



War Is Life Itself: The Causes of WWI

World War I



K20 Center, Aimee Myers

Published by K20 Center

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons CC BY-SA 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

Grade Level	10th – 11th Grade	Time Frame	180 minutes
Subject	Social Studies	Duration	4 class periods
Course	U.S. History, World History		

Essential Question

Is war between nations inevitable?

Summary

In this lesson, students will move through a series of primary source documents, maps, and graphs to explore the underlying causes of World War I. After analyzing the documents, students will use a graphic organizer to connect new information to historical concepts: militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism. Students will later evaluate and debate concepts in class through the instructional strategy Four Corners. The lesson ends with a writing component that requires forming a stance and supporting that stance with textual evidence.

Snapshot

Engage

Students pretend to be detectives and read a "case file" covering the incident that sparked World War I, the assassination of Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, to engage them in an exploration of how the death of one man (and his wife) could pull the entire globe into a massive war.

Explore

Students conduct a Gallery Walk or stations activity in which they physically move around the room while using a series of guided questions to analyze different primary source documents, maps, and graphs and determine the underlying causes of World War I.

Explain

Students organize the documents under the popular World War I framework, M.A.I.N. (militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism), to develop a deeper understanding of the underlying causes of World War I. Students then collectively review this framework and tie these underlying causes to the assassination of the archduke and the outbreak of World War I.

Extend

Students analyze an Emile Zola quote on war and participate in a Four Corners activity in which they respond to the statement "World War I was an inevitable result of European nations' prosperity or competition for prosperity."

Evaluate

Students write an essay responding to the essential question as it applies to World War I. Was World War I an inevitable result of European prosperity? They must cite evidence from the documents to support their responses.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: World History (9th through 12th grade))

USH.3.2: Evaluate the long-term impact of America's entry into World War I on national politics, the economy, and society.

USH.3.2A: Summarize the transformation of the United States from a position of neutrality to engagement in World War I including the Zimmermann Telegram and the threats to international trade caused by unrestricted submarine warfare.

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: World History (9th through 12th grade))

WH.4.1: Explain the complex and multiple causes of World War I, including militarism, nationalism, imperialism, systems of alliances, and other significant causes.

Attachments

- [Case-File-Franz-Ferdinand-Assassination - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Case-File-Franz-Ferdinand-Assassination - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Case-File-Franz-Ferdinand-Assassination.docx](#)
- [Case-File-Franz-Ferdinand-Assassination.pdf](#)
- [Gallery-Walk-Documents - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Gallery-Walk-Documents - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Gallery-Walk-Documents.docx](#)
- [Gallery-Walk-Documents.pdf](#)
- [Guided-Questions-for-WWI-Documents - Spanish.docx](#)
- [Guided-Questions-for-WWI-Documents - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [Guided-Questions-for-WWI-Documents.docx](#)
- [Guided-Questions-for-WWI-Documents.pdf](#)
- [Lesson Slides—War Is Life Itself.pptx](#)
- [M-A-I-N-Graphic-Organizer - Spanish.docx](#)
- [M-A-I-N-Graphic-Organizer - Spanish.pdf](#)
- [M-A-I-N-Graphic-Organizer.docx](#)
- [M-A-I-N-Graphic-Organizer.pdf](#)

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Case File for Franz Ferdinand Assassination (attached)
- Gallery Walk documents (attached)
- Guided Questions handout (attached)
- M.A.I.N. Graphic Organizer (attached)

Engage

Tell students that they are going to begin class today by investigating a murder. Using the attached Lesson Slides, display a photo of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and distribute the "case file" (located under Attachments). Have students work with a partner to analyze the case file and determine, as if they were detectives, the (1) location of the murder, (2) the victims, (3) the murderer, (4) his or her motive, and (5) the aftermath. You might have them do this by simply [Why-Lighting](#) the document—highlighting the appropriate places and writing comments/explanations in the margins (click the link for more information)—or you may have them write this information on a separate piece of paper.

After the students have explored the case file, review the information with them. Ask: Why was the Archduke assassinated, and what happened afterward?

Sample Student Responses

- He was assassinated because some Slavs in Bosnia wanted independence from Austria-Hungary and to belong to a Slavic nation/empire with Serbia.
- After it happened, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, and then Serbia got help from its Slavic ally, Russia, who declared war on Austria-Hungary. However, Austria-Hungary was in an alliance with Germany, who promised to protect Austria-Hungary if Russia attacked. Then, a whole bunch of other countries got involved because they were in alliances too.

Go deeper with their thoughts by asking students if one person's murder seems like enough of a reason for a world war. Furthermore, ask if an alliance, or just promising to have someone's back, is really enough to drag all these nations into a war. Ask students to speculate about what other reasons might be for countries to engage in war. You might wish to list these ideas on the board to refer to later.

Explore

Create 12 stations in your classroom using the 12 documents provided in the "Gallery Walk Documents" file (located under Attachments). Students will examine each document separately to determine its meaning. Depending on the size of your class, you may wish to group students to ensure that they can use the documents efficiently. Then, pass out the "Guided Questions" document (also found under Attachments) to each student.

Explain to students that they will be investigating other factors, namely the underlying causes of World War I, through a [Gallery Walk](#) or stations activity (click the link for more information on this activity). Instruct them to move about the room examining different documents that will help them develop a deeper understanding of these underlying causes. Tell students that they should answer the questions about the documents as they visit the stations.

Teacher's Note

You may need to set time limits and/or use a timer to help students move through the documents efficiently. If you have struggling readers, you may opt to pair them up with another student who can help them read the information provided within the allotted time. If students struggle with the number of documents, you may choose to use the [jigsaw](#) strategy (click the link for more information). This strategy gives students smaller portions of documents to read before having them discuss the other documents with their peers.

