

## Horse Power Lesson One: Key Events

### *How can we choose the ten most significant events of the First World War?*

This activity assumes that children have already learned about the First World War.

The following ideas are each set out under an historical enquiry question. Children should be able to attempt an answer to the question by completing the activities described.

These can be freely adapted depending on the age and ability of children, and the curricular context in which teaching occurs.

Ask children on their own or in groups to note down details they remember about the First World War, against the clock. Share these ideas across the class, noting down similar and different details, and lead a discussion on why everyone might have selected different details.

Use maps and timelines and other online detail about the Western Front campaign to link particular dates to particular locations.

Challenge children to propose dates that they think should be added or taken off. Lead a discussion about the particular reasons why particular dates might be added or removed.

#### EXAMPLES

- June 18th 1919 should be taken off because the Treaty of Versailles happened after fighting ended on the Western Front on 11th November 1918.
- 6th April 1917 should be taken off because although the US declared war on Germany that day, American soldiers arrived too late in 1918 to make a difference to the outcome.
- 1st August should be added because that was the first day of the First World War itself when Germany declared war on Russia.
- 1915 should be added because that started the Gallipoli campaign in Turkey which is so important to Australians and New Zealanders

Ask individuals/pairs/groups to select five key dates of the First World War from the previous ten or more already chosen.

Children should be asked to debate their choices, challenging and defending each in turn. Invite suggestions as to what kind of reason lay behind each choice.

These suggestions can be compared to Christine Counsel's **The Five R's of Historical Significance**:

- **REMEMBERED**: they stayed in people's memories long afterward.
- **RESULTED**: in change.
- **REMARKABLE**: they stood out or still stand out from other events.
- **RESONATE**: they affected the future.
- **REVEALING**: they showed something about the time.

Look at the Timeline of key events in the First World War below. This timeline gives a short term and long term reason why each event matters.

Using online resources, in groups/pairs ask children to explore the details of the First World War campaigns on the Western Front (Western Europe), the Eastern Front (Eastern Europe), in the Middle Eastern, East African and South West African campaigns.

Different groups of children could be allocated different fronts to research further, and then make a case for the inclusion of more (or any events at all) from that campaign to be included as key events of the war as a whole.

#### CREDIT:

This resource was created in 2011 in consultation with Andrew Wrenn from the Imperial War Museum and was originally linked to an interactive map: Horse Power.



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#### Timeline of key events in the First World War

##### **28 June 1914 - Assassination**

The assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz-Ferdinand by a Serbian terrorist in Sarajevo, Bosnia, triggered a series of events that lead directly to the outbreak of the First World War.

**Short term** - It was the immediate cause of the First World War.

**Long term** - Still remembered today as the event that triggered the First World War, which killed millions of people, and contributed to the cause of the Second World War.

##### **4 August 1914 - War is declared**

The Imperial German army invaded neutral Belgium as part of a plan to encircle and capture Paris. Great Britain joined with France and Russia in an alliance called the Entente Cordiale and declared war on the Central Powers, Germany and Austria-Hungary. Other territories of the British Empire such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and India also declared war on Germany.

**Short term** - The invasion of Belgium was the official reason for Great Britain's involvement in the War.

**Long term** - The involvement of countries in the British Empire like Canada and Australia made the war truly global. It also caused these countries to have a stronger sense of their independence.

##### **10 September 1914 - First Battle of the Marne**

The German advance towards Paris was halted by French and British troops at the First Battle of the Marne. Shortly afterward the exhausted soldiers of both sides dug a system of trenches stretching from Switzerland to the Belgian coast of the North Sea, known as the Western Front.

**Short term** - The Allied victory meant that trenches were dug across the Western Front.

**Long term** - Trench warfare changed the way that wars were fought. It lasted for four years. It made cavalry redundant and led to the development of tanks and aircraft.

##### **21 February 1916 - Battle of Verdun**

The German army launched a massive offensive against the French at Verdun. By November there were around 700,000 casualties, and no land changed hands.

**Short term** - With 700,000 casualties, it was one of the war's bloodiest battles.

**Long term** - Verdun made the French less willing to fight on regardless of casualties. In 1940, the Nazis defeated the French army in just 6 weeks.

##### **1 July 1916 - Battle of the Somme**

The British Army launched a major offensive on the Western Front against the Germans to start the Battle of the Somme. It suffered nearly 60,000 casualties on the first day alone.

**Short term** - It was one of the bloodiest battles of the war. The first day of the battle cost the British Army the highest casualties in its history.

**Long term** - Over time it became a symbol of the bravery of troops fighting in the First World War, and one of the alleged stupidity of military commanders.

War Horse Learning

War Horse drawings by  
Rae Smith

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nationaltheatre.org.uk



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#### **6 April 1917 - USA declares war**

The United States of America declared war on Germany and its allies, but it was a year before trained American soldiers fought on the Western Front.

**Short term** - The USA pitched its men and money against Germany, helping win the war for the Allies.

**Long term** - American involvement in the First World War in Europe set an example which was followed in 1941 during the Second World War.

#### **7 November 1917 - Russian Revolution**

The Bolsheviks (Russian Communists) overthrew the provisional government of Russia in Petrograd (St Petersburg). They decided to make peace with Germany.

**Short term** - The Bolshevik takeover in Russia led to peace with Germany, freeing German troops for a great offensive on the Western Front.

**Long term** - The Bolsheviks set up a communist dictatorship called the Soviet Union which helped to defeat Hitler during the Second World War.

#### **3 March 1918 - Treaty of Brest-Litovsk**

The Bolsheviks (Russian Communists) signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, ending the war with Germany. This released German troops for a massive offensive on the Western Front which at first succeeded in breaking through French and British trenches but led to the ultimate defeat of the exhausted German troops.

**Short term** - Without the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Germans could not have moved their soldiers west to launch the final attack on the Western Front.

**Long term** - The last German offensive on the Western Front broke the deadlock of trench warfare, which led to the end of the war.

#### **11 November 1918 - Armistice day**

An armistice between the Germans and the Allied forces ended the war on the Western Front at eleven o'clock on the eleventh day of the eleventh month.

**Short term** - This armistice ended the First World War on the Western Front.

**Long term** - The date has become the focus of Remembrance services and activities in many countries since 1918. This has kept the memory of the War alive.

#### **18 June 1919 - Treaty of Versailles**

German delegates were given no choice but to sign the Treaty of Versailles, which saw Germany disarm, pay reparations, lose colonies and European territory, and accept responsibility for starting the war. It caused such bitterness in Germany that it led to the rise of the Nazi party in 1933, and led to the Second World War in 1939.

**Short term** - This treaty officially ended the First World War with Germany.

**Long term** - This treaty redrew the boundaries of many European countries, creating new ones like Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It set up the League of Nations as an international organisation, followed by the United Nations in 1944. German resentment of the Treaty was a cause of the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Second World War.

