What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

Reynold’s Newspaper, London, March 9, 1913.

Overview: In the summer of 1914 Europe went to war with itself. It was a war that many expected to be short. In fact, it lasted more than four long, terrible years, taking the lives of millions of combatants and civilians. In some cases, entire high school graduating classes of young English, French, German, and Russian soldiers died fighting one another along the Western and Eastern Fronts. In this Mini-Q you will investigate several of the causes that led to this tragedy.

The Documents:

- Document A: European Alliances, 1914 (map)
- Document B: “The Crime of the Ages” (cartoon)
- Document C: Growth in Armaments, 1890–1914 (chart)
- Document D: The Hammer or the Anvil, 1899
- Document E: “The British Octopus” (cartoon)
- Document F: Colonial Possessions (chart)
Mini-Qs in World History
Volume 3, Unit 7

What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

MINI-Q ð TM ð LESSON PLAN

DAY 1 - 45 minutes

Step One: Hook Refer to the Step One teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Read the directions aloud. The purpose is to get students engaged, talking, and wanting to do the Mini-Q.

Step Two: Background Essay Refer to the Step Two teacher notes in the Mini-Q. Students can write out answers to the BGE questions or the questions can simply be discussed.

Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing The task of recognizing and defining key words in the question is a crucial habit of mind. The second task of pre-bucketing based on clues in the question and in document titles is a huge categorization skill.

Step Four: Document Analysis Do Document A with the whole class, modeling the kind of detail you expect in student answers to the Document Analysis questions.
Homework: Analyze the remaining documents and answer the questions that follow.

DAY 2 - 45 minutes

Step Four (continued): Discussion of Documents
Option One: Working in pairs or threesomes, have students discuss the answers to the first set of Document Analysis questions they did for homework. Using a different-colored pen than they used for homework, they may add to their answers. After five minutes, open the discussion of that document to the full class. Then proceed to the next document and repeat.
Option Two: Proceed as above, but have a volunteer group lead each of the three or four different document discussions. Students at their desks may add to their notes, again in a different pen.

Step Five: Bucketing and Chicken Foot Have students complete the bucketing and chicken foot work page. This step will help students clarify their thesis and road map.

Step Six: From Thesis to Essay Writing (For homework) Have students fill out the Outline Guide Sheet or write their multi-paragraph essay.

DAY 3 (Optional)

Step Six (continued): Conduct an in-class Writing Workshop.

MINI-Q ð TM ð LESSON PLAN: CLEAN VERSION OPTION
If students are ready, use the Clean Version of the Mini-Q, which requires them to handle more of the analysis on their own. Estimated time to complete is 1-2 class periods.

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TEACHER DOCUMENT LIST (EV)

There are six documents in this Mini-Q. Students are provided with the same document list, but it is not divided into analytical categories or buckets. Students may develop categories that are different from these.

Alliances

Document A: European Alliances, 1914 (map)

Document B: “The Crime of the Ages” (cartoon)

Militarism

Document C: Growth in Armaments, 1890-1914 (chart)

Document D: The Hammer or the Anvil, 1899

Imperialism

Document E: “The British Octopus” (cartoon)

Document F: Colonial Possessions (chart)
Step One: The Hook

Teacher Note: The purpose of the Hook Exercise is to create some initial interest in the Mini-Q. Divide the class into pairs and give the students five minutes or so to discuss the seven scenarios. Admit that it would be nice to have more information but, unfortunately, this is all we have at the moment. After students have discussed the scenarios in pairs, open the discussion to the full class.

Possible questions for discussion:

1. Our nation is attacked by a foreign military.
   Teacher comment: A person who argues against going to war in this case may well be a pacifist. What is pacifism, and is it a defensible position?

2. A nation with whom we have a mutual defense alliance is attacked.
   Teacher comment: Isn’t this precisely the kind of thing that could turn a little war into a big war?

3. Our President is assassinated by a terrorist from an unfriendly nation.
   Teacher comment: What if we can’t prove that the government of this nation approved the killing?

4. Our President tells us that a country is planning an imminent attack on us.
   Teacher comment: This is called a pre-emptive attack. We get them before they can get us. The problem is it means that we start the actual fighting. Is that ever justified?

5. A country has just had a fundamentalist revolution and is sending fighters into oil-producing nations in the region.
   Teacher comment: Fundamentalists aside, should the United States go to war over oil?

6. An unfriendly nation has just successfully tested a nuclear weapon in violation of a signed UN agreement.
   Teacher comment: Aren’t UN agreements to be taken seriously?

