



Activity: Report from the Battlefield: the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in Context



Guiding question:

What is the historical significance and role of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in World War I?

DEVELOPED BY SAMANTHA SHIRES

Grade Level(s): 6-8

Subject(s): Social Studies, Language Arts

Overview

In this activity students will take the role of investigative reporters during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Using several American Battle Monument Commission resources, they will gather facts about the battle and write a radio report that will place U.S. involvement within the context of World War I.

Historical Context


By the time the United States officially declared war on the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary in April 1917, the Allies, comprised of Russia, France, and the United Kingdom, already had been in conflict for three years. World War I (WWI) was known as the “Great War” because of the enormous scale of the conflict. A total of 59 million troops took part in the war during which over 7 million men lost their lives and another 29 million sustained injuries.

With its entrance into the war in April 1917, the United States provided vital military and financial support for the Allies, taking part in nearly every major campaign on the Western Front. U.S. involvement in the war eventually culminated in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive, one of the largest military offensives in U.S. history with 1.2 million U.S. troops involved. Shortly after the Allied victory during this offensive, Armistice was declared on November 11, 1918, leading to the end of WWI.

Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Identify the significance of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in WWI;
- Contextualize the Meuse-Argonne Offensive within the broader scope of WWI.



“When I first arrived at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, I was overwhelmed at its size and scope. It is the resting place for over 14,000 American soldiers who lost their lives during the Meuse-Argonne offensive in 1918. As I looked around, my mind flooded with questions: Who were these men? What was life like for them during the Meuse-Argonne campaign? What role did these men and the Meuse-Argonne Offensive play in the larger scope of the war? Where would their personal stories fall in the chronology of the Meuse-Argonne and World War I? What part did the Meuse-Argonne campaign play in the larger context of World War I?”

—Samantha Shires

Standards Connections

Connections to Common Core

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Connections to C3 Framework

D2.His.1.6-8. Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts.

D2.His.11.6-8. Use other historical sources to infer a plausible maker, date, place of origin, and intended audience for historical sources where this information is not easily identified.

D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

Secondary Sources

[*The Great War: A Visual History Interactive Timeline*](#) ★

American Battle Monuments Commission

[*This Day in History, September 26, 1918: The Meuse-Argonne Campaign Begins*](#) (2:52) ★

American Battle Monuments Commission

Materials

- Teacher computer with projector and internet access
- Student computers with internet access
- Reporter's Notebook Handout
- Report from the Battlefield Handout
- Report from the Battlefield Rubric

Lesson Preparation

- Test computer and internet functionality
- Make one copy of the following for each student:
 - Reporter’s Notebook Handout
 - Report from the Battlefield Handout

Procedure

Activity One: Anticipatory Set (15 minutes)

- Direct students to the American Battle Monument Commission’s (ABMC) WWI interactive timeline, [The Great War: A Visual History](#). Note that the timeline can be viewed as either a map or a chart, but for this activity the map is preferable.
- Provide students with time to explore the timeline for 10 minutes. Point out the dates along the bottom of the timeline, and ask them to click on one or two events in each year. They should note that the flags of the countries involved in an event appear at the bottom of the text.
- Then lead class discussion with the following questions:
 - What did you see?
 - How does this timeline differ from other timelines that you have worked with before?
 - What do you expect to learn from this timeline based on your first impressions?

Activity Two: Fact collection and reporting (90 minutes)

- Distribute a copy of the Reporter’s Notebook Handout to each student.
- Have students move chronologically through the events and people of WWI included on [The Great War: A Visual History Interactive Timeline](#) from the Pre-war Period through 1918 while gathering information on each time period.
- Ask students to click the year 1918 at the bottom of their timeline and find the event block titled, “Meuse-Argonne Campaign.” They should read the text provided and watch the short video.
- Direct students to watch the video [This Day in History, September 26, 1918: The Meuse-Argonne Campaign Begins](#).
- Have students write their reports using the facts they have collected on the Reporter’s Notebook Handout.

Assessment

- Write a 200 word newspaper article or radio report including at least five facts about the U.S. participation in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive answering who, what, when, where, and why.

- This assignment can be scored using the Report from the Battlefield Rubric.

Methods for Extension

- Students could record their report and play it for the class.
- Students can explore images, videos, and a panoramic view of the Meuse-Argonne Cemetery online at the [ABMC website](#) to see the aftermath of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive and how those who lost their lives are honored.

Adaptations

- Students may be placed in mixed-ability groups to complete the assignment.

