



Knowledge Organiser: Why did the First World War start in 1914?



Topic Summary:

This enquiry investigates the reasons for the first ever 'world war', and the reasons why it began in 1914. The tensions that fuelled the war had been building between European countries since the creation of a united Germany in 1871. You will study the long term and short term causes of World War I and what the final spark was. You need to understand the causes of the First World War, to help you understand the causes of conflict and to look for future tension between nations and potential causes of conflict.

Key Dates:

1870-71

The Franco-Prussian War. Victory led to the creation of the German Empire.

1908

Austria-Hungary's Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

2nd-7th August 1914

Germany enacts the Schlieffen Plan by invading Luxembourg and Belgium. France and Britain retaliate.



1906

HMS Dreadnought launched, changing the nature of naval warfare.

28th June 1914

Assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Bosnian-Serb Gavrilo Princip. Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.

Key People:



Archduke Franz Ferdinand

The heir to the Austro-Hungarian Empire who was assassinated in 1914 whilst visiting Sarajevo.



The Black Hand

A secret Serbian society that used terrorist methods to promote the liberation of Serbs outside Serbia from Habsburg or Ottoman rule. They planned the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand



Gavrilo Princip

A Bosnian-Serb nationalist who assassinated Franz Ferdinand and Sophia, sparking WWI.



Alfred von Schlieffen

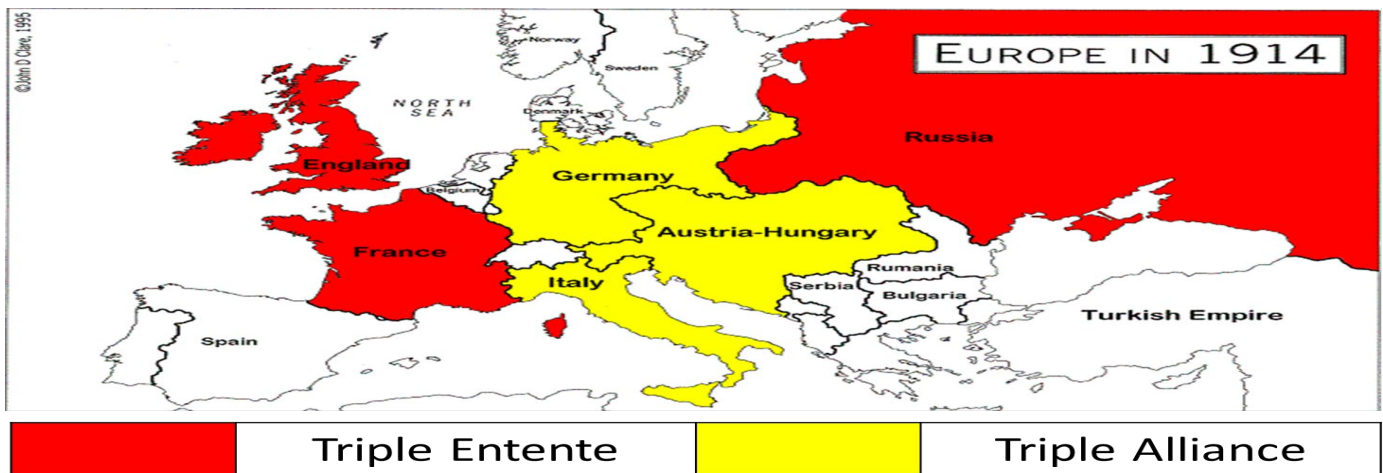
A German officer and head of the general staff who developed the German plan of attack (Schlieffen Plan) in which Germany would attack and defeat France quickly, and then fight Russia.

Vocabulary:

| | | |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Prussia | | The largest German state on the southeast coast of the Baltic Sea. |
| Tension | | A feeling of fear or anger between two countries who do not trust each other. |
| Imperialism | | Extending a country's power and influence through taking over empires. |
| Militarism | | The belief that it is necessary to have strong armed forces and that they should be used in order to gain power. |
| Navy | | The part of a country's armed forces that is trained to operate at sea. |
| Alliances | | An agreement between countries that benefits each of them. |
| Assassination | | The planned murder of an important person. |
| Nationalism | | A nation's wish and attempt to be politically independent OR a great love of your own country. |
| Balkans | | A region in south eastern Europe. |
| Causation | | Understanding the different causes of an event. |

Core Knowledge:

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Lesson 1: What was the state of Europe by 1914?</p> | <p>Europe had become very tense by 1914 with 6 powerful countries all having competing international aims and desires.</p> <p>Great Britain: Wanted to maintain and control its vast empire and saw other countries growing there empires as a direct threat</p> <p>France: After the Franco Prussian war which France lost the newly founded Germany took the French region of Alsace Loraine which they wanted back</p> <p>Russia: Wanted to protect the intertest of the Slavic people in the Balkans and disagreed with the expansion of Austria – Hungary</p> <p>Germany: Wanted to expand its empire particularly in Africa and increased its military</p> <p>Austria: Hungary: Wanted to continue its expansion of its empire to include the Balkans</p> <p>Italy: Wanted to become a powerful empire but was unsure but its army remained small</p> <p>This lesson highlights how there was a growing divide in Europe and alliances would start to form</p> |
| <p>What were the long term causes of WW1?</p> | <p>Militarism –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Militarism means that the army, navy and military forces are given high importance by the government. • The growing European divide had led to an arms race between the main countries. • There was fierce competition between Britain and Germany for control of the sea with the best navy. The British had introduced the ‘Dreadnought’, an effective battleship, in 1906. The Germans soon followed suit introducing their own battleship, the Rhineland. <p>Alliances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An alliance is an agreement made between two or more countries to give each other help if it is needed. When an alliance is signed, those countries become known as Allies. • A number of alliances had been signed by countries between the years 1879 and 1914. These were important because they meant that some countries had no option but to declare war if one of their allies declared war first. • Europe became divided into two blocs of alliances: The Triple Alliance (Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary) and the Triple Entente (Great Britain, Russia and France). These alliances were meant to be a deterrent and ensure peace, but actually made a large scale war more likely. <p>Imperialism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imperialism is when a country takes over new lands or countries and makes them subject to their rule and part of their empire. This brought them wealth, power and new trade opportunities. • By 1900 the British Empire extended over five continents and France had control of large areas of Africa. • The competition for empire increased tension and inspired the arms race and need for allies. <p>Nationalism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nationalism means being a strong supporter of the rights and interests of one’s country. • Large areas of both Austria-Hungary and Serbia were home to differing nationalist groups, all of whom wanted freedom from the states in which they lived. Serb nationalism inspired the Black Hand Gang to assassinate Archduke Franz Ferdinand. |



Long term

Short term

Trigger



Time



Event

Core Knowledge:

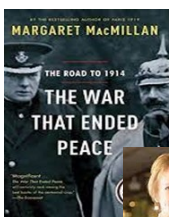
Lesson 2:
What was the short term reason for the start of the war?

- Nationalist feelings rose up in the Balkans region with countries demanding independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
- Austria had annexed Bosnia in 1908, a move that was not popular with the Bosnian people. **Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, decided to visit Sarajevo**, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, to make an inspection of the Austro-Hungarian troops there.
- **A Serbian terrorist group, called The Black Hand, had decided that the Archduke should be assassinated** and the planned visit provided the ideal opportunity.
- After a failed grenade attack by one of the terrorists, Cabrinovic, the Archduke asked to go to the hospital to visit the wounded but the driver took a wrong turn. Realizing his mistake the driver stopped the car and began to reverse.
- **Another terrorist, named Gavrilo Princip, stepped forward and fired two shots.** The first hit the pregnant Sophia in the stomach, she died almost instantly. The second shot hit the Archduke in the neck. He died a short while later.
- **Austria-Hungary retaliated by declaring war on Serbia which triggered the alliances and sparked WWI.**

Lesson 3:
How and why did WW1 breakout?

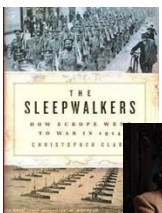
- The Schlieffen Plan has been **created by Alfred von Schlieffen in 1905**
- It was motivated by the alliance between Russia and France in 1890. This alliance threatened Germany because **war now could be staged on two fronts.**
- The Germans believed that the best way to stop the threat would be to **'Fight France First Fast'** and defeat them in 6 weeks. This attack would not start in Alsace-Lorraine, where France would expect, but **through Belgium** (a neutral country). This plan relied on the fact that Russia would take a long time (6 weeks) to mobilise and that France would be easily crushed.
- On 4th August 1914 **Germany launched a surprise attack on France by entering through Belgium** (a neutral country).
- The German invasion **gave Britain an excuse to enter the war** as Britain had previously signed the Pact of London guaranteeing support for Belgium (signed 1839 AD). **As a result, Great Britain declared war on Germany.**
- You will need to create a **causation diagram** which explains why the First World War started in 1914.
- You need to develop an argument by sorting the causes (MAINS) into an **order of importance** and **explaining which cause was most important.**
- You should try to **identify links** between the causes to compare their significance.

What do historians say?



Margaret MacMillan, The War that ended peace

MacMillan argues that the war was not inevitable, but that a host of forces were in fact working towards the maintenance of peace, from labour movements and key individuals to an enduring confidence in the capacity of Europe to avoid conflict. 'Why', MacMillan asks, 'did the forces pushing towards peace – and they were strong ones – not prevail?'



Christopher Clark, The Sleepwalkers

Germany has usually been blamed for escalating the conflict, but Clark refuses to play the blame game, arguing that the Germans were not alone in their paranoid imperialism. The more convincing and terrifying reality is that no nation really meant to wage war, but each sleepwalked into it.

How can I find out more?

Podcast: The rest is History
Causes of the First World War



Documentaries:

- The Long Road to War (Netflix)
- The Necessary War (BBC)
- Apocalypse World War I – Episode 1 – Fury (National Geographic)