

**GREAT WAR (1914-
1918): THE WESTERN
FRONT: FIRST BATTLE OF
THE MARNE 1914**



GREAT WAR (1914-1918): THE WESTERN FRONT: FIRST BATTLE OF THE MARNE 1914

Description

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how the First Battle of the Marne saved France, forced the German army to abandon the Schlieffen Plan and ultimately led to a four year stalemate on the Western Front.

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes (2-3 wk. prep)

Tour Links

- Museum of the Great War, Peronne
- Marne Battlefield
- Place Joffre
- Ecole Militaire
- Place Vauban

Essential Questions

- What was the Schlieffen Plan? What was "Plan 17"?
- Where is the Marne River? What was the First Battle of the Marne?
- Who was General Joffre? Who was General Foch?
- How were the French finally able to turn back the German advance in early September 1914?
- What role did Paris taxis play in the First Battle of the Marne?

Academic Summary

"Humanity is mad. It must be mad to do what it is doing. What a massacre! What scenes of horror and carnage! I cannot find words to translate my impressions. Hell cannot be so terrible. Men are mad!"

French Soldier's diary from the Battle of Verdun, 23 May 1916

People of France, let us all be worthy of these tragic circumstances. We shall gain the final victory; we shall gain it by unflagging will, endurance, and tenacity.

A nation which refuses to perish, and which, in order to live, does not flinch either from suffering or sacrifice, is sure of victory.

French government's proclamation to the People of Paris, 03 Sep 1914

The hour has come to advance at all costs and do die where you stand rather than give way.

General Joseph Joffre, French High Command, message to the French Army, 05 Sep 1914

Hard pressed on my right. My center is giving way. My right is retreating. Situation Excellent. I am attacking.

General Ferdinand Foch, French 9th Army, to Marshal Joffre, 08 Sep 1914

By 06 Sep 2014, the French were on the ropes. The government had abandoned Paris, leaving the city for Bordeaux in advance of what governmental officials expected was an imminent takeover of the capital by German forces. The French army, pride of the nation since the days of Napoleon, had fought valiantly over the preceding five weeks, but was now close to defeat. Morale was low. The French plan for winning against Germany, known as "Plan 17", was an abysmal failure. The Germans seemed poised to complete the "Schlieffen Plan" in time to turn their attention to Russia. As the German army neared Paris, however, General Joseph Joffre, commander of the French High Command, rallied the French armies and ordered a counterattack along the Marne River. The resulting battle (known later as the "First Battle of the Marne" saved France, forced the Germans to retreat and set the stage for over four years of trench warfare and stalemate on the Western Front.

Through an analysis of primary and secondary sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain how the First Battle of the Marne saved France, forced the German army to abandon the Schlieffen Plan and ultimately led to a four-year stalemate on the Western Front.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the German Army's "Schlieffen Plan" for winning the Great War and why the plan failed.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the French Army's "Plan 17" for winning the Great War and why the plan failed.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the First Battle of the Marne River saved France by stopping the German advance in 1914, ultimately leading to a stalemate on the Western Front.
4. Students will identify the commanders responsible for the First Battle of the Marne and their individual contributions to the battle itself.
 - a. Joseph Joffre (French)
 - b. Ferdinand Foch (French)
 - c. Joseph Gallieni (French)
 - d. Helmuth von Moltke (German)
 - e. Alexander von Kluck (German)
 - f. Sir John French (British)

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: How important is morale when fighting a war? Does defending one's homeland mean anything? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – War on the Western Front (20 min)
- Video – Battle of the Marne (15 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Schlieffen Plan and the First Battle of the Marne, specifically looking at how the French army was able to rally at the Marne River and force a stalemate on the Western Front, taking notes as appropriate. (25 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the First Battle of the Marne (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment – Essay: Explain in detail the First Battle of the Marne and how the French army was able to rally at the Marne River in 1914 to force a stalemate on the Western Front.

