

The Armistice Centenary

The First World War ended on 11 November 1918. One hundred years later, it's time to remember the events of those dark days. How much do you know about this terrible but fascinating moment in history?

Before reading

Do the preparation task first. Then read the article and do the exercises.

Preparation task

Match the definitions (a–h) with the vocabulary (1–8).

Vocabulary

1. a trench
2. an heir
3. an assassination
4. voluntarily
5. conscription
6. a civilian
7. interracial
8. a march

Definition

- a. consisting of people who come from different races
- b. a long, narrow place in the ground where soldiers protect themselves from attack
- c. by choice; not forced
- d. a person who will receive property after the death of another person
- e. an organised, public walk to express a message
- f. a system which makes people become soldiers
- g. the killing of a person who is famous, often for political reasons
- h. a person who is not a member of the military or the police

The Armistice Centenary – remembering the First World War

Gas. Trenches. Death. When members of the UK public were recently asked what words they associated with the First World War, those three telling words were some of the most common replies. The First World War lasted from 1914 until 1918 and changed the course of history. Sunday 11 November 2018 marks the hundredth anniversary of the Armistice, the agreement that brought an end to this terrible war.

How did the war begin?

Franz Ferdinand was the heir to the Austrian-Hungarian throne. On 28 June 1914, he was on a visit to Sarajevo when he was shot and killed by a Bosnian-Serb teenager. This assassination began a chain of events which, within weeks, brought all of Europe's major powers into the conflict.

Which countries fought?

The initial division was between the Allied Powers (Russia, France and the UK) and the Central Powers (Germany and Austria-Hungary). However, these alliances later expanded, with countries like Italy, Japan and the USA deciding to join the Allied Powers and countries like Turkey and Bulgaria joining the side of the Central Powers.

Why was it truly a 'world' war?

The war originated in Europe and this is where most of the fighting took place. However, at the time, the various European empires (British, French, German, etc.) controlled 84 per cent of the world's land surface. As a result, many colonies became involved in the war, often through no choice of their own. This meant that the war was felt across Africa, Asia, Australasia and parts of the Americas.

How were former colonies involved?

Millions of people from former colonies participated in the war on the side of their colonial power. Sometimes this was done voluntarily, other times through conscription. In India, 1.4 million men joined the war as troops for the British. Other countries also made huge sacrifices. New Zealand sent 20 per cent of its men to fight for the British, a higher percentage than in the UK itself. About half a million men from North and West Africa fought in the French army.

What happened on Armistice Day?

The four years of war were bloody and dark for all countries involved. Although impossible to give an exact number, it is thought that around 17 million soldiers and civilians may have died due to the war. By November 1918, the Central Powers had suffered many heavy losses. On 11 November, Germany signed an armistice, agreeing to end the fighting and to surrender much of their ammunition and warcraft.

Did anything good come from the war?

The war had a terrible human cost for all countries involved. However, one positive consequence was the decision to establish an international organisation dedicated to promoting dialogue between countries, now known as the United Nations. It is also often mentioned that the war years were a step forward in interracial contact, where armies were often made up of soldiers from different nations, with different religions and skin colours, all fighting on the same side.

What will happen on the Armistice Centenary?

Several countries will hold events to remember their nation's men and women who were involved in the war. In central London, there will be a special march called 'A Nation's Thank you – The People's Procession'. Both the UK and German governments have also invited countries to participate in ringing bells. During the war, church bells were generally silent. On 11 November 1918, bells across Britain started ringing out in celebration as news spread that the war had ended. One hundred years later, the bells will provide a tribute to those who are gone, but not forgotten.

Tasks

Task 1

Match the information (a–f) with the section in which it appears (1–6).

Section title

1. How did the war begin?
2. Which countries fought?
3. Why was it truly a 'world' war?
4. How were former colonies involved?
5. What happened on Armistice Day?
6. Did anything good come from the war?

Information

- a. Some countries which joined the war without a choice
- b. The end of the war
- c. An effort to prevent future wars
- d. The murder of a royal person
- e. Some individuals who joined the war without a choice
- f. Countries which joined the war by choice

Task 2

Choose the correct answer.

1. The Armistice was signed in
 - a. 1914.
 - b. 1918.
 - c. 2018.
2. Franz Ferdinand was a
 - a. king.
 - b. prince.
 - c. future king.
3. In the war, Japan fought on the same side as
 - a. the UK.
 - b. Germany.
 - c. Turkey.
4. When compared to the UK, New Zealand sent
 - a. more soldiers to the war.
 - b. a bigger proportion of its population to the war.
 - c. more medical staff to the war.
5. It is believed that the human cost of the war could have been 17 million
 - a. people.
 - b. soldiers.
 - c. civilians.

6. The text mentions that the war caused people from different races and cultures to
 - a. work together.
 - b. fight each other.
 - c. have no contact with each other.
7. Events to remember the Armistice will be held in
 - a. the UK.
 - b. the UK and Germany.
 - c. the UK, Germany and various other countries.
8. On 11 November 2018, many people will remember the war by
 - a. ringing bells.
 - b. keeping the bells silent for a day.
 - c. carrying little bells in a march.

Discussion

Does your country have any events to remember the end of a war?

Answers

Preparation task

1. b
2. d
3. g
4. c
5. f
6. h
7. a
8. e

Task 1

1. d
2. f
3. a
4. e
5. b
6. c

Task 2

1. b
2. c
3. a
4. b
5. a
6. a
7. c
8. a