Why did Canada get involved in World War I?

In 1914, the population of Canada was about 7.9 million. More than three million immigrants had arrived since 1896, about a third of them from Britain. Railways linked the country from east to west, and a growing number of homes and businesses had electric power and telephones. Canada's first airplane flight had taken place in Nova Scotia, and about 50,000 Canadians drove cars.

At the same time, the gap between rich and poor was growing. Although people had jobs, many of them paid poorly. To improve their working conditions, some people were joining unions. Many First Nations people were restricted to reserves, where their rights were limited. And some women were fighting to be allowed to vote in provincial and federal elections.

The Causes of World War I

War brings violence, death, and grief. One might wonder why any country ever goes to war. But history is filled with wars. Let's look at what factors led a young country like Canada to decide in 1914 that war was the only option.

In the early 1900s, the great powers of Europe were on a collision course. Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia were in a race for power.

Imperialism

Britain, France, Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Russia were imperial powers. Imperialism — the policy of extending the power of one country over other countries through military force or economic control — was a source of tension as European countries tried to expand their empires. The British Empire, for example, controlled more than 25 per cent of the world's territory and people.

From their colonies, European countries imported cheap raw materials, such as minerals and lumber, to feed their factories. The colonies also served as markets where goods manufactured in the homeland were sold. This gave the European countries economic power — and led to competition for overseas colonies.

Militarism

Militarism means using a military force to defend or promote a country's interest. To protect themselves and their colonies against invasion by rival empires, some European countries spent vast sums on their armed forces.

In the years leading up to World War I, for example, Britain's navy was the largest in the world and Russia had the largest army. But Germany was racing to catch up to both.

Advances in technology had led to the development of more powerful and deadlier weapons. During this time, arms manufacturers became some of the largest companies in Europe. How might such military buildup make it more likely that war would break out?
Alliances

Countries often form alliances to strengthen their position in the world. After World War II, for example, Canada joined a defensive alliance called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). NATO members agreed that an attack on one would be considered an attack on all.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, European countries formed similar alliances to try to maintain a balance of power whereby no single country can become more powerful than the rest. By 1914, conflicting imperial ambitions and the buildup of military might had created two large power blocs. The Triple Alliance included Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. The Triple Entente, or Allies, included France, Russia, and Britain.

When the European powder keg exploded and countries honoured their alliance commitments, World War I began.

Cause and Consequence: If you were a country with many neighbours, how would maintaining the “balance of power” be to your advantage? What might the disadvantages be?

Nationalism

Nationalism — excessive pride in one’s own nation — was growing in the years before World War I.

Austria-Hungary, for example, was home to 50 million Austrians, Hungarians, Bosnians, and Ukrainians, who were often hostile to one another. Many of the groups wanted their own independent countries.

The spark that ignited World War I was a political assassination in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was part of Austria-Hungary at the time. On June 28, 1914, Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary and his wife, Duchess Sophie, were shot dead while visiting the city.

The man who carried out the assassination belonged to a nationalist group in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina’s neighbour. Many Serbians lived in Bosnia-Herzegovina — and Serbian nationalists believed that they should be liberated from Austrian control and become part of Serbia.

After the assassination, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. But Russia had promised to help Serbia, and when Russian troops mobilized to do this, Germany sprang to defend its ally in the Triple Alliance. Britain and France backed Russia, their ally in the Triple Entente. And so by August 4, 1914, much of Europe was at war.

Cause and Consequence: In your opinion, were the alliances or the assassinations more responsible for starting the war?
Canada Goes to War

In 1914, more than half of Canadians were of British heritage, and many thought of Britain as the “mother country.” Canada was in charge of its own internal affairs, but the British government still controlled the country’s foreign affairs – its relations with other countries.

This meant that when Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, Canada was also at war. On the same day that Britain declared war, Prime Minister Robert Borden’s government said that Canada, too, was at war. Two weeks later, Parliament confirmed this. Sam Hughes, a member of Borden’s government and a strong supporter of British imperial rule, became responsible for mobilizing Canada’s volunteer army.

**Historical Perspective:** What does calling Britain the “mother country” suggest about how Canadians viewed Britain?

**Responses to Recruitment**

When World War I began, Canada was experiencing an economic depression. Factories had closed, and unemployment was high. Two years of drought had ruined much of the Prairie wheat crop. More than 50,000 people had lost their jobs on the railways, which were deeply in debt.

