History UNFOLDING

THE GREAT WAR 1914–1918

AVEZ VOUS PLACE DANS VOTRE COEUR POUR NOUS ?

London Opinion

YOUR COUNTRY NEEDS "YOU"

MindSparks®
CHALLENGING STUDENTS TO THINK HISTORICALLY

Contents

Introduction

The War to End All Wars

The "Great War," as it came at first to be called, was in every way a catastrophe. At the height of its power, Europe suddenly self-destructed. Industrial and imperial rivalries, rising nationalist sentiment, a rapidly intensifying arms race, ethnic tensions—all of these contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914. Among the causes of World War I, however, sheer willfulness and stupidity should not be discounted.

The war destroyed three huge empires: Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire, and Russia. It helped bring into being the first communist society. It did nothing to resolve the complex imperial, ethnic, and national rivalries that triggered it. Its horrendous slaughter exhausted and demoralized the democratic Allied powers. Its imperfect settlement left a deeply resentful Germany wounded, but not tamed. This war that gave birth to the modern world bequeathed it a host of ills that would haunt it for decades.

The illustrations in this set offer your students a focal point for exploring these themes and gaining insight into the impact and significance of World War I. These illustrations are presented in four lessons. Each lesson uses three visual displays to explore one broad topic in the overall story. Briefly, the four lessons are as follows:

The Approaching War
The intensifying national and imperial rivalries of the major European powers made all-out war thinkable. Supreme overconfidence made it possible. These themes form the focus of the illustrations for this lesson.

Entrenchment and Stalemate
The surprise awaiting all the participants was that their well-prepared plans for a quick and glorious war were going to sink into the mud of the trenches and vanish along the broad Eastern Front. A long and horrifying war of attrition lay ahead.

The Agony of Total War
World War I was a fully industrialized and mechanized war. Military leaders were unprepared for the impact of these weapons on outmoded strategic notions. The need for full industrial support for each nation's war effort ultimately required the mobilization of entire societies. Whether democratic or not, the nations involved came to implement a national coordination that was almost totalitarian in nature.

Legacy
Memory is a tricky matter, especially when it comes to war. This lesson's illustrations focus attention on the question of how, exactly, we do arrive at our "image" of World War I. In addition, they ask students to consider the long-term impact of the war on Europe and the world.

Using Photos, Cartoons, and Other Visuals to Teach History

Many textbooks are full of colorful visuals. However, all too often these visuals function primarily as window dressing. They make the text more entertaining, or at least more palatable. Only occasionally do the visuals in textbooks do more than offer simple pictorial reinforcement of ideas already presented in the text. In many cases, they pander to the visual orientation of the young while doing little to help young people master the challenges of the visual media that dominate their lives.

By way of contrast, our approach to using visual materials emphasizes their unique strengths as historical documents. The lessons in this booklet focus students on the visual symbols and metaphors in editorial cartoons, the dramatic qualities of certain photographs, the potential of many images to make abstract ideas more specific and concrete, the implicit biases and stereotypes in certain images, their emotional power, and their ability to invoke the spirit of a time and place. In the process, we make every effort to strengthen students' visual literacy skills in general, as well as their ability to think critically and engage in spirited but disciplined discussions.

How to Use This Booklet

The booklet is divided into four lessons, with three illustrations per lesson. Each lesson consists of the following:

A BACKGROUND INFORMATION SHEET This page provides brief summaries explaining the three illustrations on which the lesson is based and their relevance to the lesson's objectives.

DIGITAL IMAGES The booklet's PDF allows you to project the images for use in your class discussions.

DISCUSSION-ACTIVITY SHEETS
Each sheet displays one illustration. It includes a sequence of questions to help you plan an all-class discussion while using the projected images. The questions take students step by step through an analysis of the illustration. If you wish, you may reproduce these pages and hand them out. In addition to the discussion questions on the illustration itself, one or two follow-up activities are suggested. Some of these can be made into individual assignments. Others will work best as small-group or all-class activities.

LESSON 1

The Great War: 1914–1918

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will use the visuals in this lesson to focus discussion on some of the key factors that helped to bring on World War I.

