Since the War of 1812, American leaders had successfully followed George Washington’s advice in his Farewell Address to avoid “entanglements” with Europe. However, during the Spanish-American War, the United States acquired an overseas empire and grew to become a major world power. Another turning point in American foreign policy was reached in 1917, when the United States entered World War I.
— IMPORTANT IDEAS —

A. Nationalism, economic rivalry, the alliance system, and militarism contributed to the outbreak of World War I in Europe. In 1914, Europe was divided into two alliances. The spark that began the war was the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by Slav nationalists with Serbian help.

B. German troops marched through neutral Belgium and invaded France, but were halted before they could take Paris. New and improved weapons, like the machine gun, created a new form of warfare. Each side dug trenches, set up machine guns, and put land mines in the “no-man’s land” between the trenches.

C. Germany tried to use its U-boats (submarines) to break the British naval blockade that sought to starve Germany and Austria-Hungary into submission.

D. By 1918, the war had become deadlock. Neither side was strong enough to overcome the other.

E. President Woodrow Wilson tried to follow America’s traditional policy of neutrality, by not taking sides in the early years of the war. However, the United States shared its language, political system, and many traditions with Great Britain and France. Americans were shocked by Germany’s invasion of Belgium, which was sensationalized in the press. Germany sent a message offering to help Mexico regain the American Southwest if it joined the war on Germany’s side.

F. German submarines sank ships with American passengers, such as the Lusitania and the Sussex. Germany attempted to avoid such incidents, but Americans were supplying Britain with war materials while Germany was suffering from a British blockade. In 1917, Germany announced it would resume unrestricted submarine warfare and sank more ships. Wilson asked Congress to declare war.

G. The United States prepared the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), under the command of General John Pershing. When the AEF arrived in Europe, it broke the deadlock in the war. Men like Alvin York showed great bravery in the war.

H. President Wilson announced America’s war aims in the Fourteen Points before the war’s end. The Fourteen Points demanded the reorganization of Europe based on nationalism. Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey would be divided into smaller national states. Poland would be restored as an independent country. Economic barriers like tariffs would be lowered. Finally, Wilson envisioned a League of Nations — an international peace-keeping organization.

I. Germany surrendered in 1918. President Wilson traveled to Europe to participate in the Paris Peace Conference. To get his allies to agree to the League of Nations, Wilson made many concessions. Against Wilson’s wishes, the Versailles Treaty treated Germany harshly. Germany was made to accept responsibility for starting the war and had to pay reparations to the victorious allies.

J. When Wilson returned home, the U.S. Senate, led by Henry Cabot Lodge, rejected the treaty. The United States never joined the League of Nations.
Essential Questions

- Why did World War I break out in Europe?
- Could the United States have avoided entering World War I?
- What technological advances made World War I different from earlier wars?
- Why were the peace treaties ending World War I so controversial?

Causes of the War in Europe

World War I was a global war fought with new destructive technologies. It was far more destructive than any previous armed conflict. The war first began in Europe. The outbreak of the war had several major long-term causes:

- Nationalism. Nationalism led to rivalries between France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Several nationalities in Austria-Hungary wanted to form their own national states.

- Economic Rivalries and Imperialism. The European powers had competing economic interests. For example, Russian interests in the Balkans threatened Austria-Hungary. Competing colonial claims added to these tensions.

- The Alliance System. By the 1890s, Europe was divided into two alliances. On one side stood Germany and Austria; on the other side Russia, France and Great Britain. Any dispute involving two of these nations threatened to involve all of them.

- Militarism and Military Planning. Powerful military establishments dominated European life. People were often seen in uniform and extolled the virtues of military discipline and war. Army generals believed it was better to attack than to wait to be attacked because of the time it took to get troops into position.

The Spark That Ignited World War I

The assassination of **Archduke Franz Ferdinand** by Serb nationalists in 1914 was the immediate cause of the war. Austria-Hungary was then a large multi-national state. Some Slavic groups demanded their independence and were willing to commit acts of terrorism to achieve it. Officials in Serbia, a neighboring Slavic state, secretly planned the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, with specially recruited terrorists.
Austria gave an ultimatum to Serbia and then invaded Serbia to avenge the assassination. They were encouraged by their ally, Germany. Existing alliances quickly brought the other major powers into the war. Russia was allied to Serbia; Germany was allied to Austria-Hungary; and Britain and France were allied to Russia. What might have been a minor regional crisis quickly escalated into a major European war. The generals on each side hoped for a quick victory before their enemies could get their forces into action.

