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# Primary and Secondary Sources Activity

## World War I and the Russian Revolution

### World War I in France

#### Background

When World War I began, people believed that the conflict would be over in a matter of months. As countries declared war on each other, national pride increased, with each side optimistic that it and its alliance would emerge victorious. In 1914 French unionists and revolutionaries aligned with the government to show their patriotic unity. The French Parliament recessed, leaving the decision-making in the hands of President Raymond Poincaré and his cabinet.

However, the strategy of total war impacted civilians and the military as nations increased their involvement in the war. New technologies and trench warfare increased casualties; more than 8 million soldiers died as a result of artillery bombardments, poison gas, and small arms fire. The initial optimism changed after these realities of war set in. By 1917, defeatism pervaded France to such an extent that some of its leaders considered negotiating with Germany. But General Ferdinand Foch convinced both his French countrymen and the British to continue fighting.

After more than four years of conflict, approximately 10 million people lost their lives in World War I. A generation of young men ceased to exist, and the landscape and infrastructure of European territories were destroyed.

**Directions:** Read the two selections. Then answer the questions that follow.

In the war which is beginning, France will have Right on her side, the eternal power of which cannot with impunity be disregarded by nations any more than by individuals.

She will be heroically defended by all her sons; nothing will break their sacred union before the enemy; to-day they are joined together as brothers in a common indignation against the aggressor, and in a common patriotic faith. . . .

And already from every part of the civilised world sympathy and good wishes are coming to her. For to-day once again she stands before the universe for Liberty, Justice, and Reason. “Haut les coeurs et vive la France!” [Lift up your spirits, and long live France!]

—French President Raymond Poincaré, August 4, 1914

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The trenches were knee-deep in glueing mud and it was the hardest work I have ever done. . . . The banks on each side were full of buried and half- buried corpses and the stench was appalling. As one was carrying a wounded man down, one perhaps got stuck in the mud and staggered whilst one extricated [freed] oneself or was extricated. You put out a hand to steady yourself, the earth gave way and you found that you were clutching the blackened face of a half-buried German.

—A stretcher-bearer describing the battlefield at Thiepval, France, 1916

**Identifying Central Issues** According to French President Raymond Poincaré, why did France enter the war in 1914?

**Analyzing Primary Sources** In what ways does the president’s speech reflect the need for public support for the war?

**Identifying Perspective** In the second excerpt, how does the reflection of the stretcher-bearer reveal the reality of trench warfare?

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**Drawing Conclusions** What does the presence of the body of the German soldier in the trench suggest about trench warfare?

1. **Comparing** How do the different tones of the excerpts each reflect the attitude of the French people at the time?
2. **Predicting Consequences** What changes have taken place in the general public’s attitude with regard to war as a result of the World War I experience?