2. Students will consider why so many in Europe thought the war would be over in weeks.

The Approaching War

Use the background information on this page to help your students better understand the three illustrations making up this lesson. The questions and activities presented in the rest of the lesson can be used to help students clarify meanings and debate important issues.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Illustrations 1A & 1B

World War I was a catastrophe from which the world is in many ways still recovering. It broke out in a Europe that seemed to be at the height of its power and authority to claims of civilized world leadership. How could it have happened? Among the factors often considered were a rapid rise in feelings of nationalism in Europe in the late 1800s, along with an equally rapid rise in militarism and military power. These two illustrations touch on those trends. In the wake of the Franco-Prussian War, a united Germany pursued a massive military build-up. By the late 1800s, Germany had the most powerful army in the world. Germany's leader, Kaiser Wilhelm II, wanted the most powerful navy as well. This greatly alarmed Great Britain, which had long ruled the seas. Among other things, the British responded by building the so-called dreadnought class of battleships, notable for its heavy guns. Germany copied the British, thus setting in motion the first great arms race of the 20th century.

Illustration 2

Another factor preparing the ground for World War I was the intense rivalry of the great European powers for colonies in the late 1800s. This map shows the far-flung empires of these nations by 1900. All over the world, they competed for resources and the markets in which to sell their goods. As the map suggests, Africa was a main target for this imperial competition. Britain and France clashed there at one point, and later together confronted Germany. Germany was a latecomer in the struggle for colonies, and as such was seen by Great Britain as the main and growing threat to its empire and its world supremacy.
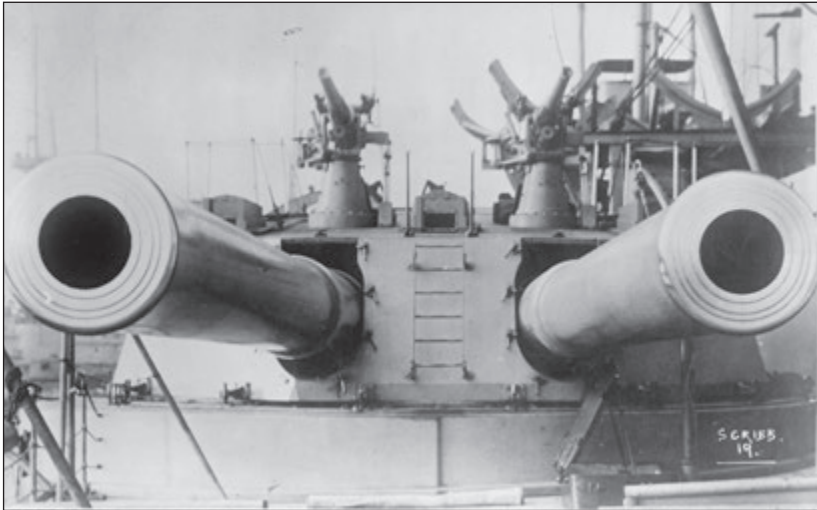
Illustrations 3A & 3B

When hostilities broke out in August 1914, few could see what lay ahead. Indeed, many people believed the war would be over quickly. Young Englishmen—induced by such posters as in Illustration 3A—rushed to recruiting stations to sign up in the hopes of easy glory on a foreign battlefield. The patriotic French poster in Illustration 3B also captures this spirit of almost carefree optimism. Its appeal for funds says, "We will beat them!" And they would beat them—the Germans, that is. But the costs would be vastly greater than anyone then could have imagined.

Lesson 1—The Approaching War
Illustrations 1A & 1B

1A

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

1B

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Discussing the Illustrations

1. The ship in Illustration 1A was part of the so-called dreadnought class of warships built by Great Britain in the early 1900s. Great Britain had long been a major sea power. The Industrial Revolution added enormously to its control of the seas, making Great Britain the dominant world power throughout the 19th century. Why do you think it had this effect? In what ways does this photo emphasize the impact of industrialization on British sea power?

2. Beginning in the 1870s, a continental European power arose and began to compete with Great Britain for world leadership. The poster on the right is from that nation. Can you guess what nation?

3. Many would call this poster a good example of the militaristic and nationalistic propaganda that was common at the time and that may have helped bring on World War I. How would you define "propaganda"? What makes this poster appear to be militaristic and nationalistic propaganda?

Follow-up Activities

1. **Small-group activity**: Many events during the latter half of the 19th century influenced the spread of nationalism and militarism in Europe. The following are just a few:

   The revolutions of 1848
   The unification of Italy
   The unification of Germany
   The Crimean War
   The Industrial Revolution

   Each member of the group should research one of these events or trends. As a group, discuss your findings in front of the rest of the class.

2. Read Activity #1. Conduct an analysis of your history textbook to find out how it treats these events as they relate to World War I. How would you "grade" your textbook? Is there sufficient information on these events? Do the authors explain how they influenced the outbreak of World War I? Defend your conclusions in a brief talk to the class.