Politicians like Wilfrid Laurier, the Liberal leader who had been prime minister from 1896 to 1911, urged Canadian men to enlist. Laurier said, “It is our duty . . . to let Great Britain know . . . that there is in Canada but one mind and one heart, and that all Canadians stand behind the Mother Country, conscious and proud that she . . . engaged in war . . . to save civilization from the unbridled lust of conquest and power.”

About 25 per cent of all soldiers who served in the Canadian army during the war had been born in Britain. These volunteers, who were paid $1.10 a day, came from all walks of life. They were factory workers, doctors, labourers, farmers, lawyers, and miners. Many of them thought that the war would be over soon. They rushed to sign up, believing that they were setting out on a great adventure.

On October 3, 1914, the first 30 troop ships set sail for England carrying 32,000 Canadian and Newfoundland troops and 100 Canadian nurses. After more training in England, the troops finally arrived at the front lines near Ypres, Belgium, in the spring of 1915.

**Cause and Consequence:** Consider Canadian economic conditions in 1914. What factors, besides patriotism, might have motivated so many to sign up so quickly?
Not Wanted in the Armed Forces

In 1914, discrimination was common — and recruiting practices reflected the discriminatory attitudes of many Canadians. Early in the war, for example, Aboriginal people were not expected or encouraged to sign up.

But as the war dragged on, many soldiers were dying while the number of volunteers dropped. So the government started welcoming Aboriginal volunteers, who signed up in large numbers.

By the end of the war, about 35 per cent of eligible Aboriginal men — about 4000 of them — had joined the Canadian Forces. On the Algonquins of Pikwàkanagàn First Nation reserve, for example, all but three eligible single men enlisted.

Some Aboriginal volunteers signed up out of loyalty to the British king. He was descended from Queen Victoria, with whom First Nations had signed treaties. Others enlisted as a way of escaping the reserve system, which restricted their rights. Ironically, though, in order for Aboriginal men to enlist, they had to relinquish their Aboriginal rights and status.

Many Black Canadians also tried to enlist, but most were rejected by the white officers who ran the recruiting stations. Eventually, in 1916, Black volunteers were recruited to join a segregated, non-combat construction battalion. Their job was to dig trenches, load ammunition, cut down trees, and lay railway tracks.

Asian volunteers were also turned away. Canadians of German heritage, as well as many who came from Ukraine, were rejected because their former homelands were at war with Britain.

Women's Roles

Women were not allowed to sign on as soldiers, sailors, or pilots. But more than 3000 Canadian women enlisted as nurses. These were the first women to officially serve in the Canadian Armed Forces. They took care of wounded and dying soldiers in field hospitals, often within a few kilometres of the front lines. They also served in hospitals in Britain and France.

Nursing near the front lines was dangerous. Many medical staff were wounded or killed when hospitals came under fire. In addition, the risk of picking up an infection or disease was high.

Further, about 1000 Canadian women served as drivers in the air force. Others volunteered to drive ambulances and take on other jobs with the Red Cross.

Recall... Reflect... Respond

1. Could the Canadian government have responded differently to the outbreak of war? Explain your judgment.

2. On the basis of your knowledge of who was welcomed into the armed forces, describe the barriers faced by many groups in Canada during World War I.

3. Create a web diagram to illustrate all the causes of World War I. Include both long-term conditions and short-term causes. Show which causes are related to others. Explain your connections.
Trench Warfare

After the Germans’ initial rapid push through Belgium and into France, the Allies stopped them in late 1914. This resulted in a stalemate (where neither side can move), and from then on, the Western Front did not change much. To protect themselves from artillery and machine gun fire, soldiers on both sides dug trenches deep enough to shelter a man standing up.

So, when the first Canadian troops arrived at Ypres in 1915, they found themselves digging — and living in — trenches. Over the years, the trenches grew into a maze of underground rooms and tunnels. Some tunnels were dug toward enemy lines so that listeners could eavesdrop and sappers could plant explosives to blow up enemy trenches.

Despite the new machine guns and artillery, British and French commanders stuck to outdated tactics. They continued ordering soldiers to go “over the top” of the trenches and attack. But to reach enemy lines, the soldiers had to cross no man’s land — the area between the Allied and German trenches. In no man’s land, Allied soldiers had little protection against enemy artillery and machine gun fire, and hundreds of thousands died.

