

World War I

*A Half-Century of Crisis and
Achievement (1900–1945)*



The road to war

The Great War

The aftermath of war

Thematic Icons



Economics and business



Geography and environment



Historical concepts and questions



Politics, government and citizenship



Religion and thought



Society and culture



War, diplomacy and foreign policy

Icons: For more detailed instructions, see the *User Guide*



Flash activity (these activities are not editable)



Teacher notes included in the Notes page



By the end of this section, you will have learned about World War I, and be able to answer the following key questions:

- How and why did World War I begin?
- How was it different from previous wars?
- How did the war progress as countries joined and left the fighting?
- How did the war end?



The “powder keg of Europe”



At the turn of the 20th century, nationalist uprisings in the Ottoman-controlled **Balkans** made the region extremely volatile. Located between the Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, the Balkans was also subject to frequent foreign intervention. For these reasons, the Balkans was known as the “powder keg of Europe.”

Press **start** to begin.

start



Why do you think this incident resulted in a global war?



Alliances between the major powers in Europe forced many nations into a war that otherwise had little to do with them. Drag these events into the correct order to explain how the major powers joined the war.

Press **start** to begin.

start





Europe goes to war



Germany and Austria-Hungary were known as the **Central Powers**. Russia, France and Britain were the Allied Powers, or simply the **Allies**. Leaders on both sides expected the war to be quick and glorious. Instead, it lasted for four years and killed tens of millions of people around the world. Why was the war so different from what people expected?

Press **start** to begin.

start



How might trench conditions affect an army's success?



The **Eastern Front** was more mobile than the Western Front. Early in the war, Russia had invaded Germany and Austria-Hungary. However, by December of 1914, the Russian army was in retreat.

Russia's lack of industrialization made it difficult to supply the troops. Many soldiers went without adequate weapons, ammunition, or even food and clothing.

Russia's only advantage was numbers. As men died by the thousands, they were quickly replaced from Russia's massive population. This forced the Central Powers to continue fighting on two fronts.





Advances in military technology soon made World War I very different from any previous war. New weapons allowed both sides to inflict massive casualties and changed the nature of warfare forever.

Press **start** to begin.

start





As time went on, trenches became more elaborate as both sides tried to provide their soldiers with multiple layers of protection. Press the numbered hotspots to learn about different features of World War I trench warfare.
Press **start** to begin.

start





In 1915, the Germans set up a U-boat blockade of Britain, hoping to cut the island off from its allies.

The U-boats had orders to engage in **unrestricted submarine warfare** – they would shoot on sight any vessel sailing in British waters.

The Germans bombed British docks, factories and other war-making facilities. This strategy, known as **total war**, is intended to destroy a country's ability to make war. As the war went on, the Allies used similar tactics against the Germans.



How do you think total war affects a nation's ability to make war?





A truly global war



Fighting quickly spread to other continents as more nations joined the war. Before long, World War I had become global.

Press **start** to begin.

start





As more countries were drawn into the war, the United States remained officially neutral. Although the U.S. supplied the Allies with munitions, most Americans saw the war as a European conflict. In 1915 and 1917, two events threatened American neutrality and brought the U.S. closer to declaring war.

Press **start** to begin.

start



Why were Americans so reluctant to enter the war?



By 1916, the war was still a stalemate.
Neither side made significant gains,
despite huge troop losses.

Watch this animation to find out about the
later events and **armistice** of World War I.

Press **start** to begin.

start



How should the Allies deal with the defeated nations?



World War I was unlike any previous war. New weapons required new battle strategies and new uniforms. Look at these two uniforms from the beginning and the end of World War I and discuss how they are different. Press the buttons to read about how the uniforms changed. Press **start** to begin.

start



Can you suggest reasons for these changes?



Despite the militarism and alliances of the pre-war years, few world leaders were prepared for the realities of war. Match each leader to his description. Press the information panels on the right to see a photograph and a quotation from each of them.

Press **start** to begin.

start

