rather than comprehensive history of war (not a historian) a few important ideas and consequences of the war, try to connect to concepts and writers we’ve already covered; here are the things I want you to get out of this material

(write these on board)

alliances

patriotism/nationalism

modernization/mechanization of war

rise of socialism (VS. CAPITALISM)

disillusionment

American role

(I’ll do my best to tie all the facts I present back to these ideas)

*********

• *World War I or the First World War, 1914 - 1918*, was the first war that involved nations spanning more than half the globe, hence *world* war.

It was commonly called "The Great War" or sometimes "the war to end wars" until *World War II* started

here’s a quick overview of important themes and consequences, esp for Europe:

• The Great War lasted for four years and caused the deaths of eight million men.
• It saw the collapse of three empires – Germany, Austro-Hungary and Russia.
• It devastated the regions on both the eastern and western fronts.
• It was the first industrial war, with endless technological advances, mass production and the general mobilization of all human, economic and mechanical resources.
• Its victims came from every nationality and from every background - from Europe and North America, from the Commonwealth nations and colonized peoples in India, Indochina and Africa.
• It happened everywhere, on the ground and underground, on the water and under water, and in the air.
• It was fought using every possible means, from cavalry charges to hand-to-hand trench warfare, from bombardments to assault tanks, using gas or phosphorus. In this war, the warrior was reduced to the dual role of servant and victim of the machine.
• Europe emerged from the Great War completely changed - exhausted, horrified, and forcibly modernized.
• daughter of the industrial and scientific revolution; mother to the political revolutions that gave rise to the Soviet Union and the Weimar Republic.
• It changed the face of central Europe for two decades, until German invades Czech and Poland to start WWII
• It shaped the world and for some, its after-effects are still with us to this day - the fields of some regions in France still yield a crop of unexploded shells ready to go off at any moment.

some causes (whole sections of libraries written on this):
Though triggered by the assassination (June 28, 1914) of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Franz Ferdinand, Archduke of Austria in Sarajevo, Bosnia at the hands of a pro-Serbian nationalist assassin (a Bosnian Serb student named Gavrilo Princip), the war's origins lie in the complex relations of the European powers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

• 5 great powers at the time: (ALLIANCES)
Germany, Russia, France, Britain, Austria-Hungary
Germany & Austro-Hungary are allied; Germany has alliance with Russia that they let lapse (we learned about Wilhelm in the film – his first act of leadership was to let this alliance lapse)
• all of Europe scrabbling for colonies overseas (MODERNIZATION, CAPITALISM)
• Germany decides it’s going to built huge navy to rival Great Britain’s, which upsets balance of power (ALLIANCES)
• growing nationalist aspirations of Balkan states, 1908, for ex, Austria annexes Bosnia & Herzogovenia to its empire, wanted to be independent (NATIONALISM)

early reactions:
• The perception of war in 1914 was almost romantic, and its declaration was met with great enthusiasm by many people.
• common view was that it would be a short war of maneuver with a few sharp actions (to "teach the enemy a lesson")
• many historians have commented on this idea of “war as celebration” – massive crowds gathered in cities expressing loyalty to their countries, and how these overwhelming feelings often supplanted deep differences between people and united them as citizens of single country
• There were, however, lots of people who disagreed with the war, esp pacifists but also socialists in different countries - -there were massive anti-war demonstrations with thousands of people (although not as big as big public celebrations)

who fought:
• civilians suddenly became soldiers plunged into a whole new world, foremost a war of civilians
• Up until the nineteenth century, war had mainly been the affair of career soldiers but now it was gradually absorbing greater and greater numbers of people.

technology:
• The First World War was different from prior military conflicts: it was a meeting of 20th century technology with 19th century mentality and tactics.
This time, millions of soldiers fought on all sides and the casualties were enormous, mostly because of the more efficient weapons (like artillery and machine guns) that were used in large quantities against old tactics. (SEE HANDOUT)

- Death was a daily occurrence and there were bodies everywhere. In the places where the fighting was the most violent and the longest, the corpses piled up. Those who dug shelters uncovered human remains. Others made parapets out of them. The living ate and slept surrounded by bodies. Near Verdun, Léger tried to find a dugout. "My main concern", he wrote, "was to avoid having a corpse close by me. I made the mistake of digging the hole to rest my head a little too deep. I uncovered two feet with shoes on, it was the body of a Frenchman (the Hun only wore boots). I dug a little further along to try and find a better spot. There was nothing doing. There were human remains everywhere."

