western Front.
2. Hand out the activity sheet Where Did They Fight? and discuss the different theaters of war on the sheet. Allow students to work in groups to research answers.
3. Tell students that they will present the next part of the lesson. Assign topics from one of the two following research areas to groups:
   ▶ The role of colonial soldiers and laborers who served in the war, including more than
   ▶ Online activity sheet: Test Your Smarts: WWI’s New Ways of War

4. Have students prepare 10-minute group presentations on their topics. Make sure they highlight important points. Ask: Why do you think there is a focus on the Western Front and not other arenas of WWI?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
▶ Video: Section 5, “African Americans in WWI”
▶ Video: Section 6, “Women in WWI”
▶ Online activity sheet: Unsung American Heroes
The American Homefront in WWI

A powerful combination of propaganda and patriotic sentiment influences how U.S. citizens view the war.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Discuss U.S. entry into the war. After a period of declared neutrality, the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915, Germany's resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare, and the publication of the Zimmermann Telegram, which revealed a secret alliance between Germany and Mexico, finally pushed the United States to declare war on April 6, 1917. In 1914, the U.S. Army numbered some 135,000 men. The Selective Service Act of 1917 dramatically increased the number to 4 million by the war's end.

2. Watch Section 4 of the video at scholastic.com/thegreatwar and discuss war propaganda and patriotic sentiment with students. Include the following topics: the Committee on Public Information, the Four Minute Men, attacks on anti-war activists. Ask: How did U.S. citizens support the war effort once the country declared war? What role did propaganda play?

3. Discuss the negative aspects of patriotism, including mistreatment of German Americans. Ask: How did extreme patriotic sentiment lead to violence and persecution?

4. Explain that students will build a glossary of terms while researching tools of propaganda during the war. Provide the following research topics: Propaganda posters and art, including Uncle Sam, use of new celebrity culture and media to sell the war, patriotic music, books, and film. While they research, instruct them to create a document that defines important terms in a glossary format.

5. Hand out the activity sheet Propaganda: How America “Sold” WWI and have students write speeches.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online activity sheet: German Americans in WWI

Lesson 4

After the 11th Hour

The Treaty of Versailles sets the stage for peace—and for future conflict. Explore the resolution, and also the commemoration, of World War I.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Explain that the war on the Western Front ended at the 11th hour on the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918. War continued in Africa for weeks and the Middle East for years. Display the classroom poster, and discuss the legacy of the war.

2. Tell students that the negotiations are met in Paris in 1919 to resolve the war and negotiate the terms of peace. Distribute the activity sheet The Paris Peace Conference. Have students conduct research to answer the questions. Ask: How do you think the Treaty of Versailles contributed to another horrible conflict 20 years later?

3. Based on their research, ask students to draw up changes they would make to the Treaty of Versailles. Have them explain why they believe their changes would create more lasting peace.

4. Watch Section 8 of the video at scholastic.com/thegreatwar. Discuss how WWI was commemorated, including Armistice Day and its evolution to Veterans Day. You might also show Video 7 to discuss other legacies of WWI in technology, language, and art.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Online activity sheet: Create a World War I Commemoration

Video: Section 7, “Innovations of WWI”
Life in the Trenches

**DIRECTIONS** Imagine you are a soldier stationed on the Western Front during World War I, and write either a journal entry or a letter to your family or friends back home. Be sure to include information on all aspects of your life at the Front, including weapons, food, and what your daily life is like. Make sure to describe your surroundings and how it feels to be in battle. The excerpts below were written by soldiers serving on the Western Front (though trench warfare was not confined to the Western Front). Use them as inspiration along with the facts you have learned in class to inform your letter.

**Shells of all calibers kept raining in our sector. The trenches had disappeared, filled with earth. The air was unbreathable. Our blinded, wounded, crawling, and shouting soldiers kept falling on top of us and died splashing us with their blood. It was living hell.**

—French infantryman

**It is Christmas evening 1915, our company is in the second line in the concrete bunkers. We worked ourselves into a sweat making this. Every sack of cement and sand must be dragged along. We lost a lot of comrades by enemy shrapnel. Now we are sitting in the bunker, our work has not been in vain. Snow is covering the earth, we are homesick for wife, children and sister…. Now it is Christmas for the second time in this war. Along the front line all is quiet, only some rifle bullets are crossing the air like lashes…. I have to look for a Christmas tree, without a tree there is no Christmas.**

—Ernst Bergner, 143rd Infantry Regiment (Germany)

**The fighting troops of the front lines see themselves mire[d] hopelessly in this hellish wasteland. Whoever lives through it thanks his good luck. The rest die as “heroes.” It is not easy to expect death almost daily. However, after a while I have gotten used to the idea of dying young. Strangely, it has a soothing effect and prevents me from worrying too much.**

—Reinhold Spengler, 1st Bavarian Infantry Regiment (Germany)
Where Did They Fight?