**A NEW KIND OF WAR**

Military leaders on both sides predicted the war would be over quickly. To avoid a two-front war, German war plans called for their army to march through neutral Belgium to take Paris before Russia could enter the war. The Germans advanced across Belgium into France, but they were stopped before reaching Paris.

New and improved weapons were used to fight the war, including the machine gun, poison gas, submarines, and airplanes. These weapons made it easier to defend positions than to attack. Soldiers dug deep, fortified trenches. Soon trenches extended hundreds of miles along eastern France, on Germany’s “**Western Front**.” “**Trench warfare**” was a new and strange form of warfare that the world had never seen. These trenches were separated by fields of barbed wire and mines known as “no man’s land.” Anyone who climbed out of the trenches faced instant death from enemy machine gun fire. Soldiers spent years in the trenches, facing shelling from artillery fire for hours each day. Since neither side could advance, fighting lines became stationary.
Sometimes, soldiers faced attacks with poison gas. Casualty rates were high. Tanks were they first introduced in World War I, but were still too primitive to be effective. Overhead, the first airplanes were used to see what was going on across enemy lines. In the oceans, submarines, known in German as “U-boats,” were used to attack large ships. When a battleship sank another ship, it rescued survivors. However, submarines lacked room to take in those who had survived an attack.

Britain placed a blockade around Germany and Austria-Hungary in an attempt to starve them into submission. Russia became cut off from the West and lacked ammunition and supplies. Each side tried to mobilize all its resources, turning the conflict into a total war.

**APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED**

During World War I, many new and deadly weapons were used, such as machine guns, submarines, tanks, poison gas, and airplanes. What impact did these new weapons have on the nature of warfare?

**AMERICA INTERVENES**

When the war first broke out in Europe, President Wilson attempted to follow the traditional American policy of neutrality. In 1916, he even campaigned for re-election on the grounds that he had kept America out of the war. Yet despite Wilson’s best efforts, the United States eventually became involved in the conflict for several reasons:

**Closer Ties with the Allies.** Many Americans traced their ancestry to Britain. A common language and history also tied Americans to the British. The United States, Great Britain, and France all shared the same democratic political system. On the other hand, many Americans were of German ancestry.

**German Actions and Allied Propaganda.** Americans were especially shocked at the German invasion of neutral Belgium. German war plans had called for the invasion of this neutral country to speed up their conquest of France. American newspapers ran stories and pictures depicting German atrocities against civilians.

**Zimmerman Telegram.** This was a secret message from the German Foreign Minister, promising to return U.S. territories to Mexico if Mexico would help Germany fight the United States. American public opinion was enraged when the telegram was discovered and printed in the newspapers.
Freedom of the Seas. The main reason for American entry into World War I was German unrestricted submarine warfare:

★ The British Blockade. A British naval blockade prevented food and arms from being shipped to Germany. Meanwhile, the United States became the main source for Allied arms, supplies and food. The German navy was too weak to break through the British blockade. By using submarines, Germany was able to retaliate by sinking merchant ships delivering goods to Great Britain. However, unlike battleships, submarines had no room to pick up survivors.

★ Sinking of the Lusitania. The Lusitania was a British passenger ship. In 1915, the Lusitania left New York City for Liverpool. Unknown to her passengers, much of the cargo below deck was made up of munitions for the British war effort. A German submarine sank this British passenger ship, killing more than 1,000 passengers, including 128 Americans. The sinking of the Lusitania enraged opinion in the United States.

★ Sussex Pledge. The Sussex was a French ship that provided ferry service on the English Channel. After a German submarine attacked the ship in 1916, killing more than 50 passengers, President Wilson threatened to break off relations with Germany. Germany pledged not to sink any more ocean liners without prior warning or providing help to passengers.

★ Germany Announces Unrestricted Submarine Warfare. Suffering from near-starvation by the British blockade, desperate German leaders announced finally that they would sink all ships in the blockaded areas. This declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare violated the principle of “freedom of the seas” — the right of neutral nations like the United States to ship non-military goods to nations at war. When German submarines then actually attacked American merchant vessels, President Wilson asked Congress to declare war on Germany.

APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

Assume you have been selected to be participate in a commission investigating the neutrality of the United States. Conduct your own research on the Internet or in the library to examine America’s behavior during the early years of the war as a neutral. Write a report on your findings with the title: “Did the United States act as a true ‘neutral’ before it entered the war?”
Soon after joining the war, President Wilson ordered a force of U.S. troops, known as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), to be sent to Europe. The AEF was put under the command of General John J. Pershing. A West Point graduate, Pershing had fought in the Indian Wars, the Battle of San Juan Hill, against Filipino rebels, and had led the expedition against Pancho Villa. In 1917 Pershing insisted that American soldiers be well-trained before being sent to the Western front. As a result, few American troops arrived before 1918. Pershing also demanded that the American forces fight together and not just be used to fill gaps in the French and British armies.

By 1918, the AEF numbered over a million men. The AEF suffered more than a quarter of a million casualties, including more than 50,000 men killed in battle. President Wilson had refused to allow African-American regiments to serve in the AEF, but two of these regiments served directly under French command.

**Battle of Argonne Forest.** One of the greatest American battles of the war occurred in 1918 in the Argonne Forest in Northeastern France near the Belgian border. The Germans had spent four years fortifying their positions which they believed were unsurpassable. The terrain was steep with barely a flat piece of land. One general remarked that it was “a region forgotten when level ground was being created.” German defenses included miles of barbed wire, often hidden in the underbrush. There were also high concrete walls to block the progress of tanks and deep pit traps into which tanks might fall. Machine gun nests were everywhere.

The AEF, under General Pershing, assembled 600,000 soldiers and 40,000 pieces of artillery. They fought through the hilly terrain, shattered the German defenses, and opened a hole in the German lines. This final and most important battle of the AEF lasted a month and a half. A total of 1.2 million Americans were involved in the campaign from start to end, of whom 117,000 were killed or wounded.

During the Civil War, Congress had created the **Medal of Honor** for officers and non-commissioned soldiers who “most distinguish themselves by their gallantry in action.” More than 3,400 soldiers have been awarded the medal.
Alvin York (1887–1964) was a devoted Bible reader, and almost avoided military service as a conscientious objector. He was drafted into the army at age 29. In many respects, he was typical of the draftedees — underprivileged and undereducated — who were sent to France to make the world “safe for democracy.” In the Battle of the Argonne Forest, with nothing more than his rifle and pistol, he reportedly killed 25 Germans and captured 132 prisoners.

ACTING AS AN AMATEUR HISTORIAN

The passage below is from The Diary of Alvin York. York was born in a two-room log cabin in the hills of Tennessee:

“My little old mother and Pastor Pile wanted to get me out [of the army]. Pastor Pile put in a plea to the government that it was against the religion of our church to fight. He filled the papers out and sent them to me to sign. The army told me all I had to do was to sign them. I refused. My mother, too, put in a plea to get me out as her sole support. My father was dead and I was supporting my family. I had brothers [in Tennessee] that could look after my mother. So I never asked for an exemption from service. I never was a conscientious objector. I didn’t want to fight and kill. But I had to answer the call of my country.”

Imagine you are Sergeant York or some other soldier in the American Expeditionary Force on the Western Front during World War I. Write a letter to your family at home describing your experiences.

THE HOME FRONT, 1917–1918

To fight the war, President Wilson was given sweeping powers by Congress. He established several agencies to regulate the economy during the war. Railroads were placed under direct government control. Congress passed the Selective Service Act (1917) and millions of Americans registered for the draft. Almost two million American troops eventually reached Europe, while women and African Americans filled many of their jobs at home. The cost of the war, about $30 billion, was paid for by higher taxes and war bonds. The war greatly benefited the American economy, since exports to the Allied powers greatly increased.

During the war, civil liberties were curtailed to meet wartime needs. The Espionage Act of 1917 made it a crime to criticize the war effort.
SCHENCK V. U.S. (1919)

Charles Schenck was a member of the Socialist Party who felt that drafting men was an unfair use of governmental authority. During World War I, Schenck was convicted for distributing literature that encouraged men to resist the draft. Schenck claimed his First Amendment right to freedom of speech had been violated. His case turned on whether the First Amendment was violated if Congress passed a law punishing dissent in wartime. In Schenck v. U.S., the Supreme Court ruled that there were limits to free speech. The Court said that free speech is not protected from falsely "shouting fire in a crowded theater and causing panic." The First Amendment did not protect words that create a "clear and present danger." This decision became a guide for measuring the limits of free speech.