7. A US naval vessel is sunk in a foreign harbor by government agents from that country.
   Teacher comment: This sounds a bit similar to what some Americans believed happened in Cuba in 1898. Was that a just cause for going to war?
Hook Exercise: What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

Directions: Wars have been fought throughout history. The list below presents different reasons for going to war. Check whether you agree or disagree that the reason given is a good one. Feel free to make notes. Be prepared to discuss your thoughts.

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<th>Agree</th>
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Step Two: Establishing the Context

General Instructions
- Review the Timeline.
- Pre-teach the boldfaced vocabulary.
- Have students read, or read aloud, the Background Essay.
- Have students answer the Background Essay questions on the next page.

Specific Considerations
The main purpose of the Background Essay is to create a context for the Mini-Q exercise. Its job is to provide a sense of time, place, story, and to introduce important vocabulary and concepts. Doing this well gives all students a more equal chance to succeed with the Mini-Q.

**Time:** World War I began in late July 1914, and ended in November 1918. The United States, which does not figure in this Mini-Q, did not enter the war until April 1917.

**Place:** If available, show a map of Europe on the eve of war in 1914. The map in Document A will suffice, although it is best discussed when you get to it. Students will note that the map looks quite different from today. The biggest differences are probably the existence of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire.

**Story:** Consider reading the Background Essay aloud. We believe it is good for many students, even good readers, to hear the words as they see the words. For many it is important to hear the cadence of the language, to experience pauses and emphasis.

**Vocabulary and Concepts:** You may want to pre-teach the boldfaced terms in the essay. Our feeling about vocabulary is that some pre-teaching is good, but keep the word list short. Even for second language students, see how much they can get from context. Understanding vocabulary is another reason for reading aloud.
What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

At the turn of the 20th century Europe was feeling pretty darned good. It controlled empires that circled the globe. Its technology was unsurpassed. Its art and music were the envy of the world. In 1900, Europeans believed the world was their oyster.

But this feeling was not to last. By the end of 1918, after four long years of war, European confidence was badly shaken. Ten million soldiers had died, another 20 million had been wounded. Empires that had lasted for centuries lay in tatters. Writers wrote of broken dreams. Europe had entered the Great War riding on a song. Now, in November of 1918, no one was singing. What had gone wrong?

In the late 19th century European leaders believed that by creating a balance of power they could prevent such a horror. The idea was that if the major powers of Europe—countries like England, France, Russia, and Germany—were balanced in strength, no one country could dominate the rest. War could be avoided.

But Otto von Bismarck, the Chancellor of Prussia who led the unification of the German states, did not like the fact that Germany was sandwiched between Russia and France. To counter this uncomfortable situation, Bismarck created an alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy. In response, France, Russia, and Great Britain formed their own entente. The great players were picking sides.

The tension between countries was matched by tension within countries. Especially in southeastern Europe, in an area known as the Balkans, the spirit of nationalism and independence ran high. Some ethnic groups revolted. The region was a powder keg. All it lacked was a spark to set it off. That spark was provided by a Serbian nationalist group called the Black Hand. They wanted independence from their mother country, Austria-Hungary. Their solution? Assassinate the Archduke of Austria when he came to visit.

On the morning of June 28, 1914, the Archduke’s car was fired upon by one of the Serbian assassins. Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife were killed. The Black Hand hoped the assassination would trigger a rebellion that would lead to Serbian independence. But this spark in the Balkans soon flamed out of control. One thing led to another and soon all of Europe was at war.

Four long years and 10 million lives later, Europe looked for answers. What had gone wrong?

This Mini-Q contains six documents. It does not pretend to cover all the underlying causes of World War I. (Nationalism, for example, is not included.) Your task is to identify and describe each of three important causes that are represented and then answer the question before us: What was the underlying cause of World War I?
Step Two: Establishing the Context (continued)

Answers to Background Essay Questions

1. What is meant by the phrase "In 1900 Europeans believed the world was their oyster"? Europe believed the world was something delicious that they could consume or use to their benefit.

2. World War I lasted four years. What were the war years? 1914–1918

3. The population of Chicago is about 3,000,000. How does that compare to the total number of dead and wounded in World War I? (Give your answer as a fraction.) It is about one tenth \((1/10, \text{ derived from } 3,000,000 / 30,000,000)\)

4. Why might a balance of power prevent war? With power about even, neither side could expect easy victory.

5. Otto von Bismarck once said that a great war might someday be caused by "some damned foolish thing in the Balkans." Was he right? Explain. Yes. The assassination of the Austrian Archduke Ferdinand that triggered World War I occurred in the Balkan country of Serbia.

