

WORLD HISTORY READERS

Level 6 - 1

World War I

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Seed
Learning



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World War I

These days, war is sometimes seen as a glorious adventure. Television, books, and films often make war seem exciting with fights or great battle scenes.

Soldiers are strong and brave heroes.



German soldiers shelter in a trench.

At the beginning of World War I (1914-1918), many people greeted the announcement of war with enthusiasm. Men volunteered to go and fight. The war brought out feelings of patriotism.

Most people, however, thought that the war would be over in a few months. In fact, no one could imagine the amount of death and destruction the war would cause.



Bandaged British soldiers during the war

Crowds gathered in Paris at the beginning of World War I.



What Is a Trench?

A trench is a long ditch cut into the ground. Much of World War I (WWI) was fought using trenches. The trenches were usually built with wood and sandbags, and they were about two meters deep.



A German bunker, Flanders Fields

Trenches helped protect soldiers. They were usually cut in a zigzag pattern, to stop anyone shooting down the length of them. But the trenches could be miserable places with problems such as rats, flooding, and disease.

The safest places were the underground shelters called bunkers. Food and weapons were stored inside. Sometimes the soldiers slept on wooden benches in the bunkers.

Preserved trenches in Holland



Why Did WWI Start?

Why do countries go to war? In the case of WWI, there is a lot of debate. However, one event started it. An Austro-Hungarian prince was murdered on June 28, 1914. His name was Archduke Franz Ferdinand.

At that time, many countries were becoming powerful in Europe. Many of these countries wanted more colonies. They built up their armies in case they needed to fight with their neighbors.

Soon after the murder of Archduke Ferdinand, almost all of Europe was at war, as well as Russia, Turkey, Japan, and some British colonies like Australia. There were two opposing sides, the Allies and the Central Powers.

A New Way to Fight

Battles in previous wars happened fast. Armies moved quickly on horses. They covered a lot of ground. In WWI, this changed mostly because of trench warfare. As a result, battles became long and slow. Allied and Central Power forces began digging the first trenches on the Western Front on September 15, 1914. Eventually, the trenches stretched right across Europe. In total, the trenches built during WWI would stretch about 25,000 miles if they were laid end-to-end.



Preserved WWI trenches in Belgium



The street corner where the Archduke was killed



The arrest of Archduke Ferdinand's murderer



German machine gunners in a trench



A German soldier ready to throw a grenade, in the background wearing a helmet



Soldiers wearing gas masks

Most trenches were terrible places to live. Often there was nothing to do. No wonder many soldiers lost hope or became depressed while they were stuck in the trenches.

Both sides tried to develop new weapons. Science and industry were put into the service of the war. Hot air balloons were used to scan the enemy's trenches. Grenades became important weapons. Large artillery guns on wheels could shoot the enemy from far away.



An American artillery gun in Beaumont, France

One of the worst weapons was poison gas. Without a gas mask, soldiers died horribly. The chlorine gas filled their lungs up with liquid until they drowned. After WWI, gas was banned for use in war.

Imagine the War

Can you imagine what it was like living in the trenches? Imagine you are standing there beside your friend, Johnny. It rained in the morning, so both of you are standing in water. In fact, Johnny has something called "trench foot." His feet have been wet for so long that they are rotting, but at least neither of you is sick like some of the other soldiers.

Out of the corner of your eye, you see something move. It's a rat! The rats are everywhere—nothing gets rid of them! It has been days since you have had a hot meal. You remember your favorite dinner from home, your bedroom, a hot shower . . . All of those things seem like a dream now!



A German trench



Soldiers dying between the trenches

Comprehension Questions

1. What did many people think at the beginning of the war?
 - (a) It would last for many years.
 - (b) It would be over quickly.
 - (c) It would be good for their economy.
 - (d) They didn't know it was happening.
2. Why did the armies build trenches?
 - (a) To store food
 - (b) To make a place to sleep
 - (c) To protect the soldiers
 - (d) To collect water
3. The two sides in WWI were...
 - (a) the English and the Germans.
 - (b) the Allies and the Japanese.
 - (c) the Allies and the Germans.
 - (d) the Allies and the Central Powers.
4. How many miles of trenches were built in WWI?
 - (a) Over one million
 - (b) About 25,000
 - (c) Around one hundred
 - (d) Less than ten
5. No man's land was an area...
 - (a) where no one was allowed to visit.
 - (b) only for women.
 - (c) between enemy trenches.
 - (d) where no one could survive.
6. What was a problem soldiers in the trenches faced?
 - (a) Rats
 - (b) Trench foot
 - (c) Depression
 - (d) All of the above
7. A light-shell rocket would...
 - (a) destroy a tank.
 - (b) light up the sky at night.
 - (c) travel far because it was not heavy.
 - (d) be used during the day.
8. Which was NOT important for fighting during WWI?
 - (a) The gas bomb
 - (b) The tank
 - (c) The machine gun
 - (d) The horse
9. Who wrote *All Quiet on the Western Front*?
 - (a) A French poet
 - (b) A German soldier
 - (c) A Russian king
 - (d) An American sailor
10. After WWI, wars...
 - (a) used more technology.
 - (b) were romanticized.
 - (c) always used trench warfare.
 - (d) All of the above

Glossary

- **announcement** an official public statement about something
- **approximately** close to a specific number or time, but not exactly that number or time
- **artillery** large guns that are used to shoot over a great distance
- **ban** to make something illegal or not allowed
- **barbed wire** strong wire with short, sharp points on it
- **brutal** being extremely cruel or very violent
- **ceasefire** an agreement to stop fighting a war for a period of time
- **colony** a region or country that is being controlled by a more powerful country
- **crisis** a time that is very dangerous or difficult
- **enthusiasm** a feeling of interest and excitement about something
- **grenade** a small bomb thrown by hand or shot from a gun
- **interrogation** the act of questioning someone, often with force
- **mobile** able to move or be moved easily
- **spark** to cause something to start
- **sympathy** the feeling of understanding and caring about someone's problems

Key 1. (b) 2. (c) 3. (d) 4. (b) 5. (c) 6. (d) 7. (b) 8. (d) 9. (b) 10. (a)