Extension

On tour: École de Guerre

While on tour, students should find time to visit the École de Guerre (French military staff college) on the Champ de Mars opposite from the Eiffel Tower in Paris. In the front courtyard, there's a statue of Marshall Joffre mounted on a horse. The plinth has an inscription about the First Battle of the Marne. Students can see firsthand where Joffre and many others trained for the French officer corps, including Charles De Galle (of WWII fame – ironically, he was a student in 1914 when one his instructors was Petain).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- pierreswesternfront.punt.nl/content/2008/08/marne-first-battle
Marne First Battle (website) – both primary and secondary sources
- www.historylearningsite.co.uk/first_battle_of_the_marne.htm
History Learning Site (UK) on the First Battle of the Marne
- www.bbc.co.uk/history/worldwars/wwone/battle_marne.shtml
BBC website – Battle of the Marne: 6-10 September 1914
- www.firstworldwar.com/features/plans.htm
“Planning for the War” (website article) – from firstworldwar.com. Good explanation of both Plan 17 and the Schlieffen Plan.
- www.firstworldwar.com/battles/marne1.htm
“The First Battle of the Marne, 1914” (website article) – from firstworldwar.com
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/marne_joffreorderoftheday.htm
“The First Battle of the Marne: Joseph Joffre’s Special Order of the Day, 11 September 1914” (primary source)
- photosofwar.net/war-photos/french-soldiers-wwi/
“French soldiers wait in the trenches at the Western Front during the First World War, 1916” (primary source, photograph)
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/marne_french.htm
Sir John French on the First Battle of the Marne, September 1914 (primary source) – from the commander of the British Expeditionary Force at the First Battle of the Marne.
- www.firstworldwar.com/source/joffredespatch_aug1914.htm
French Review of the War – The Battle of the Frontiers and the Retreat to the Marne, Aug-Sep 1914 (primary source). From the text of the official French Review by Commander in Chief Joffre.
- www.theartofbattle.com/battle-of-the-marne-1914.htm
The Art of Battle: Animated Battle Maps: Battle of the Marne, 1914
- www.authorstream.com/Presentation/tomgriffith-146358-war-western-front-education-ppt-powerpoint/
“War on the Western Front” PowerPoint
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video) – great 2 minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.firstworldwar.com/video/taxisofthemarne.htm
Taxis of the Marne, September 1914 (video) – primary source video (only 16 seconds) of taxis bringing reservists out to the Front at the First Battle of the Marne.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXFWgUxDtq4
First Battle of the Marne (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=CoVD2h220Hs
Battle of the Marne (video) from Professor Andrew Orr, history department, Sam Houston State University (TX).
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gflb_jSYTV0
The Great War: Episode 2 - Stalemate (video). This 55-minute video, part of a series produced by the BBC in conjunction with the Imperial War Museum (UK), does a great job using archival and primary source footage from the Western

Front. Highly recommended for students and teachers.

Background Information

- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Battle_of_the_Marne
“First Battle of the Marne” – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Joffre
“Joseph Joffre” – Wikipedia article
- en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schlieffen_plan
“Schlieffen Plan” – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/france/paris
On the Road: Paris – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/great-war-austrian-ultimatum-to-serbia
Great War – Serbian Front: Austrian Ultimatum of 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-causes-of-the-war-1914
Great War – Lights Going Out in 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-wilfred-owen
England and the Great War – Wilfred Owen: Dulce et Decorum Est
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/england/england-and-the-great-war-armistice-day-1918
England and the Great War – Armistice Day 1918
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-treaty-of-versailles
Great War – Treaty of Versailles 1919
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-battle-of-the-somme
Great War – Battle of the Somme 1916
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-clemenceau-views-at-versailles
Great War – France: Clemenceau
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/battle-of-verdun-1916
Great War – Battle of Verdun
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/france/great-war-first-battle-of-the-marne-1914
Great War – First Battle of the Marne 1914
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/germany/great-war-schlieffen-plan
Great War – Germany: The Schlieffen Plan
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/russia/great-war-eastern-front-treaty-of-brest-litovsk-1918
Great War – Eastern Front: Treaty of Brest-Litovsk 1918

Key Terms

- Battle of the Marne (First)
- Ferdinand Foch
- Joseph Joffre
- Marne River
- Plan 17
- Schlieffen Plan
- Stalemate
- Western Front

