

WWI: The Spark and the Trenches - A Detective's Look

Materials Needed:

- Computer with internet access
- Large sheet of paper or poster board
- Colored pens or markers
- Access to a world map (online or physical)
- Optional: Printer for map template

Lesson Activities:

Part 1: The Case of the Archduke (Introduction - 15 mins)

Teacher: "Griffin, imagine you're a detective in 1914. A major event has just happened – Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary has been assassinated in Sarajevo! This single act will plunge Europe, and eventually much of the world, into a massive war. But why? Was it just this one event, or were tensions already boiling? Today, we're investigating the causes and the start of World War I."

Discussion: What do you already know or think about World War I? What does the term 'World War' even mean?

Part 2: Uncovering the MAIN Clues (Causes - 20 mins)

Teacher: "Detectives look for underlying motives. For WWI, historians often talk about the 'MAIN' causes. Let's break them down."

- **Militarism:** Building up armies and navies, glorifying military power.
- **Alliances:** Agreements between countries to defend each other (like gangs, but with nations!).
- **Imperialism:** Countries competing for colonies and resources around the world.
- **Nationalism:** Intense pride in one's own country, sometimes leading to rivalry and conflict.

Activity: Watch a short, engaging video explaining the causes of WWI (Search for: "Causes of WW1 explained" - choose an age-appropriate, clear video like those from Simple History or Crash Course World History, pre-screened by the teacher). Discuss after watching: How did each of the MAIN causes contribute to the tension before the assassination?

Part 3: Mapping the Conflict (Alliances & Geography - 25 mins)

Teacher: "Okay Detective, let's map out the players. Europe was tangled in alliances. When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia (where the assassin was from), the alliances kicked in like dominoes."

Activity:

1. On your large paper, roughly sketch or print a map of Europe in 1914.
2. Identify and label the major powers: Great Britain, France, Russia, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire, Italy.
3. Use two different colors to shade the countries belonging to the main alliances:
 - **Allied Powers (Triple Entente initially):** France, Great Britain, Russia (and later others like Italy, USA)
 - **Central Powers (Triple Alliance initially):** Germany, Austria-Hungary, Ottoman Empire

(Italy was initially allied but switched sides).

4. Mark Sarajevo, the location of the assassination.
5. Draw arrows indicating the initial declarations of war (Austria-Hungary on Serbia, Germany on Russia, Germany on France, Britain on Germany).

Discussion: Looking at the map, how did these alliances make a larger war almost inevitable once conflict started?

Part 4: Into the Trenches (Nature of Warfare - 15 mins)

Teacher: "The war quickly bogged down, especially on the Western Front in France and Belgium. Soldiers dug vast networks of trenches. Let's get a glimpse of what that was like."

Activity: Watch a short video explaining trench warfare (Search for: "Life in the trenches WWI" - choose an age-appropriate video, perhaps from the Imperial War Museums or similar sources).

Discussion: What were the conditions like? What new technologies made this war different (e.g., machine guns, poison gas)? How would this type of fighting affect soldiers?

Part 5: Case Summary (Wrap-up & Assessment - 15 mins)

Teacher: "Alright Detective Griffin, let's review our findings."

Discussion/Review:

- What were the MAIN causes again?
- What event triggered the war?
- Who were the main opposing alliances?
- What was trench warfare like?

Assessment: Use your map and explain the key countries, alliances, and how the war started. Or, answer 3-5 questions verbally or in writing (e.g., List the MAIN causes; Name two countries on each side; What was the 'spark' that ignited the war?).

Extension (Optional):

Research a specific WWI technology (tanks, airplanes, submarines, gas) or a major battle (Marne, Somme, Verdun) and write a short paragraph or create a small presentation about it.