

ACTIVITY TWO: THEATERS OF WAR

TEACHER DEBRIEFING SHEET

Discussion Questions:

1. Examine the locations of the theaters of war during World War I and discuss why you think war was waged on each of the different fronts.
2. Compare and contrast the Western Front, the Eastern Front, and the Middle Eastern theater of war.
3. Describe the role(s) strategic and physical geographic factors played in World War I military successes and failures.
4. What are some of the possible results of a military campaign planned without considering geographic factors?
5. What are the costs of war and the price of peace?

Task:

Create a propaganda campaign, consisting of two different propaganda posters, to convince military leaders of the importance of considering both strategic and physical geographic factors as they make decisions about battles.

Task Evaluation Criteria:

- Propaganda campaign consists of two different propaganda posters; posters are designed to convince military leaders of the importance of considering both strategic and physical geographic factors as they make decisions about battles.
- Propaganda posters make use of color and at least three of the following propaganda techniques: exaggeration, caricature, the incitement (causing) of fear, the inclusion of testimony (statements) from well-known people, and/or visuals that evoke emotion.
- Group accurately incorporates at least five pieces of World War I historical information (events, geography, data, people, etc.) into propaganda campaign.
- Propaganda posters include at least two different World War I perspectives (Allies, Central Powers, specific military leaders' points of view, soldiers' points of view, etc.).
- Group presentation includes discussion of the costs of war and the price of peace.

Extension Questions:

1. Describe some of the challenges soldiers faced on the various fronts.
2. Many WWI military leaders were swiftly relieved of duty, often during battle. Why do you think this was so?
3. Which theater of war do you think would be the most difficult to fight in and why?
4. Explain how geographic factors increased the number of World War I casualties.
5. Which of the battles you read about in your Resource Cards is most memorable, and why?
6. What role do waterways play in war? What role(s) did they play in World War I?
7. What are some of the short-term effects of a battle planned without taking geographic factors into account? (Or a battle plan based on geographic misinformation?)
8. What are some of the long-term effects of a battle planned without taking geographic factors into account? (Or a battle plan based on geographic misinformation?)
9. Describe some of the major turning points of World War I.
10. Do you think that World War I military leaders read The Art of War? Why or why not?

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ACTIVITY CARD



Read the CONTEXT-SETTING CARD. Then use the information on your RESOURCE CARDS to talk about the DISCUSSION QUESTIONS.



Examine the TASK and complete the project to meet all of the TASK EVALUATION CRITERIA.

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CONTEXT-SETTING CARD

A **theater of war** (also called a war zone) is an area in which military operations (battles) take place.

World War I was fought in different theaters of war throughout the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Most of the battles of World War I took place on the Western Front, which was located in Europe where Germany bordered France and Belgium. The other major European theater of war was the Eastern Front, located where Russia bordered Germany and Austria-Hungary. Other European theaters of war included fronts in Italy and in the Balkans. In addition to the various war zones in Europe, battles were fought in the Middle East (in the Ottoman Empire) and in Germany's colonies in Africa and Asia.



Geographic factors played a major role in World War I. Military leaders considered both strategic geographic factors (the advantages they would gain by acquiring control of certain territories) and physical geographic factors (such as topography and climate) in planning battles. Military leaders tried to plan battles that would allow them to gain access to important areas, including waterways and key cities. They also had to consider whether or not, or how, to fight a battle based on the topography (the kind of territory, such as mountains, swamps, etc.) and the climate (temperature, rainfall, etc.). When military leaders failed to consider geography, or based their decision-making on incorrect or inaccurate information about geography, there were often more casualties (losses).



From The Art of War, an ancient Chinese text by Sun Tzu:

To estimate the enemy situation and to calculate distances and the degree of difficulty of the terrain so as to control victory are the virtues [qualities] of the superior general. He who fights with full knowledge of these factors is certain to win; he who does not will surely be defeated.

The Cost of War and the Price of Peace

Revised 12/04

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RESOURCE CARD 1 (OF 4) The Schlieffen Plan

In 1905, German Army Chief of Staff Alfred von Schlieffen was asked to plan a way to prevent having to fight a war on two fronts: the Western Front (along the German-French border) and the Eastern Front (along the German-Russian border). Schlieffen believed that to avoid a simultaneous (occurring at the same time) war on these two fronts, Germany would need to defeat France quickly before Russia had a chance to mobilize its armed forces. Schlieffen's plan called for 90% of Germany's military forces to deliver a knockout blow to France, resulting in the capture of Paris in 42 days. The remaining 10% of Germany's military forces would defend the Eastern Front against Russian attack. In August of 1914, at the start of World War I, Germany activated the Schlieffen Plan. The Schlieffen Plan failed, in part because the plan was based on a series of assumptions that turned out to be incorrect.



