Overview

Historically, it has been noted that WWI erupted after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand (heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne) in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914. However, historians continue to debate other underlying causes, including changing political and economic situations in major European nations, the Industrial Revolution, and social turmoil. Whatever the cause, The World War of 1914-18 - The Great War, as contemporaries called it, was the first man-made catastrophe of the 20th century.

In this lesson, students will examine the events that led the world toward WWI.

Objectives

As a result of completing these activities, students will:

- Investigate and create a timeline of the main causes of WWI.
- Describe the factors contributing to the war.
- Assess and reshape events and decisions key to the start and continuation of WWI.

Standards

- USH.3.4) Summarize the Versailles Treaty, the formation and purpose of League of Nations and the interrelationship between the two. (Government)
- WH.8.1) Trace and explain the causes, major events and global consequences of World War I

Materials

- Computer Lab
- Internet access
- Groups of 3 or 4 students

Procedure

1. Have students share what they understand about how WWI started: basic causes, key figures, nations involved. Create a timeline using Xtimeline.com to organize the events for which WWII began. Note that perhaps the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand was the breaking point, but prior to that, several monumental changes were occurring in major European nations that fueled the start of the war early on. (Causes include: industrialization and resultant wealth in some nations, nationalism, imperialism, Bismarck and alliances, arms races, crisis in Africa, Archduke Francis Ferdinand's assassination, and British suffragettes seeking the vote for British women.) At least 3 of these events need to be included on the timeline.

2. Divide the students into groups of 3 or 4. Each group will represent a particular nation that was involved in WWI and allow time for them to research events and put them into a timeline that lead up to the outbreak of the war.
3. Have each group research and understand what happened during this war, and then explain to your students that they will be creating a timeline based on what their nations believe on how WWI began.

4. Each member of each group must comment on another group’s timeline on at least 2 supporting arguments for their country and why they shouldn't be held accountable for the war.

5. The following day each student must respond underneath their own nation’s timeline and defend their nation with counter arguments.

Adapted from:  
http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/lesson1.html  
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