By the end of 1914, the war along the Western Front stretched more than 400 miles across France and Belgium, where millions of soldiers were entrenched. But while the Western Front is the best remembered theater of the war, WWI was a global conflict fought on multiple fronts. Study the map to learn more.

**NOT SHOWN:**
- In Africa, the majority of fighting occurred in eastern, western, and southern Africa, but African colonies across the continent participated in WWI.
- WWI was also fought in the Pacific and other world oceans.

**DIRECTIONS** Choose one of the theaters of war listed below. Use the links or conduct additional research to answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.

**Eastern Front**
bit.ly/GreatWarEasternFront

1. How was the war on the Eastern Front different than the Western?
2. Which soldiers served on the Eastern Front?
3. How did the Russian Revolution impact the Eastern Front?

**Italian Front**
bit.ly/GreatWarItalianFront

1. Which countries fought on this front?
2. What role did the physical terrain play on the Italian Front?
3. Describe the campaigns along the Italian front.

**Middle Eastern Front**
bit.ly/GreatWarMiddleEasternFront

1. Why was the Ottoman Empire considered the “sick man of Europe?”
2. Why was the Battle of Gallipoli so important?
3. How did the war help shape the modern Middle East?

**African Front**
bit.ly/GreatWarAfricanFront

1. Why was the war in Africa fought differently than battles in Europe?
2. Why was there such a high death toll for laborers during the war in Africa?
3. What were some of the notable battles and campaigns in Africa?
Propaganda: How America “Sold” WWI

The American government relied on propaganda to encourage citizens to support the war. The Four Minute Men program was one of the most successful propaganda programs of World War I. In merely 18 months, 75,000 people delivered 1.5 million speeches to millions of people across the country.

These speeches covered all aspects of the war, encouraging people to conserve food, buy Liberty Bonds (war bonds issued by the government to help pay for the war), enlist for military service, and give their support to the war effort. They could be delivered in any public place, such as movie theaters, street corners, county fairs, and even churches and synagogues.

The Committee on Public Information (CPI) provided guidelines on how to write these speeches. The following is an adapted example on how to encourage the purchase of Liberty Bonds:

1. **Have an opening** to grab the attention and interest of the audience.
2. **Write a body** to present facts that will appeal to the rationality of the audience.
3. **Have an emotional appeal** to stir sentiment and make the audience want to act and to buy Bonds.
4. **Have an ending that summarizes** your closing appeal.

**DIRECTIONS** Choose an issue or cause of today and write your own Four Minute Men speech. Follow the guidelines of the CPI to write your speech. For more information and guidelines, check out [bit.ly/GreatWarFourMinuteMen](http://bit.ly/GreatWarFourMinuteMen).
The Paris Peace Conference

In 1919, delegates from countries that fought in WWI gathered in Paris to negotiate peace. The United States, led by President Woodrow Wilson, hoped this would be a start for nations to determine their own futures. The conference led to the creation of the League of Nations to peacefully manage world conflicts. But the United States did not join the League, greatly weakening it.

The Treaty of Versailles ended the war between Germany and the Allies. Its harsh treatment of Germany reflected the wishes of Great Britain and France, who believed Germany to be the principal aggressor of WWI. The treaty was met with feelings of bitterness and humiliation by Germans, creating an unstable environment that contributed to the outbreak of another horrific conflict 20 years later.

The partitioning of the Ottoman Empire into British and French mandates ignited opposition among Turkish nationalists, who established the independent nation of Turkey. The decision also led people in the region to view the West with suspicion, as it went against British promises of an independent Arab state. The consequences of this arbitrary settlement of the Middle East are still being felt today.

**DIRECTIONS**

Conduct additional research to answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

- What were Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points?
- What was the purpose of the League of Nations, and why did the United States reject it?
- How was the map of Europe and the Middle East changed by the peace conference?
- How is the impact of the Paris Peace Conference still felt today?

The “Big Four” leaders in Paris (left to right): Prime Ministers Lloyd George (Great Britain), Orlando (Italy), and Clemenceau (France), and President Wilson (U.S.).
World War I by the Numbers

Soldiers had a 50 PERCENT chance of becoming a casualty.

Britain and France enlisted more than 3 MILLION soldiers and laborers from their territories in Southeast Asia, India, Africa, and the Caribbean.

Over 1.3 MILLION women workers were in the German war labor force in 1917.

There were 9 MILLION estimated military deaths—higher than the population of most U.S. states.

1 in 3 Frenchmen between the ages of 18 and 30 died between 1914 and 1917.

1 MILLION men were killed or wounded on both sides at the Battle of the Somme in 1916, with the Allies gaining only 6 miles.

The U.S. Army increased from less than 135,000 to nearly 4 MILLION during the war.

An estimated 5 MILLION civilians worldwide died as a direct result of the war.

26,277 Americans died at the Battle of Meuse-Argonne, more than 3 times as many as the Battle of Gettysburg.

35,000 miles of trenches were built on the Western Front—enough to circle the Moon 5 times.