6. How did the assassination of the Archduke of Austria-Hungary lead to war between Russia and Germany? Austria was, of course, angry at Serbia and wanted an apology. Serbia, fearing trouble, got a promise of help from Russia. When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia, Russia came to Serbia's aid. Germany then came to Austria's aid. Russia and Germany were at war.

7. Define these terms:

   balance of power: a distribution of power where no one nation can dominate another

   entente: an agreement between two or more governments

   Balkans: about 10 countries located on the Balkan Peninsula between Italy and Turkey. In 2012 they included Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Greece, and pieces of several others.

   nationalism: love and devotion for one's own country

   ethnic: usually relating to a racial or cultural group

   spark: an event that triggers a larger event
Background Essay Questions

1. What is meant by the phrase “In 1900 Europeans believed the world was their oyster”?

2. World War I lasted four years. What were the war years?

3. The population of Chicago is about 3,000,000. How does that compare to the total number of dead and wounded in World War I? (Give your answer as a fraction.)

4. Why might a balance of power prevent war?

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6. How did the assassination of the Archduke of Austria-Hungary lead to war between Russia and Germany?

7. Define these terms:
   - balance of power
   - entente
   - Balkans
   - nationalism
   - ethnic
   - spark

Timeline
1858 – Full British rule of India begins.
1865 – End of American Civil War
1871 – Franco-Prussian War (France v. Germany)
1902 – End of Boer War between British and South African Dutch
1914 – Beginning of World War I (also known as the Great War)
1918 – End of World War I
1919 – Versailles Peace Treaty
1939 – Beginning of World War II
Step Three: Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

**Understanding the Question**

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?
   What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

2. What terms in the question need to be defined?
   underlying cause

3. Rewrite the question in your own words.
   What was the deepest, or most fundamental cause of World War I?

**Pre-Bucketing**

*Teacher Note:* As students suggest their bucket labels, draw bucket sets on the board. At this stage, students are simply looking for generic labels that provide a framework for organizing the essay.

Underlying Cause #1
Underlying Cause #2
Deepest Underlying Cause
Understanding the Question and Pre-Bucketing

Understanding the Question

1. What is the analytical question asked by this Mini-Q?

2. What terms in the question need to be defined?

3. Rewrite the question in your own words.

Pre-Bucketing

Directions: Using clues from the Mini-Q question, consider possible analytical categories and label the buckets.
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document A: European Alliances, 1914 (map)

Content Notes:

- "Entente" has entered the English language through French and usually refers to an "agreement" between two or more nations to follow some plan of action.

- The map of Europe was never again as simple as just prior to World War I. Most of Europe was ruled by seven countries: Spain, France, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, Austria-Hungary, and Russia. Of these countries, six had some type of monarchy (only France did not) and only in Great Britain and France was political power located in an elected assembly. Most political decisions in Europe were still being made by some type of hereditary ruler (a king, kaiser, emperor, or tsar). Many of these monarchs were related.

- The assassination of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo was particularly worrisome to Austria-Hungary because its leaders feared that ethnic Serbs living in Austria-Hungary would join a greater Serbia. Russia had a special interest in this because the Russian people had a Slavic ethnic tie with Serbia.

- As a side note, Italy broke its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary soon after the war broke out, and joined England, France, and Russia in 1915.

Teaching Tips:

Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. The map shows the alliance arrangement in Europe in 1914. In what year did World War I begin?
   1914

2. What countries made up the Triple Alliance?
   triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.

3. Germany worried about one day having to fight a war on two fronts or two different borders. According to the map, was this fear justified?
   Yes. Russia was on its eastern border (the Eastern Front) and France was on the western border (the Western Front).

4. Italy would switch sides in 1915. Whom did this hurt?
   Germany and Austria-Hungary

5. If this map were your only evidence, how could you use it to describe one possible underlying cause of World War I?
   The map suggests that if a nation in one alliance were to attack a nation in the other alliance, six large nations could quickly find themselves at war.
Document A

Source: Map created from various sources.

European Alliances, 1914.

Document Analysis

1. The map shows the alliance arrangement in Europe in 1914. In what year did World War I begin?

2. What countries made up the Triple Alliance? What countries made up the Triple Entente?

3. Germany worried about one day having to fight a war on two fronts or two different borders. According to the map, was this fear justified?

