

Teachers' Notes

Audience:

This aim of this pack is to explain the First World War to children aged 11 to 14.

Scope:

The coverage of the Great War is limited inasmuch as only three of the main battles are covered, and the political situations are described only as they existed at the start and the end of the war when they were instrumental in the causes and the outcomes. The War is covered, where applicable, from the point of view of Ireland and her people.

The pack is illustrated with some seldom-seen images of battles, artefacts and medals. The final chapter covers some misconceptions about the war.

Subjects covered

Key Players and Leaders: Descriptions of the main players and leaders of the Allied and Central Powers who contributed to the start of the War.

Causes /Assassination / Britain and Ireland involved: This chapter sets the political scene. It goes on to describe the sequence of events that would ensure that a disagreement between the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Serbia would escalate into a worldwide conflict. It covers the reasons why Britain got involved in the conflict, and sets out some reasons why Irishmen joined up.

Trenches, Trench Life and some big WWI Battles: Describes what a trench was, how big the network of trenches was, the concept of No Man's Land and also what life was like in trenches as the war went on. It describes three of the most commonly cited battles: the Battle of the Somme, Gallipoli and Ypres.

Ceasefire - The Christmas Truce: Explains the circumstances that contributed to both sides of the conflict giving up fighting in 1914.

Ireland and the War at Sea – the sinking of the Lusitania and the Leinster: This chapter describes the torpedoing of two civilian liners - the closest the Great War ever physically came to Ireland

Britain's difficulty, Ireland's Opportunity: The Easter Rising: This chapter gives the background to the 1916 Rising, and briefly describes how events unfolded. The Rising will be covered in more depth in our next schools pack.

1917-1918 The Beginning of the End ...Defeat?: This chapter describes the unravelling of the Great War and how it happened. Unrestricted Submarine Warfare is discussed, Russia gives up the fight and the U.S. joins just as Germany is getting closer to victory. The Armistice and the Paris Peace Conference. The question mark is deliberate - Germany's army was seen by the population as undefeated heroes.

1919 The Fallout: Covers the Treaty of Versailles and the terms imposed on Germany. Also makes the link between Germany's treatment after the First World War and its link to the rise of Nazism and the Second World War.

British Medals of World War 1: Descriptions and photographs of the service medals issued to British survivors and casualties of World War I.

Facts and Myths of the First World War: Dispels some mistaken, but commonly-held beliefs about the conflict.

Topics for Discussion

Key Players and Leaders:

- The fact that three of the leaders were cousins is not widely known. If they had spoken to each other more at the beginning and had more power over their armies, would the results of the assassination have been different?
- Discuss the role of Von Schlieffen's plan in the escalation of the war. Had it not been for this plan forcing an invasion of France for no reason other than a perceived threat, how would the war have progressed? Would it have just been an Austrian/Serbian war?

Causes /Assassination / Britain and Ireland involved:

- Bearing in mind the tensions in Europe at the time, discuss whether the First World War would have happened at all if Franz Ferdinand had not been killed.
- Perhaps someone at a later date might have attempted to take the life of the Archduke. What if that person had been an Austrian? Would there have been a war at all?
- Try and imagine (by writing, or using a question and answer session) what it must have felt like to be in the British Army fighting against the Germans in Belgium and hearing the news that a small number of your countrymen had taken over the GPO and were attacking your army comrades in Dublin.
- Imagine a discussion between two Dubliners in the British Army, one for the rebels and one against. How would that discussion turn out?
- Again from the point of view of a Dubliner in the British Army, how would you feel about the fact that the British Army was bombing your city?

Trenches, Trench Life and some big WWI Battles:

- Imagine you are a soldier (Irish or German) who has just been sent to the front and is writing home from the trenches in either the Somme, Ypres or Gallipoli. Describe what you were expecting when you left home, and how it differed to what you experienced when you arrived in the conflict zone. Bear in mind that in the early years of the war, the glamour of war was still a popular concept among the general public. When soldiers arrived at the front, this was quickly replaced by the reality of war as described in this chapter.
- Was the campaign in Gallipoli and Turkey a mistake? Discuss why.

Ceasefire - The Christmas Truce:

- Discuss the scenario if the Christmas Truce had carried on and spread all along the Western Front. Could this have happened? Would it have stopped the war? Is it a possibility, even today, that if armies refused to fight there would be no war?

Ireland and the War at Sea – the sinking of the Lusitania and the Leinster:

- How might the war have developed if the Americans had declared war on the Central Powers after the sinking of the Lusitania in 1915?
- Was it a mistake for America not to “Avenge the Lusitania” in 1915?
- It is known for a fact that the Lusitania was carrying bullets for rifles, and empty artillery shells that were being brought to British factories to be filled. Did this mean the Germans were justified in sinking her?
- Given the large number of British Army passengers aboard, were the Germans right to sink the Leinster?

1917-1918 The Beginning of the End ...Defeat?:

- Describe what might have happened if Germany’s offer to the Mexican government (that they would support Mexico in a war against the U.S.) had been accepted. Could Germany have won?
- Was the Armistice a mistake? Even taking into account the further loss of life if the war continued, wouldn’t it have been better to have totally defeated the German Army and insisted on a surrender instead?

1919 The Fallout:

- Given that Germany was not directly responsible for the start of the war, do you think the terms of the Treaty of Versailles were too harsh?
- What terms might have been fairer?
- A Serbian citizen shot the heir to the Austrian throne. Austria’s retaliation for this event escalated the conflict. Should Austria and/or Serbia have been punished as well as Germany?

British Medals of World War 1:

- Many Irish families have these medals. Ask the pupils if their family has any in their possession - perhaps belonging to a Great Great Grandfather. On the medals is impressed the soldier's name and number. If the medal belonged to a soldier who died, a good place to start online research is the free Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (<http://www.cwgc.org>) which lists and commemorates the British dead of the First World War including place of burial and sometimes next-of-kin details.

Facts and Myths of the First World War:

An interesting exercise here would be to see how many pupils would have originally believed the "Myth" and were surprised by the "Fact"