

The Outbreak of the First World War

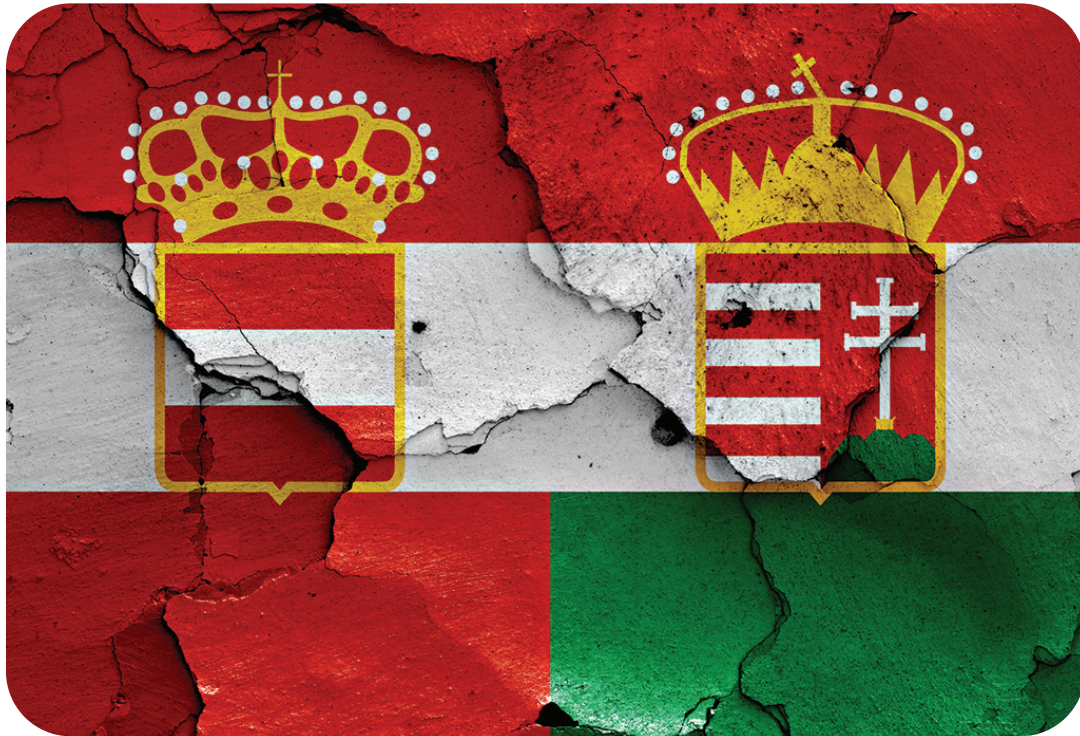


- ① Sit down with the children and show them the series of pictures overleaf. You may wish to lay the sheets out either on a table or the floor, and then read the story.
- ② Ask the children the following questions and discuss them:
What part of the story did you like?
Which pictures did you like?
- ③ Explain that Russia was very different. Their leader was the Tsar, like a Russian king. (In 1917, there was a revolution, but that's a completely different story!)
- ④ The First World War was one of the biggest wars ever. Talk to children about how this story made them feel.
- ⑤ Additional supporting activities about the war can be found in the Remembrance Day section on iChild.

The outbreak of the First World War



As 1914 dawned, there had been no real wars in Europe for nearly a hundred years. Some people even believed that war would soon be a thing of the past. They were so optimistic that they thought we should all share a common language, Esperanto. But, below the seemingly peaceful surface, tensions simmered.



The great Ottoman Empire had become less powerful, but still ruled Turkey and parts of the Middle East. The mighty Austro-Hungarian Empire ruled much of Europe, and had become friends with a new and powerful country called Germany.