WILSON’S FOURTEEN POINTS

Wilson broadened American war aims from a defense of “freedom of the seas” to a crusade to make the world “safe for democracy.” Americans found it inspiring to endure the war for such high-minded ideals. In January 1918, Wilson delivered his Fourteen Points in a speech to a joint session of Congress. The Fourteen Points stated that each major European nationality, like the Poles, should be given its own country and government. Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire were therefore to be divided up into several independent nation-states. Poland was to be reborn, and Alsace Lorraine was to be returned to France. Wilson’s Fourteen Points introduced several other changes to increase international cooperation. They called for freedom of the seas, a reduction of armaments, the removal of trade barriers, and an end to secret diplomacy. Wilson felt the most important part of his plan was the creation of a League of Nations. This was to be a new organization of nations that would mediate international disputes and act against aggressors. Wilson hoped to create a world of peaceful nations in which future wars could be avoided.

ACTING AS AN AMATEUR HISTORIAN

"1. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, [with] no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy … in the public view.
2. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas ….
3. The removal of all economic barriers and establishment of equality of trade.
4. National armaments will be reduced to the lowest point ….
5. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims,
10. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development ….
13. An independent Polish state should be created ….
14. A general association of nations must be formed ….”

Which of the Fourteen Points would you consider as most essential to peace? Why?
American troops broke the deadlock in Europe, causing Germany to surrender in November 1918. Wilson hoped to use his Fourteen Points as the basis for a peace plan.

**LEARNING WITH GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS**

Complete the graphic organizer below by describing some of the key events associated with the United States entry into World War I.

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<th>Causes of World War I in Europe</th>
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**WORLD WAR I**

A New Type of Warfare

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THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES

At the end of the war, separate treaties were concluded with Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Turkey. Wilson traveled to Europe to help negotiate these peace treaties. He made a crucial mistake in not inviting influential Republican Senators to accompany him, since the Senate would eventually have to ratify the treaty. Almost immediately, Wilson came into conflict with other Allied leaders at the Paris Peace Conference. They wanted to impose a harsh treaty on Germany that would make the Germans pay for the war.

Wilson made many concessions in order to get the support of the other Allied leaders for the creation of the League of Nations. The final terms of the Treaty of Versailles and the other peace treaties supported nationalism but ended up being extremely harsh on Germany and the other defeated powers.

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**Germany’s Territorial Losses.** A new independent Poland was created. Germany lost territory to France and Poland, as well as all of its overseas colonies.

**Austria-Hungary and Turkey.** The Austro-Hungarian Empire was divided into several new national states. Turkey lost its territories in the Middle East.

**THE PEACE TERMS ENDING WORLD WAR I**

**Punishing Germany.** Germany lost its navy, while its army was reduced to a small police force. Germany was forced to accept blame for starting the war in the War Guilt Clause and was required to pay huge reparations (payments for damages) to the Allies.

**League of Nations.** The Treaty created the League of Nations, an organization of nations pledged to defend each other against aggressors. The League was severely weakened when several major powers, such as the United States and Russia, failed to join it.

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**ACTING AS AN AMATEUR HISTORIAN**

The Covenant of the League of Nations, the agreement creating the League, was placed in the Treaty of Versailles.

“**Article 10.** The Members of the League undertake to ... preserve against external aggression the territorial integrity and political independence of all members.

**Article 11.** Any war or threat of war, ... is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League, and the League shall take any action that may be deemed wise to safeguard the peace of nations.

**Article 12.** Members of the League agree that, if a dispute is likely to lead to a rupture, they will submit the matter ... to the Council, and they agree in no case to resort to war until three months after a report by the Council. The award of the arbitrators or the judicial decision shall be made in a reasonable time ....”

How was the new League of Nations supposed to prevent war? Explain your answer.
THE U.S. SENATE REJECTS THE TREATY

President Wilson hoped that the League of Nations would prevent future wars, but his opponents in Congress argued that it would drag the country into unnecessary military commitments. Wilson needed two-thirds of the U.S. Senate to ratify the Versailles Treaty, but he rejected any compromise with the Senate.