4. Italy would switch sides in 1915. Whom did this hurt?

5. If this map were your only evidence, how could you use it to describe one possible underlying cause of World War I?
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document B: "The Crime of the Ages"

Content Notes:

- The United States was home to a strong isolationist movement in the beginning of the 1900s. Many Americans felt the country should not be involved in the political affairs of Europe. This cartoon from the Chicago Tribune strongly reflects that feeling. The United States did not enter the fighting of World War I until 1917, three years after the war began. In fact, Woodrow Wilson won reelection to the White House in 1916 behind the slogan "He kept us out of war!"
- John T. McCutcheon was one of America's most famous political cartoonists. World War I occurred during McCutcheon's long tenure with the Chicago Tribune.

Teaching Tips:

Discuss Document Analysis questions:

1. What is the significance of the date of this cartoon? What is the name and nationality of the cartoonist? Explain their significance.
   
   August 5, 1914 is significant because it is within a week of the start of the war and therefore reveals an early explanation of why the war started. The cartoonist was John T. McCutcheon, an American. That McCutcheon is an American is significant because he is more likely to be an outside, unbiased observer.

2. What is the "Crime of the Ages"?
   
   The crime is the stabbing to death of the "Peace of Europe." She lies on the table in the background with a dagger in her.

3. How can the cartoon be used to describe the chain of events that led to war?
   
   This answer can get involved. Austria is pointing at Serbia because a Serbian assassin killed the archduke Franz Ferdinand. Austria blames Serbia for not working harder to prevent terrorism and allowing an anti-Austrian feeling to develop. Serbia blames Austria because Austria gave unreasonable demands to Serbia after the assassination. When Serbia would not meet all of them quickly enough, Austria declared war on Serbia. Russia is pointing at Austria because Russia supported Serbia. Germany declared war on Russia when Russia mobilized troops against Austria, and at the same time put more troops on the German border. Germany felt this was an aggressive act and declared war. France blames Germany because Germany declared war on Russia, and France honored its entente. Belgium wanted to remain neutral, but Germany invaded Belgium to attack France. So Belgium blames Germany. England blames Germany because it had an agreement to protect Belgium's neutrality. When Germany invaded Belgium, Great Britain declared war on Germany. Italy is not pointing at anyone because it broke its alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary at the beginning of the war. Italy did not declare war on anyone at first. Eventually, it joined the war in 1915 on the side of France, Great Britain, and Russia.

4. What does the hand in the upper left corner represent?
   
   Four different answers could be:
   1. America (it comes from the West);
   2. God (it looks like Michelangelo's hand of God in the Sistine Chapel);
   3. Lady Justice;

5. According to the cartoon, what was the underlying cause for war? Explain.
   
   Childish nations, locked together by entangling alliances, looked to blame someone else for killing the "Peace of Europe." The alliances were a big part of the problem.
Document B

Source: John T. McCutcheon, artist, Chicago Tribune, August 5, 1914.

Document Analysis

1. What is the significance of the date of this cartoon? What is the name and nationality of the cartoonist? Explain their significance.

2. What is the “Crime of the Ages”?

3. How can the cartoon be used to describe the chain of events that led to war?

4. What does the hand in the upper left corner represent?

5. According to the cartoon, what was the underlying cause for war? Explain.
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document C: Growth in Armaments, 1890–1914

Content Notes:
- Between 1890 and 1914 the nature of what constituted arms was changing due to mechanization. For example, trucks and primitive tanks would gradually replace horses and wagons. Armaments could include anything from rifles, siege guns, and warships to bandages, food rations, and training barracks.
- The denominations in the chart are shown in millions of British pounds. A pound at this time was roughly equivalent to five US dollars.
- In 1914 Italy was part of the Triple Alliance. In 1915 it joined the Entente. That, of course, had a bearing on the total arms balance.

Teaching Tips:
Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. In millions of British pounds, how much did Germany and Austria-Hungary spend in 1890? In 1914?
   1890: about 42 million pounds; 1914: about 150 million pounds

2. How much did Great Britain, Russia, and France spend in 1890? In 1914?
   1890: about 100 million pounds; 1914: about 225 million pounds

3. Which nation spent the greatest percent on its navy? Why would it do that?
   Great Britain. They are an island and wanted a strong navy for defense.

4. Is there evidence in the chart to support the thesis that an arms build-up (militarism) was an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.
   Yes. In 24 years, Germany and Austria-Hungary together nearly quadrupled arms spending from 42 to 150 million pounds. The Triple Entente more than doubled its spending from 100 million to 225 million pounds. This evidence supports the claim that militarism was an underlying cause, because nations with arms are likely to want to test those arms in combat. Also, the existence of all those arms at the ready discourages a cooling-off period. Quick tempers prevail. War results.