Since the end of the previous century, countries had been signing all sorts of treaties and agreements with each other:

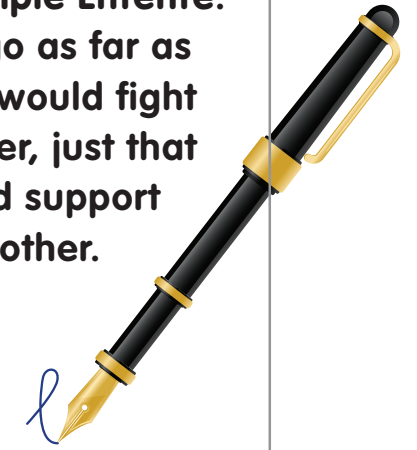
In 1867, Britain and other European countries signed the Treaty of London to respect Belgium's neutrality. In other words, if European countries fought, they would respect Belgium's right to not take sides.

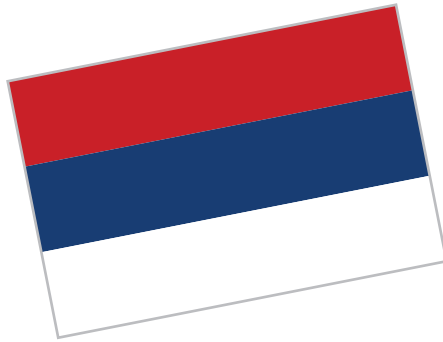
In 1882, Germany and Austria-Hungary formed the Triple Alliance with another young country called Italy. This alliance meant that, if any one of them were at war, the other two would fight on their side.

In 1907, Britain, France and Russia were worried about how powerful Germany was becoming, so they balanced this out by forming the Triple Entente. This didn't go as far as saying they would fight for each other, just that they would support one another.

In the meantime, Italy and France signed a secret treaty saying that they would not attack each other (even though Italy had also signed the Triple Alliance).

And Russia signed an agreement to protect Serbia.





Serbia was the only independent country within the Balkans peninsula. All the other countries were ruled by Austria-Hungary. Many resented this and in 1911 they formed a secret, revolutionary society, The Black Hand (Cma Ruka), whose aim was to free the South Slav people (Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) from Austria-Hungary's foreign rule.



Austria-Hungary and Germany had little liking for Serbia's growing strength. They were also worried about the power of France and Russia, especially once Britain joined them in the Triple Entente. Germany began building more weapons to prepare to fight France and Russia, and more battleships to fight the British.



France, Russia and Britain had not always been friends, but they were united in their suspicion that Germany planned to dominate Europe. So an “arms race” began, as they also started to build more weapons and battleships of their own.

In these tense times, Austro-Hungarian Archduke Franz Ferdinand (who was also the Inspector-General of the Austro-Hungarian Armed Forces), visited Serbia to attend a series of exercises by the Serbia Army. He was accompanied by his wife, Sophia.



On 28 June 1914, a member of the Black Hand, Gavrilo Princip, assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Sophia.

Austria-Hungary wanted revenge. They prepared to invade Serbia and crush all rebellion.

Russia said that they would come to Serbia's defence if Austria-Hungary invaded. Germany warned the Russians that they would attack if Russia protected Serbia.

Exactly one month after the assassination, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. This date, 28 July 1914, is the date we now remember as the outbreak of WW1.



Russia kept their word to Serbia, and began to arm their soldiers.

So Germany declared war on Russia.

Germany then told the British that France was planning to cross Belgium to invade them, even though both France and Belgium denied this. Germany replied that they had to defend themselves, so they had no

choice but to go through Belgium to attack France first.

On 3 August 1914, Germany declared war on France and prepared to cross Belgium and Luxemburg to fight the French.





Because of their Treaty of London promise to Belgium, Britain could not stand by and let Germany invade Belgium.

On 4 August 1914, Britain declared war on Germany.

Many thought the war would be over and won very quickly. Soldiers set off, proud and patriotic, expecting that the war would be “over by Christmas”.



But not everyone was so optimistic.

The night before Britain declared war, the British foreign secretary (Sir Edward Grey) looked out of his window into the twilight. He said, "the lights are going out all over Europe. We shall not see them lit again in our lifetime."