

The World at the beginning of the 20th Century
Preliminary Core Year 11
Modern History

The aim of this assignment was to try and make what is a very large and at times unwieldily topic understandable and interesting to students. I also wanted students to be able to empathise with the national interests of various countries so that they could understand how Europe fell into war in 1914.

Procedure:

1. I started with a PowerPoint to give the students a flavour of the time and also as a way of introducing them to some of the key concepts. We discussed some of the issues raised.
2. I reinforced this with a list and explanation of key concepts so as to make sure students understood what the words meant and how to apply them.
3. Students then broke into groups to research and present information about their designated country. (See task sheet) Time was allocated for library research and preparation. Each group then presented information about their country. They also had to locate some primary sources to present to the class. A number of different format were presented – France even brought in some éclairs – provided are some examples of varying degrees of those who use power point for their presentations.
4. As a way of bringing all the information together the student were given an A3 copy of table and with help from each group filled in the information. This enabled them to gain a big picture of the period.
5. I then spent some time looking at the Causes of WWI. I have included a summary sheet, which I put on overhead. One thing I did notice was that the assignment had raised the awareness of the students to the problems that European nations had in diplomacy. They also were able to articulate reasons why particular countries (usually the ones they studies) might act the way they did.

6. I then recalled them into their research groups and presented the scenario to them. It was interesting to note that although the game was to be played the next lesson, that in the remaining time students took on the persona of their country and groups were formed and preliminary negotiations took place. The next day the students came in buzzing and it was obvious that negotiations had taken place prior to the meeting. The debate started with the major power dominating and the issue of the Duchy of Fenwick quickly passed into insignificance as other issues came forth. The discussion became quite heated, many nations availed themselves of the time out to consult their allies or their notes. I added to the fuel by passing notes around saying they were from the particular country's foreign office. The debate ended without any resolution and certainly some frustrated participants. It is interesting to note that the other Year 11 Modern class carried their debate into a second period and would have continued if the teacher had not called a halt.
7. Students the next day debriefed and filled out a debrief note (copy included) some comments are included. Both my colleague and myself certainly rated the whole exercise as a success. In later evaluations of the whole year many students commented on the usefulness of the whole process in understanding European diplomacy at the time plus the fact it was fun and interesting.