5. How can an argument be made that an arms build-up might lead to peace? Explain.
   One could argue that a military build-up can serve as a deterrent to war. This was the idea behind nuclear deterrence during the Cold War.
Document C


**Growth in Armaments, 1890–1914**
in British pounds (£)

Note: By 1914 the Entente Powers could field 2.23 million men, Germany and Austria-Hungary 1.2 million.

**Document Analysis**

1. In millions of British pounds, how much did Germany and Austria-Hungary spend in 1890? In 1914?

2. How much did Great Britain, Russia, and France spend in 1890? In 1914?

3. Which nation spent the greatest percent on its navy? Why would it do that?

4. Is there evidence in the chart to support the thesis that an arms build-up (militarism) was an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.

5. How can an argument be made that an arms build-up might lead to peace? Explain.
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document D: "The Hammer or the Anvil"

Content Notes:
• The German Chancellor was the appointed head of the government. He served at the Kaiser's discretion. Von Bülow served as Chancellor until 1909. Von Bülow had a close relationship with Kaiser Wilhelm, much of it due to von Bülow's reluctance to disagree. After his years as Chancellor he served as minister to Italy at the beginning of World War I, but was unable to keep Italy from switching sides to the Entente.
• An interesting note: Adolf Hitler would later use the hammer and anvil imagery in speeches about Germany in the late 1920s and early 1930s.
• In 1899 nearly everyone in Europe and America, child and adult, would have been familiar with the anvil and the hammer. Horses were a primary means of travel and blacksmithing (horseshoeing) was one of Europe's most common occupations. The hammer and the anvil were the tools of the blacksmith's trade.

Teaching Tips:
Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. Why is von Bülow worried about England, France, and Russia?

   These three countries have been acquiring colonies around the world. Germany does not want to become their economic slave.

2. What is an anvil? What does von Bülow mean when he says Germany will be "a hammer or an anvil"?

   A heavy block of steel with a flat, smooth top on which objects like horseshoes are beaten and shaped with a hammer. Germany will either be the aggressor or the victim, the beater or the beaten, the winner or the loser.

3. Judging from the document, who is Germany likely to "hammer"?

   England, France, and Russia.

4. One half-century earlier, the Englishman Charles Darwin introduced his idea of evolution which was based on the idea of survival of the fittest. Do you think von Bülow believed in this idea? Explain.

   Von Bülow would have supported Darwin's idea. What Darwin believed about animals von Bülow seemed to believe about nations.

5. How can you use this document to make an argument that the arms build-up was a more important underlying cause than the network of alliances?

   Von Bülow's speech was given in 1899, fifteen years before the start of the war. It stated a basic philosophy of survival of the fittest – kill or be killed. This required an arms build-up because Germany lagged behind Britain in armaments. Alliances could help create a balance of power between groups of nations and help keep the peace. Arms, on the other hand, were the hammer of war.
Document D

Source: Bernhard von Bülow, German Chancellor, spoke these words in a speech before the Reichstag (German congress) on December 11, 1899.

In our nineteenth century, England has increased its colonial empire – the largest the world has seen since the days of the Romans ... the French have put down roots in North Africa and East Africa ... Russia has begun its mighty course of victory in Asia .... We don't want to step on the toes of any foreign power, but at the same time we don't want our own feet tramped by any foreign power ... We don't ever again want to become ... the 'slaves of humanity.' But we'll only be able to keep ourselves at the fore if we realize that there is no welfare for us without power, without a strong army and a strong fleet. The means, gentlemen, for a people of almost 60 million – dwelling in the middle of Europe and, at the same time, stretching its economic antennae out to all sides – to battle its way through in the struggle for existence without strong armaments on land and at sea, have not yet been found. In the coming century the German people will be a hammer or an anvil.

Document Analysis

1. Why is von Bülow worried about England, France, and Russia?

2. What is an anvil? What does von Bülow mean when he says Germany will be “a hammer or an anvil”?

3. Judging from the document, who is Germany likely to “hammer”?

4. One half-century earlier, the Englishman Charles Darwin introduced his idea of evolution, which was based on the idea of survival of the fittest. Do you think von Bülow believed in this idea? Explain.

5. How can you use this document to make an argument that the arms build-up was a more important underlying cause than the network of alliances?
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document E: The British Octopus

Content Notes:

- Propaganda was used widely by both sides during World War I. The question is whether a piece of propaganda is helpful in exploring underlying causes. This 1917 cartoon is clearly inflammatory and anti-British. However, it has a point to make that rests on some fact. The British and the French were well ahead of Germany in acquiring overseas possessions.
- The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 divided most of Africa up into European spheres of influence. Ironically, even though the conference was called by Otto von Bismarck and held at his Berlin villa, England and France walked away from the conference with claim to the largest pieces of the African pie. Add to this other English possessions, especially in India and Australia, and one understands the German cartoonist’s point of view.

