A War Spreads

Trace the causes, turning points, and reach of World War I.

MWH.C.6.1 "Analyze the underlying causes and significant events of World War I. Describe complex and multiple causes of World War I, including militarism, nationalism, industrial and colonial competition, Europe's alliance system..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two causes that helped turn a local crisis into a wider war. Circle three battles, then number two details that show why this became a total war.

From Crisis to Total War

1. Before 1914, military buildups and plans for rapid mobilization made leaders fear delay. Nationalism threatened the weakening Austro-Hungarian Empire, while declining Ottoman control left Balkan states competing for land. Industrial powers competed for markets and raw materials, and colonial rivalries deepened distrust. Alliances raised the danger that a local conflict would draw in larger powers. In June 1914, a Bosnian Serb nationalist assassinated Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia; Russian support for Serbia and German support for Austria-Hungary helped widen the war.

2. Germany invaded neutral Belgium to reach France, bringing Britain into the war. In September 1914, French and British forces stopped Germany's advance near Paris at the First Battle of the Marne. The failed quick victory led to years of trench warfare on the Western Front. At Verdun in 1916, German attacks and French resistance caused enormous losses without a decisive breakthrough. Later that year, Britain and France attacked at the Somme. Even with tanks and heavy artillery, they gained little ground at a terrible human cost.

3. This was a total war: governments drew on factories, farms, labor, and civilians to sustain armies. Machine guns, mass-produced shells, and poison gas increased the killing power of industrial warfare. Fighting spread beyond Europe into the Middle East, Africa, and the oceans; empires also recruited soldiers and workers from their colonies. In 1917, the United States entered the war, adding resources to the Allies. Together, these changes made a swift European clash into a long, global struggle that reshaped civilian life.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the decline of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires add to tensions before the war?

2. Why did the assassination lead to a wider war instead of remaining a local conflict?

3. How did the Marne help shape the kind of fighting seen at Verdun and the Somme?

4. Why does the passage call World War I a total war? Give two different kinds of evidence.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum label claims, “World War I was caused by one assassination and decided by one battle.” Write three or four sentences that challenge both parts of the claim. Use at least two long-term causes, two named battles, and one feature of total war.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · MWH.C.6.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two causes that helped turn a local crisis into a wider war. Circle three battles, then number two details that show why this became a total war. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the decline of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires add to tensions before the war?	**Nationalism threatened Austria-Hungary, while declining Ottoman control left Balkan states competing for land.**
2	Why did the assassination lead to a wider war instead of remaining a local conflict?	**Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia, while Russian support for Serbia, German support for Austria-Hungary, and the risk created by alliances helped spread the conflict.**
3	How did the Marne help shape the kind of fighting seen at Verdun and the Somme?	**The Marne stopped Germany's advance and ended its chance for a quick victory. Years of trench warfare followed, including the costly battles at Verdun and the Somme.**
4	Why does the passage call World War I a total war? Give two different kinds of evidence.	**Governments mobilized civilian labor and production, and fighting spread beyond Europe. Industrial weapons such as machine guns and poison gas are also valid evidence.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The assassination triggered a crisis, but military buildups and alliances helped spread it across Europe. Colonial competition and nationalism had already raised tensions. The Marne stopped Germany's advance, while Verdun and the Somme showed how costly a prolonged war could be. Governments mobilized civilians and factories to sustain the fighting, making it a total war rather than a contest settled by one battle.

Accept other passage-supported causes and evidence of total war. Responses should explain why both the single-cause and single-battle claims are misleading.