Cause and Consequence: Examine the map in Figure 6–10. It shows the 708-kilometre Western Front, which stretched from the Swiss border to the North Sea. How might this long line of trenches have contributed to the stalemate between the warring sides?

Life in the Trenches

Life in the trenches was miserable and dangerous. Depending on the season, soldiers endured bone-chilling cold, unbearable heat, or constant rain and mud. Their uniforms were filthy and infested with lice. Rats were everywhere. Diseases such as trench foot were common. Trench foot, which rotted the flesh of the feet, was caused by standing in mud and water. If the infection spread, a soldier’s foot and leg might need to be amputated.

Fear was constant. Soldiers never knew when the enemy might stage a surprise raid or an all-out attack. Even between battles, troops were not safe. Snipers on both sides tried to shoot enemy soldiers, and each army tried to lob shells and grenades into the other’s trenches.

Evidence: We know that conditions were dreadful in the trenches. Yet Canadian soldiers stayed and continued the fight. What can you infer from this?
The War at Sea

Both Britain and Germany relied on ships to supply food, raw materials, medical equipment, soldiers, and weapons. So each side used its navy to sink as many of the enemy’s supply ships as possible.

When the war began, Germany had more submarines than Britain. The Germans called their submarines U-boats, which stood for Unterseeboote (underwater boats). To cut off the Allies’ supplies, U-boats began to attack ships bound for Britain.

To counter this threat, the Allies set up convoys. Merchant ships gathered at Halifax, Nova Scotia, and travelled in packs with naval escorts to detect and sink U-boats. Once the convoy system was in place, fewer ships were lost. Still, 45 Canadian steamships were among the 2600 Allied ships sunk by U-boats.

In 1915, a U-boat torpedoed the Lusitania, a British passenger liner that was also carrying war supplies to Britain. More than half the passengers, including 128 Americans, went down with the ship. This incident, and the sinking of two more American ships in 1917, is often credited with helping shift American public opinion in favour of joining the Allies. However, historians disagree on how significant the incident was because the United States did not enter the war until April 1917.

World War I helped speed the growth of the Canadian navy. When the war started, Canada’s navy consisted of two second-hand cruisers. By 1918, this number had grown to more than 100 ships, including cruisers, destroyers, submarines, trawlers, and minesweepers. These ships escorted convoys across the Atlantic, bringing much needed arms and supplies. What would it take to ramp up from two to 100 ships?

The War in the Air

When World War I began, Canada had no air force, so would-be aviators joined the British Royal Flying Corps or the Royal Naval Air Service. About 22,800 Canadians served as pilots, gunners, mechanics, and aircrew. During the war, Britain began training pilots in Canada. By the end of the war, about 40 per cent of British pilots were Canadian.

Flying the early airplanes was dangerous. Their open cockpits offered little protection, and pilots often flew low over enemy lines to take pictures, gather information, drop bombs, and fire at enemy soldiers.

Fighter pilots who shot down five or more enemy aircraft became known as aces. Canadian Billy Bishop was one of the bravest.
A New Kind of War

When Canadian troops first arrived in Europe, they remained together in their division. But as more divisions arrived, the divisions were separated and integrated into the British army.

Soon after arriving in Europe, Canadian soldiers were sent to help French and British troops near Ypres, Belgium. There, in April 1915, the Germans unleashed a deadly new weapon: chlorine gas. This gas burned the eyes and lungs, causing victims to choke, gag, and suffocate to death.

When the French front line at Ypres was hit hard by the gas, Canadian troops moved in as reinforcements. At first, the Germans pushed the Canadians back, but then the line held. The German advance was stopped, but the Canadians suffered more than 6000 casualties.

Both sides launched gas attacks during the war — and both sides began equipping their troops with gas masks. In the end, however, these attacks were not as effective as had been hoped. The gas usually dispersed quickly, and if the wind changed, a gas attack could backfire and harm the troops who had started the attack.

The Battle of the Somme

General Douglas Haig, the British commander, believed the Allied forces could break through the German lines at a location on the Somme River. This action would help stop German troops from bombarding the French near Verdun.

For two weeks, Allied artillery bombarded the German line along a 45-kilometre front. Haig wanted to destroy the German trenches and the barbed wire that protected them. But the tactic failed.