Teaching Tips:

Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. In what language, and in what year, was this cartoon created?
   The language is German; the year is 1917, three years into the war.

2. Translate each of the following:
   Freiheit der Meere: Freedom of the seas
   England der Blutsauger der Welt: England, the bloodsucker of the world

3. What is the main point being made by the cartoonist?
   This German cartoonist believes that British colonialism is sucking natural resources out of Africa, Asia, Australia, and even South America. It follows that Germany is justified in being at war with England.

   Yes. In 1914 British naval expenditures were over £40 million compared to about £20 million for Germany.

5. What does this document suggest is an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.
   Colonialism is an underlying cause, specifically German fear of far-flung British colonies and British control of the seas. If England gobbles up the world’s resources, its economy, its navy, and its military will grow strong. Germany will be left with table scraps and will become a second-class nation.
Document E

Source: German propaganda cartoon, 1917, GE104A, Poster Collection, Hoover Institution Archives.

The British Octopus

**FREIHEIT DER MEERE.**

**ENGLAND DER BLUTSAUGER DER WELT.**

*Freiheit Der Meere* = Freedom of the seas
*England Der Blutsauger der Welt* = England, the bloodsucker of the world

**Document Analysis**

1. In what language, and in what year, was this cartoon created?

2. Translate each of the following:
   - Freiheit der Meere
   - England der Blutsauger der Welt

3. What is the main point being made by the cartoonist?


5. What does this document suggest is an underlying cause of World War I? Explain.
Step Four: Document Analysis

Document F: Size of Colonial Empires in 1913

Content Notes:

- For the sake of comparison, the Eurasian Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan and his immediate successors was about five million square miles. The area of the continental US today is a bit over 3.1 million square miles.
- It is easy to see why Germany was uncomfortable with the colonial numbers. Both in terms of area controlled, and the people it controlled, Germany had less than 10% of Britain’s holdings.
- Colonialism carried with it some strategic military advantages. For example, England controlled the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea at Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, and the Cape of Good Hope.

Gibraltar: Gibraltar had been in British hands since the 18th century. With the opening of the Suez in the late 19th century, the Straits of Gibraltar became even more crucial for controlling sea traffic from the Atlantic, through the Mediterranean, through the Red Sea, and on to the Indian Ocean.

Suez: Britain bought out Egypt’s interest in the Suez Canal in 1875. Egypt became a British protectorate one year into the war in 1915.

Cape of Good Hope: In 1910 South Africa became an independent country but it officially remained within the British Empire. Britain had control of the seas around the Cape.

Teaching Tips:

Discuss the Document Analysis questions:

1. What was the total area of British colonies in 1913?
   12,740,000 square miles

2. What was the combined area of colonies held by the nations of the Triple Entente? What was the combined area of colonies held by Germany and Austria-Hungary?
   17,180,000 square miles; 1,139,000 square miles

3. In what different ways could a large colonial population help the economy of the mother country?

   It could provide cheap labor, soldiers, and markets for buying the manufactured goods of the mother country.

4. How can you use this document to argue that imperialism (colonization) was one underlying cause of World War I?

   The colonial gap was a big problem for Germany and Austria-Hungary. The lack of colonies meant fewer natural resources and fewer markets for selling their goods. This economic weakness made Germany and Austria-Hungary an anvil, not a hammer. Economic desperation could easily lead to war.

5. How can you use Documents E and F to argue that colonialism was more important than alliances and arms build-ups as the underlying cause of World War I?

   Forming alliances and building up arms are means to acquiring and holding onto colonial possessions. Alliances and arms build-up should be seen as secondary causes. Colonialism was the driving force leading to war.
Document F


Size of Colonial Empires in 1913

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Area (sq. miles)</th>
<th>Population of Colonies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>12,740,000</td>
<td>400,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>4,440,000</td>
<td>56,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1,139,000</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>927,000</td>
<td>15,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>579,000</td>
<td>1,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>125,000</td>
<td>10,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria-Hungary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document Analysis

1. What was the total area of British colonies in 1913?

2. What was the combined area of colonies held by the nations of the Triple Entente? What was the combined area of colonies held by Germany and Austria-Hungary?

3. In what different ways could a large colonial population help the economy of the mother country?

4. How can you use this document to argue that imperialism (colonization) was one underlying cause of World War I?

5. How can you use Documents E and F to argue that colonialism was more important than alliances and arms build-ups as the underlying cause of World War I?
Step Five: Bucketing — Getting Ready To Write

Task One: Bucketing

Teacher Note: Have students look over all the documents and organize them into their final buckets. They should write final bucket labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. Below is one suggested way for organizing an argument.