Reporter's Notebook Handout

Use this worksheet to take notes as you examine each source for your report.

Source 1: [The Great War: A Visual History Interactive Timeline](#)

1870-1914: The Pre-War Period

Who was part of the Triple Alliance?

Which countries made up the Triple Entente?

1914: When and where did war first break out in Europe?

1915: What was the Western Front and what part did it play in WWI?

1916: Many new battlefield technologies emerged during WWI. What were some of them, and how did they change the way that war was waged?

Who were the Flying Yanks and what was their importance?

1917: The United States entered the war in 1917. Although initially determined not to get involved, what changed the minds of Americans?

1918: (Note the increase in the number of events taking place in France)
Who took part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive?

How many total troops took part in the battle?

When did the offensive take place? How long did it last?

Where did the offensive occur?

Why was the Meuse-Argonne Offensive important to the outcome of the war?

Source 2: [*This Day in History, September 26, 1918: The Meuse-Argonne Campaign Begins*](#)

What type of geography did troops traverse during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign?

How many miles long was the Western Front?

How many American casualties and deaths occurred during the campaign?

Reporter's Notebook Handout Answer Key

Use this worksheet to take notes as you examine each source for your report.

Source 1: [The Great War: A Visual History Interactive Timeline](#)

1870-1914: The Pre-War Period

Who was part of the Triple Alliance?

Germany, Austro Hungary, and Italy

Which countries made up the Triple Entente?

Great Britain, France, and Russia

1914: When and where did war first break out in Europe?

June 18, 1914 Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austro Hungary was assassinated by a person with ties to Serbia.

1915: What was the Western Front and what part did it play in WWI?

Aircraft and dirigibles (Zeppelins); bombs dropped from aircraft. Both of these technologies allowed for the war to be fought both in the air and on the ground. Made it more difficult to protect civilians and industry. Source: German Air Raids on England.

1916: Many new battlefield technologies emerged during WWI. What were some of them, and how did they change the way that war was waged?

France and Belgium, situated to the west of Germany, comprised the main theatre of fighting in WWI. Source: Deadlock on the Western Front

Who were the Flying Yanks and what was their importance?

American pilots that were flying for the allies even before the U.S. entered the war. Their accomplishments include shooting down enemy planes and providing surveillance and reconnaissance for Allied troops. Source: Flying Yanks, Americans in the Air

1917: The United States entered the war in 1917. Although initially determined not to get involved, what changed the minds of Americans?

Two events helped to change American public opinion. The first was the interception of the Zimmerman Telegraph. It proposed an alliance between Germany, Japan, and Mexico with the plan that Mexico would annex Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. The second contributing event was the sinking of several American ships in the Atlantic Ocean. Source: U.S. Declares War on Germany

1918: (Note the increase in the number of events taking place in France)

Who took part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive?

The United States and France versus Germany

How many total troops took part in the battle?

Over 1,000,000

When did the offensive take place? How long did it last?

From September 26 to November 11, 1918

Where did the offensive occur?

Between the Argonne Forest and Meuse River

Why was the Meuse-Argonne Offensive important to the outcome of the war?

It broke the German defensive line

Source 2: [*This Day in History, September 26, 1918: The Meuse-Argonne Campaign Begins*](#)

What type of geography did troops traverse during the Meuse-Argonne Campaign?

The area was comprised of hills and forests. Important because the Germans were entrenched in the region and the topography provided them with strong defensive positions.

How many miles long was the Western Front?

400 miles

How many American casualties and deaths occurred during the campaign?

26,000 dead; 100,000 wounded

Report from the Battlefield Rubric

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Organization	Report includes a clear introduction sentence, well-organized body sentences, and a conclusion sentence.	Report includes an introduction sentence, body sentences, and a conclusion sentence.	Report is missing one of the following: an introductory sentence, body sentences, and a conclusion sentence.	Report does not include a clear introduction sentence, body sentences, and/or conclusion sentence.
Historical Evidence	Report successfully uses at least four identifiable references from the interactive timeline and video.	Report successfully uses at least three identifiable references from the interactive timeline and video.	Report successfully uses at least two identifiable references from the interactive timeline and video.	Report successfully uses one or fewer identifiable references from the interactive timeline and video.
Accuracy	Report successfully engages with relevant historical facts without error.	Report engages with relevant historical facts with minor errors.	Report engages with relevant historical facts with several significant errors.	Report has little or no command of relevant historical facts.
Conventions	Clear control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Adequate control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.	Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage, and sentence formation.