Henry Cabot Lodge (1850–1924) had studied history and political science at Harvard University. He was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt’s and a strong supporter of imperialism. Lodge had been in charge of the Congressional committee that had investigated the conduct of the U.S. Army in suppressing rebels in the Philippines. He was a strong opponent of the League of Nations. He believed that if the United States joined the League, it would lose its freedom of action.

ACTING AS AN AMATEUR HISTORIAN

Below is a speech by Henry Cabot Lodge, Senate Majority Leader in 1919, He sets forth his objections to the League of Nations:

“The independence of the United States is not only more precious to ourselves but to the world than any single possession. Is there any country today on the face of the earth which can compare with our liberty, our peace, and our freedom? I will go as far as anyone in world service, but the first step to world service is the maintenance of the United States. I have always loved one flag and I cannot share that devotion [with] a mongrel banner created for a League of Nations. I have never had but one allegiance, and I cannot divide it now. The United States is the world’s best hope, but if you tie her to the interests and quarrels of other nations, if you tangle her in the [troubles] of Europe, you will destroy her power for good and endanger her very existence.”

What reasons does Lodge give for opposing membership in the League of Nations?

To overcome the Senate’s objections, President Wilson decided to appeal directly to American voters for support. He went on a national speaking tour, but he had failed to gauge the feelings of most Americans. During his tour, Wilson suffered a stroke. Later, the Senate refused to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. Despite Wilson’s grand vision, the United States never joined the League of Nations.

AMERICA RETREATS INTO ISOLATIONISM

By 1919, most Americans were disillusioned with world affairs. The small gains they seemed to have made in World War I came at a terrible cost. Americans once again heeded George Washington’s advice to avoid European entanglements, and they turned their attention towards their material well-being at home.
America returned to its more traditional policy of isolationism — separating themselves from other countries’ affairs. Americans turned their backs on Europe by raising tariffs, and restricting European immigration. Rejection of the Versailles Treaty, refusal to join the League of Nations, higher tariffs, and new immigration restrictions were all signs of America’s decision to turn inward.

**APPLYING WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED**

Have your class re-enact the debate over the Treaty of Versailles in the Senate. Should the United States have joined the League of Nations?

**LEARNING WITH GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS**

Complete the graphic organizer below by describing three important provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

**THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES**

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<th>New Nation States</th>
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**CHAPTER STUDY CARDS**

**World War I**

- **European Causes:** Nationalism, imperialism, alliance system, militarism.
- **Spark Starting WWI.** The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand.
- **Reasons for U.S. Intervention in the War.**
  - Closer ties with Britain and France.
  - German actions and propaganda.
  - Zimmerman Telegram.
  - Violation of Freedom of the Seas.
  - Sinking of the Lusitania / Sussex Pledge.
  - Use of unrestricted submarine warfare.

**World War I Highlights**

- **New Weapons and Tactics:**
  - submarines
  - machines guns
  - air planes
  - trench warfare

- **Selective Service Act.** Allowed national government to draft men to serve in war.

- **American Expeditionary Force.** U.S. troops sent to Europe to defeat Germany.

- **Battle of Argonne Forest.** Major battle of WWI. Germany was defeated.

- **Alvin York** awarded the Medal of Honor.
**World War I Results**

- **Wilson’s Fourteen Points.** Proposed by Wilson as a basis for the peace treaty.
  - Create new nation-states: Poland.
  - Break up Austria-Hungary.
  - Freedom of the Seas.
  - No secret treaties, open diplomacy.
  - League of Nations.

- **Versailles and Other Treaties.** Ended World War I. Dealt harshly with Germany.
  - Germany lost its colonies.
  - Austria-Hungary and Ottoman Turkey were broken up into separate nation-states.
  - **League of Nations** was created.

**Important Individuals**

- **Archduke Franz Ferdinand.** His assassination sparked the start of WWI.
- **John J. Pershing.** Commanded American Expeditionary Force during WWI.
- **Alvin York.** WWI soldier who won Congressional Medal of Honor for valor.
- **Woodrow Wilson.** U.S. President during WWI. Issued Fourteen Points. He strongly supported U.S. participation in a League of Nations.
- **Henry Cabot Lodge.** U.S. Senator who led the fight against joining the League of Nations.