Underlying Cause #1: Alliances
Underlying Cause #2: Militarism
Deepest Underlying Cause: Imperialism

Task Two: Thesis Development and Road Map

The Chicken Foot

There were at least three underlying causes for World War I: alliances, militarism, and imperialism. Of these, imperialism was the most important.
Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

Bucketing

Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write bucket labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. You can put a document into more than one bucket (multi-bucketing), but you need a good reason for doing so. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs. In this particular Mini-Q, you may want to organize your buckets so that the most important underlying cause is in the last bucket (paragraph).

Thesis Development and Road Map

On the chicken foot below, write your thesis and your road map. Your thesis is always an opinion that answers the Mini-Q question. The road map is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.
Step Six: From Thesis to Essay Writing

Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

Working Title: What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

Paragraph #1
Grabber: In the end, no one was singing.
Background: War lasted four long years – 1914 to 1918. 10 million dead; 20 million wounded

Stating the question with key terms defined: What was the underlying cause of this tragedy?
Thesis and roadmap: There were three basic causes of World War I: alliances, arms race, and imperialism. Of these imperialism was main underlying cause.

Paragraph #2
Baby Thesis: Alliances were one key contributor to the war.
Evidence: (supporting detail from documents with document citation)
  Triple Alliance: Germany, Austria-Hungary, and, for a time, Italy (Doc A)
  Triple Entente: Britain, France, and Russia (Doc A)
  Following Ferdinand's assassination, finger pointing reflected alliance ties (Doc B)
Argument: Assassination might have remained regional incident without alliance obligations.
  Alliances made a local conflict continental.

Paragraph #3
Baby Thesis: A second basic cause was arms build-up
Evidence: Big 5 arms spending: £140 million in 1890 to £540 million in 1914 (Doc C)
  German arms increase was fourfold: £30 to 120 million (Doc C)
  Von Bulow: Germany must choose to be hammer or anvil (Doc D)
Argument:
  In this case, arms did not act as a deterrent. The huge arms stockpile was a powder keg
  that made war more likely.

Paragraph #4
Baby Thesis: Imperialism was the most fundamental cause of World War I
Evidence: Tremendous possessions gap between Germany/Austria-Hungary and England/France.
  England had more than 12 million square miles of colonial possessions, France 4,000,000
  plus. Germany a bit over 1 million. A-H had 0. (Doc F)
Argument:
  Colonial imbalance caused tension. Germany and A-H playing catch-up. Britain seen as an
  octopus sucking natural resources out of their African and Asian colonies (Doc E). This could
  lead Germany and Austria-Hungary to believe they needed an alliance and arms build-up to
  get their share of the spoils.

Paragraph #5
Conclusion: Nationalism also important and alliances and arms were definite factors. However,
  colonialism lurked beneath it all.
From Thesis to Essay Writing

Mini-Q Essay Outline Guide

Working Title

Paragraph #1
Grabber

Background

Stating the question with key terms defined

Thesis and road map

Paragraph #2
Baby Thesis for bucket one

Evidence: Supporting detail from documents with document citation

Argument: Connecting evidence to the thesis

Paragraph #3
Baby Thesis

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #4
Baby Thesis

Evidence

Argument

Paragraph #5
Conclusion: “Although” statement followed by convincing restatement of main idea
Mini-Q Sample Essay: Non-Proficient
What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

World War I killed millions of people but why? There were lots of reasons and most of them show up in the documents. One of them is colonialism. We can get rid of that reason right away because I visited colonial Williamsburg with my grandpa and it was really peaceful.

The first reason so many people died was alliances. These were big organizations of countries that fought together. One big one was for England and France who really didn't like Germany. They tried to blacken them out on their maps (Doc A).

Another reason was all the guns which people made in 1914. It's pretty clear if you don't have guns you can't fight which is my main point. Their guns weighed millions of pounds (Doc C). That's a lot of guns.

So that's pretty much it. Guns cause wars. Try fighting a war with your fists. I don't think you can do it.

Mini-Q Sample Essay: Proficient
What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

At the end, no one was singing. World War I was one of history's great tragedies. It was fought for four long years between 1914 and 1918, and cost 10,000,000 lives and left 20,000,000 wounded. But what were the underlying causes of this war and the one main cause that stands out. The war had at least three significant causes—alliances, an arms race, and colonialism. Of these, colonialism was the most underlying.