When British and Canadian troops started moving across no man’s land on July 1, 1916, they found the barbed wire intact and the Germans with machine guns ready. Also taking part was the Newfoundland Regiment, which was not linked to the Canadian Army because Newfoundland had not yet joined Confederation. The Newfoundlanders attacked at Beaumont-Hamel at the northern end of the front — and suffered terrible casualties. Of the nearly 800 men who went over the top at Beaumont-Hamel, only 68 were able to report for duty the next morning.

Although the Allied force suffered 60 000 casualties on that first day, Haig ordered the attack to continue. And it did, for more than four months. When the battle finally ended in November 1916, the Allies had suffered about 650 000 casualties to gain just 545 square kilometres of territory. For good reason, this battle is sometimes called the bloodiest battle in human history. Among the casualties were 24 000 Canadians.

Continuity and Change: Compare the number of dead to the number of Canadians killed in Canada’s decade-long war in Afghanistan. What has changed and what has stayed the same?
The Battle of Vimy Ridge

By early 1917, both British and French forces had tried — unsuccessfully — to take a German stronghold on Vimy Ridge in northern France. This height of land was considered a key vantage point, and for their third attempt to capture it, the Allies turned to the Canadians. For the first time, Canada's four divisions were assembled to fight as a single unit under a Canadian commander, Major-General Arthur Currie.

The slaughter at the Somme had ended just a few months earlier, and it had taught the Allied commanders some important lessons. They began to change their tactics.

One strategy they adopted was the creeping barrage. From behind the front line, artillery would start bombarding no man's land and gradually advance their salvos toward the German trenches. Infantry would follow this creeping barrage forward, moving as close as possible to enemy positions before starting their attack.

Currie and his superior, British Lieutenant-General Julian Byng, spent the weeks before the attack making detailed plans. Soldiers were shown maps and aerial photographs and drilled on the location of German positions. Troops practised, using scale models. Tunnels were built so that troops could move part of the way forward under cover.

Then, for two weeks, artillery pummelled the German lines. The attack started at 5:30 a.m. on Monday, April 9, 1917, the day after Easter Sunday. As snow fell, the first wave of 20,000 Canadians followed a carefully co-ordinated creeping barrage toward the ridge.

Once on the move, the Canadians were required to reach specific points at precise times; otherwise, they risked being caught in their own bombardment. Machine guns were carried forward behind the first wave to hold positions that had been captured.

The careful preparation paid off. By the next day, the Canadians had taken and held Vimy Ridge. Coming on the heels of the disaster at the Somme, this important victory gave the Allies new hope.

After the battle, a Paris newspaper called the victory "Canada's Easter gift to France." And after the war, France gave the battlefield to Canada as a memorial park. On the memorial are inscribed the names of 11,285 Canadian soldiers who died in France but whose bodies were never found.
Vimy and Canadian Identity
Many historians view the success at Vimy as a turning point in Canada's history as a nation. The achievement gave many Canadians a new sense of national pride and identity.

Historian C.P. Stacey, for example, wrote: "As [the Canadian soldiers] looked across the Douai plain from the conquered ridge they felt that their nation had come of age. If a single milestone is needed to mark progress on the road to national maturity, one might do worse than nominate that famous Easter Monday."

Historical Perspective: Stacey takes the historical perspective of the victorious soldiers at Vimy. What do you think most affected Canadian identity in the long run: the thoughts of Canadian soldiers after Vimy, as Stacey describes them, or the newspaper headlines at left?

Youth Making History
Remembering Vimy

It was a typical school assignment: Pick the name of a soldier who had died in World War I, and research him.

But by the time high school student Robert Sweeny of R.D. Parker Collegiate School in Thompson, Manitoba, had arrived in Vimy Ridge on April 9, 2012, to mark the battle's 95th anniversary, he had a new understanding of the project.

His soldier's name was Robert Richardson.

"He was just 25 years old," Robert said, placing his hand on the memorial etched with Richardson's name, along with the names of more than 11,000 Canadian soldiers killed in France who were never found. "He never had a grave. They never found his body.

"I just wanted to be here, to touch the wall, and let him know that he's not alone," he said under darkened skies and drizzling rain. "I'm so glad I'm here, so that someone knows he fought in the battle."