Geographic Factors

Geographic factors were an important consideration for Schlieffen in the creation of his plan to capture Paris in 42 days. The fastest route was obviously a straight line that entered from the border at Metz directly to the capital of France. But at the time, a line of forts extended along this border to protect France from such an invasion. To the north and south of these forts were dense forests and mountainous regions, whose difficult terrain would present a challenge for German armies. Therefore, Schlieffen sought to avoid the geographic obstacles by moving north around the Ardennes Forest to a broad, open plain in Belgium. As a result of this decisive planning, German forces were able to sweep through Belgium and easily capture the industrial region of northeastern France. However, the Schlieffen Plan failed in its ultimate (final) goal, and did not achieve victory over France.

Assumptions that went into the creation of the Schlieffen Plan:

- Britain would remain neutral, and Belgium would not put up a fight against a German attack.
- It would take *at least* 6 weeks for Russia to mobilize for battle.
- It would be easy to defeat France in 6 weeks.

The reality of the Schlieffen Plan when it was put into action:

- Belgium fought back with the aid of British troops.
- Russia mobilized in just 10 days, forcing Germany to pull troops from the Western Front to defend its eastern border against Russia.
- Germany did not follow the original plan, which called for an attack on Paris. Instead, the Germans attacked east of Paris and were halted (stopped) by the French at the Battle of the Marne.

ACTIVITY TWO: THEATERS OF WAR

RESOURCE CARD 2 (OF 4) The Western Front

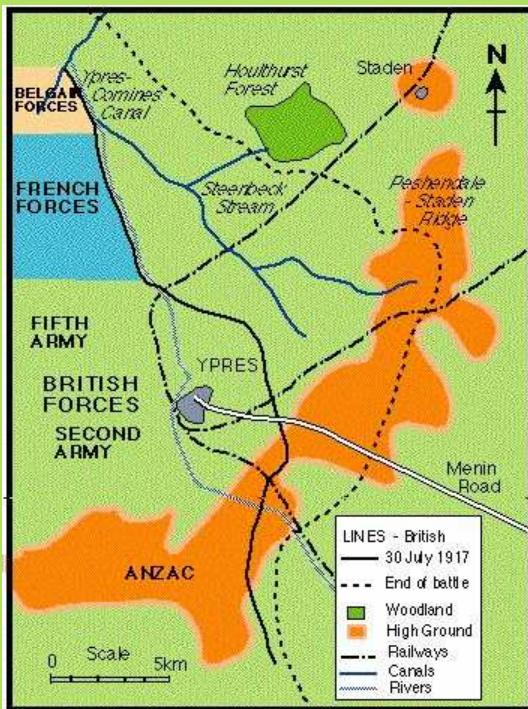
The Western Front refers to the line of fighting that extended along Germany's border with Belgium and France. After the failure of Germany's Schlieffen Plan (a plan to conquer France rapidly), Allied troops attempted to force the Germans to retreat. In the resulting battles, each side failed to outmaneuver the other. Soldiers on both sides settled behind impressive lines of trenches (ditches) from which they fought. For most of the war, the battles on the Western Front resulted in a stalemate (a tie, or a standoff) between the two sides. In 1918, the stalemate was finally broken when troops from the United States joined the war, and the Allies were able to overwhelm the exhausted Germans.

Valentine Fleming, a member of the British Parliament, described the Western Front in a letter, 1914:

Imagine a broad belt, ten miles or so in width, stretching from the [English] Channel to the German frontier near Basle, which is positively littered with the bodies of men and scarified [scarred] with their rude graves; in which farms, villages, and cottages are shapeless heaps of blackened masonry [bricks]; in which fields, roads, and trees are pitted and torn and twisted by shells...

Third Battle of Ypres (also called Passchendaele), July 31-November 6, 1917

Allied forces hoped to gain access to Germany's U-boats on the Belgian coast by winning a battle at Ypres. The battle was fought on a former swamp, whose drainage systems were quickly destroyed by fighting. The first Allied advance was successful, but troops then waited weeks before British General Douglas Haig organized the next step. By this time, the battlefield was covered with numerous pits from mines and shellfire. When the heaviest rainfall in 30 years fell, the pits filled with mud and water, causing much of the area to be like quicksand. Men, animals and equipment were swallowed up in the mud. The battle resulted in a small (five mile) Allied advance with over 500,000 total casualties.



British WWI soldier and poet Siegfried Sassoon recalled Ypres in his 1918 poem "Memorial Tablet" (excerpted):

...I died in Hell
(they called it Passchendaele) my wound was slight
and I was hobbling back; and then a shell
burst slick upon the duckboards; so I fell
into the bottomless mud, and lost the light.

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RESOURCE CARD 3 (OF 4) The Eastern Front

The Eastern Front refers to the theater of war along Russia's western border – the border it shared with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Fighting began on the Eastern Front when Russia invaded Germany in August of 1914 in order to take some of the pressure off of their allies fighting Germany on the Western Front. Russia's initial (first) fighting resulted in a crushing defeat at the hands of the Germans at the Battle of Tannenberg (August 1914). Some historians argue, however, that the Russian sacrifice at Tannenberg (which diverted German troops from the Western Front) enabled the Allies to defeat the German Schlieffen Plan at the Battle of the Marne on the Western Front. While the Russians were more successful in their attempts against Austria-Hungary, by the end of 1914, with the Central Powers' victory at the Battle of Limanowa, the entire Eastern Front had been pushed back within the borders of the Russian Empire, and Russia was now on the defensive.

