WORLD WAR I

War Begins

Until 1914, there had not been a large-scale war in Europe for nearly 100 years. However, for some European leaders, there was no question if a great war would start. Nationalism, regional tensions, economic rivalries, imperial ambitions, and militarism made European countries wary of each other.

The spark that triggered World War I was the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, who was heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. A Serbian nationalist living in the Austrian-Hungarian province of Bosnia assassinated Ferdinand. Soon after, Austria-Hungary gave Serbia harsh demands to help them investigate the assassination. When Serbia refused, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. Because of a system of alliances between European countries, nearly every major power soon became involved in the war. The two alliances became known as the Allies and the Central Powers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>World War I Alliances (Main Members, 1914)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALLIES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom (Britain)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
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American Neutrality

For the first three years of World War I, the United States was neutral and did not participate in the war. Most Americans viewed the war as a distant European conflict for land and influence. They did not think the war directly threatened their interests, so they wanted no part in it. They preferred to maintain what they viewed as traditional American isolation from European disputes; however, most Americans did favor one side over the other.

Cultural Ties

In 1914, one third of Americans were foreign-born. Many still thought of themselves in terms of their former homelands—as German Americans, Irish Americans, and so on. Many of these Americans supported the Central Powers. Most Americans, however, supported Britain and France, both of which had strong historical ties with the United States. America’s national language was English, its cultural heritage was British, and its leading trade partner was Britain. France had aided the American cause during the American Revolution.

Freedom of the Seas

Early in the war, British leaders decided to use their navy to blockade Germany to keep essential goods from reaching their enemy. Germany responded by attempting to blockade Britain. Since Germany did not have enough surface ships to enforce its blockade, Germany used U-boats, or submarines.

Americans had always argued for freedom of the seas, or the ability to navigate the world’s oceans without restrictions. The German blockade violated this principle because Germany did not restrict, or limit, itself to only attacking warships. U-boats attacked any ship that they thought was helping their enemies.

The most famous case of a U-boat sinking an unarmed ship happened on May 7, 1915. On this date, a U-boat sank the British passenger ship Lusitania off the coast of Ireland. Even though the Lusitania was carrying ammunition, the U-boat attack shocked Americans. Over 1,200 civilians died, including 128 Americans. They protested that unarmed ships should not be sunk without first being warned and provided with safety for its passengers. Germany, fearful of the United States entering the war, responded by promising not to sink unarmed ships in the future. However, the country would break its promise.

The United States Enters The War

By 1917, Germany was suffering from severe shortages. German leaders decided to take action. First, German foreign minister Arthur Zimmermann sent a telegram to Mexico. The telegram called the Zimmermann Note, asked Mexico to form an alliance with Germany if the United States declared war on Germany. Next, Germany announced it would return to unrestricted submarine warfare against Britain.

Although most leaders knew Mexico had no intention of attacking the United States, Americans were shocked by the Zimmermann Note and angered by the return of unrestricted submarine warfare. On April 2, 1917, President Wilson asked Congress for a declaration of war against Germany. Wilson said in his request that “the world must be made safe for democracy.” Most Americans now thought that the war threatened their interests.

Victory

American troops and war materials began to arrive in Europe in June 1917. However, it was not until early 1918 that American troops began to arrive in large numbers. The American troops, added to those of France and Britain, gave the Allies a military advantage. By the fall of 1918, the German front was collapsing. Both the German and Austro-Hungarian armies had had enough. Some men deserted, others mutinied, and many refused to fight. Their leaders faced little choice but to surrender. On November 11, 1918, Germany surrendered to the Allies in a railway car in France.
WORLD WAR I Guided Reading.
Directions: Read the handout and answer the questions below.

1. Why were European countries wary of each other in 1914?
2. What was the spark that triggered World War I?
3. Why did Austria-Hungary declare war on Serbia?
4. Why were so many major European powers involved in the war so quickly?
5. What were the names of the two Alliances?
6. Why did the United States choose to be neutral and not participate in the war?
7. Why did some Americans support the Central Powers?
8. Why did most Americans support the Allies?
9. How did Germany respond to Britain’s blockade?
10. What does “freedom of the seas” mean and which country supported it?
11. What happened to the Lusitania?
12. What did America believe the Germans should have done before attacking the Lusitania?
13. Did Germany keep their promise not to sink any more unarmed ships?
14. Why was Germany desperate in 1917?
15. Who wrote the Zimmermann Note and where was it sent?
16. What did the Zimmermann Note say?
17. How did Americans respond when they found out about the Zimmermann Note?
18. President Wilson told the American people that we must make the world safe for __________!
19. When did American troops begin to arrive in Europe and how did they help the Allies?
20. When did Germany surrender?