Explain

Once students have completed the Gallery Walk activity, have them sit down. Inform them that all of the information they learned from the documents can be split up into four major categories that most historians believe are the underlying causes of World War I: militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism (M.A.I.N.). Discuss these terms through a class discussion, and address the original ideas students had in the Explore activity. You can use the PowerPoint provided under Attachments, if needed, to review what these terms mean with students.

Handout the "M.A.I.N. Graphic Organizer" (under Attachments), and have students work in partners or small groups to fill out the chart using the documents and the guided questions they answered during the Explore Gallery Walk. Like the sample below, students can cite the document that refers to the information used.

Militarism	Alliances	Imperialism	Nationalism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All of the major European powers spent an increasing amount of money on their militaries from 1890-1914, but Germany spent a dramatic amount in 1914 (Document C) Germany increased its military spending because it wanted to compete with other nations and be powerful, plus it felt threatened by the power of other nations (Doc. D & E) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy were in an alliance called the Triple Alliance or Central Powers, while Great Britain, France, and Russia were in the Triple Entente (Document A) Germany and Austria-Hungary were fearful of attack from Russia and promised to go to war to protect each other if Russia or one of Russia's allies attacked them (Document B) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Britain had a huge empire (the biggest) (Documents F & G and this made Germany feel very threatened and inferior (Documents H & E) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A lot of countries had pride/nationalism, shown in national anthems (Documents I & J) and in desire to be powerful, like Germany (Docs D & E) Ethnic/national pride was important for Slavs, too—and this caused tension for Austria-Hungary because of the Slavs in Bosnia, which it controlled. This would eventually cause the Archduke's assassination and the outbreak of WWI (Docs K & L)

Sample Responses for Students' M.A.I.N. Graphic Organizer

After students have completed the M.A.I.N. graphic organizer, review them collectively. You may do this by filling out the chart together using a Smart Board/projector or simply by eliciting student responses through a round-robin, class sharing technique.

Teacher's Note: Additional or Alternative Explain Activities

Alternatively, you may use the provided Lesson Slides to encourage student discussion (there are cues to ask students about the documents in the presenter notes) or have students complete a reading on the causes of World War I, such as those provided in their textbooks or on the website "[The Origins of WWI](#)." If you choose to have your students complete an additional reading, make sure that they use an interactive reading strategy, such as [Why-Lighting](#) or [Thinking Notes](#). You may also elect to show the first few minutes of [Crash Course in History's video](#) on World War I. This video discusses the entirety of World War I at a fast pace. You should preview first and decide whether to use it or not, based on your students' abilities.

Extend

Display the Emile Zola quote, which has been provided for you toward the end of the Lesson Slides (or you can write it on the board).

Quote

"Would not the end of war be the end of humanity? War is life itself. Nothing exists in nature, is born, grows or multiplies except by combat. We must eat and be eaten so that the world may live. It is only warlike nations which have prospered; a nation dies as soon as it disarms. War is the school of discipline, sacrifice and courage."

Have students talk with an elbow partner about what the quote means. After several minutes, ask for volunteers to discuss the quote as part of a whole group. Guide students to an understanding that Zola is suggesting that war is necessary for countries to be powerful, and that powerful countries will ultimately have to fight to stay powerful. Point to the sentence, "We must eat and be eaten so that the world may live," if necessary.

After students have reached an understanding of Zola's message, connect his message to World War I by displaying the statement "World War I was inevitable for the nations involved to survive and thrive." Have students participate in a Four Corners activity about this statement.

Teacher's Note: Four Corners

[Four Corners](#) is an instructional strategy that encourages evaluation and argumentation. Place one of four signs in each corner of the room: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Ask students to stand in the corner that best represents their opinions in response to the above statement. Ask each student group to discuss the reasons for their level of agreement/disagreement (of 3-5, depending on class size), and then choose a leader to speak for their group's position. After each student leader speaks, ask students to move (if they feel they must) to reflect any change in opinions they might have.

Summarize by comparing positions and reasons provided by the groups.

Teacher's Note: Additional Extend Possibilities

Have students consult their textbooks to make a timeline of the major events leading up to WWI, noting where these events fall under the M.A.I.N. framework and citing relevant documents.

Evaluate

Have students write an essay responding to the essential question as it applies to World War I: Was World War I inevitable for the nations involved to thrive and survive? When responding to the essential question, instruct students to address how militarism, alliances, imperialism, and nationalism created tensions between the European powers that erupted after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Remind students that they must use evidence from the documents in their responses.

Resources

- AuthenticHistory.com. (2012, September 13). The Origins of WW1. Copyright 2012, AuthenticHistory.com. Retrieved from <http://www.authentichistory.com/1914-1920/1-overview/1-origins/index.html>
- CrashCourse. (2012, September 27). Archdukes, cynicism, and World War I: Crash course world history #36 [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XPZQ0LAIR4
- K20 Center. (2014). Gallery walk/carousel. Instructional Strategies. Retrieved from <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505a54d>
- K20 Center. (2014). Four corners. Instructional Strategies. Retrieved from <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f5064550>
- K20 Center. (2014). Jigsaw. Instructional Strategies. Retrieved from <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f507c1b8>
- K20 Center. (2014). Thinking notes. Instructional Strategies. Retrieved <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f507bd73>
- K20 Center. (2014). Why-lighting. Instructional Strategies. Retrieved from <https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/d9908066f654727934df7bf4f505e7d5>
- Emile Zola quote as cited in Pick, D. (1996). War machine: The rationalisation of slaughter in the Modern Age. London: Yale University Press. (p. 86)