The Central Powers were able to effectively geographically isolate (separate) Russia from its allies by blocking the two water routes into the Russian Empire. In the northwest, the German navy controlled the Baltic Sea. In the southwest, the Ottoman Empire blocked access to the Black Sea through the Dardanelles and the Sea of Marmora. Cut off from her allies, and sorely under equipped, both on the battle front and the home front, Russia was ripe (ready) for unrest. In 1917, the Russian Revolution began, as Russians demanded a change in government. The Russian leader (the tsar) abdicated (gave up his power), and Russia's new socialist government officially pulled Russia out of World War I early in 1918.

The Russian Steamroller

The popular image of Russia before World War I was that of a steamroller, a powerful country that would crush everything in its path. The reality, as the world came to see once the war got underway, was quite different. These before and after impressions of the strength of the Russian Empire are shown in the 1915 Spanish propaganda poster at right. At the beginning of the war, Russia is depicted as a fierce bear accompanied by a massive steamroller. One year later, the bear is tired and the steamroller is broken.

Russia, unlike its allies, was not an industrial powerhouse. When Russia's men went off to fight in World War I, they left behind key jobs in industry and agriculture. The lack of workers slowed production, and Russian factories and farms could no longer meet wartime demands, including the demand for weapons. A lack of trains prevented delivery of existing supplies to the war front. The lack of trains also prevented the delivery of coal, further reducing production as many factories were forced to close because without coal they had no source of power.



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RESOURCE CARD 4 (OF 4) The Middle Eastern Theater of War

In November of 1914, the Ottoman Empire (located in the Middle East and centered around Turkey), which had remained neutral during the first few months of World War I, joined the war on the side of the Central Powers. The majority Muslim Ottoman Empire declared a jihad (a holy war) against the Allies. The inclusion of the Ottoman Empire among the Central Powers shifted fighting to yet another theater of war – the Middle East.

The Middle Eastern theater of war was particularly difficult for Allied soldiers not used to the extreme temperature shifts of the region. On humid summer nights, troops were attacked by flies and mosquitoes, and on many winter nights the cold was overwhelming. The Middle Eastern climate also affected the Allied troops during the rainy season, when muddy conditions resulted from the flooding of the Tigris River. The Ottomans definitely held an advantage over the Allies in battles in their home region since they were prepared to deal with the climate. However, by the end of World War I, Allied successes in the Middle East contributed to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The Battle of Gallipoli (February 1915-January 1916)

In 1915, the Allies decided to attack the Gallipoli Peninsula in the northwest corner of the Ottoman Empire. The Allies believed that if they could take the Gallipoli Peninsula, they could defeat the Ottoman Empire, thereby weakening the Central Powers and strengthening the Allies by opening supply lines to Russia through the Black Sea. The outcome of a victorious battle for the Allies on the Gallipoli Peninsula was envisioned (imagined) in a meeting of the British War Council on January 8, 1915:

Lord Kitchner: "The Dardanelles [waterway to the southeast of the Gallipoli Peninsula] appeared to be the most suitable objective...if successful it [the attack] would reestablish communication with Russia, draw in Greece and perhaps Bulgaria and Romania [as members of the Allied Powers] and release wheat and shipping now locked up in the Black Sea."

Lieutenant Colonel Hankey: "It would give us the Danube [river]...for an army penetrating into the heart of Austria."

Unfortunately, the Allied military leaders underestimated the challenges of the battle. Bad weather led to delays and the Allied troops were forced to send for assistance, which gave the Turks more time to prepare. The delay, coupled with lack of intelligence about the terrain (geography), was a major disaster for the Allied troops. After nine months, the Allies withdrew in defeat.



Gallipoli in Numbers

Before the battle began, the British War Office estimated that there would be 5,000 total Allied casualties. In the first week alone, 6,500 ANZAC (Australian & New Zealand Army Corps) troops died. There were 16,000 cases of frostbite among the Allied troops. In the end, the Allies suffered over 200,000 casualties.

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INDIVIDUAL REPORT

Compare and contrast the expectations and the realities of battle on the Western Front, the Eastern Front, and in the Middle Eastern theater of war during World War I, making sure to include geographic factors in your discussion.

Evaluation Criteria:

- Response compares and contrasts the expectations and the realities of battle on the Western Front, the Eastern Front, and in the Middle Eastern theater of war during World War I.
- Response includes discussion of geographic factors.
- Response makes use of specific historical evidence (events, geography, data, people, etc.) to support comparisons and contrasts.
- Response includes discussion of the costs of war and the price of peace.