Alliances were an important cause of war. When Archduke Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary was assassinated in 1914 by a Serb, European was divided into two giant alliances, the Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary, and the Triple Entente with England, France, and Russia (Doc A). When countries started pointing fingers at each other after the killing, war quickly happened (Doc B). Without the alliances, the killing could have stayed a local problem, not a world war.

A second big cause of World War I was the arms build-up. Total arms spending by the five big countries went from 140 million pounds in 1890 to 540 million pounds in 1914 (Doc C). The Germans were especially afraid of being the anvil and getting hammered by England, France, and Russia (Doc D). Arms cause war. Generals like to test weapons out. Also, if there is a problem like an assassination, people reach for their guns without thinking it through. Sparks become huge explosions.

Alliances and arms were important but the main underlying cause of World War I was imperialism. Germany and Austria-Hungary were way behind England and France in getting colonies. In 1913 they trailed 17 million square miles of territory to about one million square miles (Doc E). Germany saw England as a giant octopus sucking up the resources of Africa (Doc E). Alliances and arms could help Germany get even, but the big deep problem was losing colonial resources to England and France. That's why you needed alliances and arms.

WWI had other causes like nationalism which lead to the assassination of Ferdinand, but the big cause of the war was imperialism. Countries are made up of people and people are greedy. They want more and more. Sometimes, like in 1914, war results.
Causes of WWI Mini-Q

Student Mini-Q Lined Paper

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Mini-Q Sample Essay: High Proficiency
What Was the Underlying Cause of World War I?

In the end, no one was singing. World War I lasted four long years from 1914 to November 1918. It was triggered by the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. In a matter of one month events had spun out of control. By August 1, 1914, armies across Europe were squared off against each other. By late 1918 10,000,000 soldiers and civilians were dead and another 20,000,000 were wounded (BGE). It is important to try to understand the underlying cause of this tragedy. It will be argued that along with nationalism, three basic causes were responsible: a network of alliances, a build-up of arms, and imperialism. It will further be argued that, of these, imperialism was the most important of all.

Alliances were a key contributor to the war. Europe was generally divided into two groups of nations. On the one side was the Triple Alliance – Germany, Austria-Hungary, and for a short time, Italy. On the other side was the Triple Entente – France, England, and Russia (Doc A). When Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian nationalist, Austria logically pointed the finger of blame at the Serbian government (Doc B). Because of ethnic ties, Russia quickly sided with Serbia. Germany, bound by the Triple Alliance, sided with Austria-Hungary. England and France, bound by the Triple Entente, sided with Russia. All-out war resulted. What might have been a regional conflict between Serbia and Austria-Hungary was now a war that engulfed the whole continent. Alliances help explain the death of peace in Europe (Doc B).

A second convincing cause of World War I was the arms build-up of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1890 total arms spending by Europe’s big five powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary, Britain, France, and Russia – was about 140 million British pounds (Doc C). Twenty-four short years later this spending had increased by two and one half times to 570 million pounds (Doc C). Germany showed the greatest growth of all, nearly quadrupling their spending from 30 million to 120 million (Doc C). The German increase was no accident. As early as 1899, German leader Berth von Bulow announced that in the struggle for national survival Germany would have to choose whether to be “the hammer or the anvil” (Doc D). Germany clearly chose to be the hammer. True, an arms build-up can lead to something called deterrence. That is, countries might not want to fight if everyone is heavily armed. However, in Europe in 1914 it didn’t work out that way. The stockpile of weapons made Europe a powder keg. All it took was the spark of an assassination in the Balkans to set off an explosion. Had there been no race to arms, the explosion might have been avoided.

While alliances and the arms build-up were important, they don’t explain what drove European countries to take these measures. For the answer one must look hard at imperialism. By the late 19th century Europe had carved up much of the planet, especially in Africa and southern Asia. On the eve of the war in 1913 Britain controlled more than 12 million square miles of overseas possessions. France had over 4 million (Doc F). This clearly did not look like a good situation to Germany and Austria-Hungary, who had just over 1 million square miles of possessions between them. In other words, they trailed England and France 16 to 1. In fact, Germans saw England as a giant octopus, with its tentacles around the world sucking out the earth’s resources (Doc E). Clearly arms and an alliance were necessary to fight this colonial monster. But arms and alliances were simply the means for dealing with the real problem. The real problem, the underlying problem, was the unequal distribution of the colonial pie.

In closing, it is important to repeat that there was no single cause behind the Great War. Nationalism, barely touched upon here, was a key factor. Alliances and arms we have discussed. But at the center of the horror, like a giant sea monster lurking in the depths of man’s soul, was the greed of imperialism and the determination by the great powers to get, or keep, their piece of the pie.