- Although the First World War led to the development of air forces, tanks, and new tactics, most of the action took place in the trenches, where thousands died for each square meter of land gained.
- Although the First World War led to the development of air forces, tanks, and new tactics, most of the action took place in the trenches, where thousands died for each square meter of land gained.
- the use of chemical warfare, and aerial bombardment, both of which had been outlawed under the 1909 Hague Convention.
- The effects of gas warfare were to prove long-lasting, both on the bodies of its victims (many of whom, having survived the war, continued to suffer in later life)
- The effects of gas warfare were to prove long-lasting, both on the bodies of its victims (many of whom, having survived the war, continued to suffer in later life)
- called the “age of artillery” large-scale use of heavy field guns – shot not bullets but basically bombs – used in CW, yes, but larger, more of them, more accurate
- The soldiers were crushed, terrified by the blind violence of the artillery, the salvos, the preparatory shots and the destruction, the explosions and the devastation caused by a single projectile.

quote:

French writer describes bombardments on front: "The rumbling of the artillery became more and more frequent and ended up forming a single rumbling of the whole earth. From all sides, outgoing bursts and explosions threw forth their flashing beams which lit up the dark sky over our heads with strips of light in all directions. Then the bombing grew so heavy that the flashes became continuous. In the midst of the uninterrupted chain of thunder claps we could see each other directly, helmets streaming like the bodies of fish, gleaming black iron shovels, and the whitish drops of the endless rain, truly it was like moonlight created by cannon fire."

- new landscape: Fire invented a new landscape, devoid of landmarks or color. When Jean Hugo went to the front line for the first time during the spring of 1915, he discovered the battlefield with the rising of the sun:

  "The plain, which stretched as far as the eye could see, seemed to have been churned up by a mad plough. The entanglement of trenches formed in the grass a huge white net with much of the mesh gnawed away. In the middle, there was a pile of stones and beams from which emerged, here and there, a house and a tree with all its leaves: La Targette. Further on, some charred tree trunks and a few white stones: Neuville-Saint-Vaast (...) There were thousands of men on this plain and I could only see one of them. He was lying face down with his nose in the grass; he was dead." Jean Hugo, *Le regard de la mémoire 1914-1945 (The Look of Memory)*, Actes Sud, 1983.
- ruins. the war left behind entire regions laid to waste, civilian populations forced to flee, their resources wiped out. This is recorded in the photographs and it is quite common to see, in the background, rubble, pieces of wall, blackened foundations - all that remained of a farm or village.
American entry:

some of these things I’ve described were experience by Americans, civilian and soldiers alike, but it’s important to stress the profound difference for most of exp. this war as an American and exp as a European.

from the outset, the U.S.’s sympathies lay with the Allies; Britain and France were democracies and were being threatened by autocratic Germany

what precipitated American involvement is Germany’s decision to launch a campaign of unrestricted submarine warfare; US was Britain’s prime supplier of war supplies, and Ger was determined to deprive them of supplies, but this meant attacking American ships

so April 1917, at Woodrow Wilson’s request, Congress declared war on Germany

in a four-year conflict, US directly involved (contributed troops) for just over a year

Peace

In particular, treaties forged were terribly harsh on Germany: billed them with reparations it would be impossible to pay, placed the entire blame for the conflict on them and deprived it of territory in violation of the principle of self-determination

Russian Revolution

people of Russia initially responded to war with patriotic fervor, but by 1917, most Russians, including soldiers, had lost trust in gov’t; gov’t collapsed and there was a no-holds-barred fight to see what group would rule.

revolutionary socialism, with its idealistic vision and compassion for the masses as very attractive;

Lenin, who had been in exile outside Russia, returned and the Bolsheviks, the most militant of all revolutionary socialists, seized power