Sweeny, along with 5000 other students, travelled to Vimy as part of the 2012 Vimy Ridge National Student Remembrance Tour. The students visited a number of key sites, including Beaumont-Hamel, France, where the Newfoundland regiment suffered massive casualties (see page 182).

Explorations
1. Is a monument like the Vimy Memorial an appropriate way to remember those who died in battle? Consider the role that a permanent structure can play for future generations. What other form of remembrance would help young people understand the importance of this battle to Canadian identity?

2. Most Canadians who died in World War I are buried far from home in Europe. During the War in Afghanistan, the bodies of Canadian soldiers who died in Afghanistan were flown home to Canada. How does this shift reflect technological change? How does it reflect changes in social values and expectations?
The Battle of Passchendaele

In early 1917, Haig had ordered Allied troops to try to break through the German lines near Ypres, Belgium. This battle became known as the Third Battle of Ypres. The Battle of Passchendaele was part of this larger battle. The Germans had held the line at Ypres since 1914, giving them plenty of time to reinforce their defences and build concrete bunkers to protect machine gun crews.

Through the summer of 1917, constant shelling and heavy rains turned no man’s land into a muddy swamp pocked with deep, water-filled craters. British, Australian, and New Zealand forces tried to attack the German positions with little success, and at a cost of 100,000 casualties.

Since Vimy, the Canadian Forces had remained together under Arthur Currie, who had been promoted to lieutenant-general. When Haig ordered Currie and the Canadians to take Passchendaele Ridge, Currie feared that losses would be heavy and once again planned carefully.

Scouts were sent out to report the position of German machine gun and artillery placements. Soldiers were drilled in the location of German positions, and they rehearsed before the battle. And, once again, a creeping barrage was planned to provide cover for soldiers making their way across no man’s land.

On October 26, the artillery barrages that preceded the attack could be heard in London, England, 150 kilometres away. The Canadians attacked behind the barrage but were slowed by the mud and heavy rain. Over the next 15 days, the attack continued.

On November 10, the Canadians captured the ridge, but 15,654 soldiers were dead or wounded. Despite this victory, the Third Battle of Ypres, which resulted in more than 310,000 Allied and 260,000 German casualties, resulted in little significant gain. For many historians, Passchendaele has come to symbolize the futility of World War I.

Historical Perspective: Historian Ronald Haycock once said about the Canadian effort at Passchendaele: “The competence, confidence, and maturity begun in 1915 at Ypres a short distance away, and at Vimy Ridge earlier that spring, again confirmed the reputation of the Canadian Corps as the finest fighting formation on the Western Front.” On the other hand, Major John R. Grodzinski has said, “The notion of soldiers coming down Vimy Ridge as Canadians was not expressed in 1917, but it was fabricated by a series of leading questions directed to Great War veterans during the 1960s.” In other words, the meaning of Vimy was created after the war, once people had a chance to talk about it. Summarize these two viewpoints. What do these viewpoints tell you about “truth” in history?
Canada’s Hundred Days

Before the war ended, Canadians would meet another daunting challenge. In 1917, a communist revolution in Russia had deposed the czar, or emperor, and Russia surrendered to Germany early in 1918. This enabled Germany to transfer 600,000 German soldiers from Russia to the Western Front. But the Allied forces were also becoming stronger. The United States had entered the war in late 1917, so fresh American troops were arriving in Europe.

Hoping to attack before the Allies were at full strength, German commanders launched a major offensive on the Western Front. But the Allies were ready — and on August 8, 1918, a period now known as “Canada’s Hundred Days” began.

On that date, the Canadian Corps, still led by Currie, spearheaded an attack on the city of Amiens. By the end of the day, they had pushed the Germans back 13 kilometres. In a war in which success was often measured in metres, this achievement was astonishing, and some historians say that it marked the beginning of the end for Germany.

The Canadians kept pushing forward. By early September, they had reached the Canal du Nord. As at Vimy and Passchendaele, Currie and Canadian officers carefully planned their strategy for crossing this heavily defended landmark. Transport, labour, communications, medical, and engineering units were brought into the planning.

On September 27, the Canadians attacked, with the support of a huge artillery barrage. The engineers quickly built bridges and ladders, often under German machine gun fire. Within hours, the Canadians had opened a route across the canal for the guns, tanks, and supplies that would be needed as the Allies pushed forward.

By October 11, the Canadians had taken the town of Cambrai and advanced 37 kilometres into what had been German-held territory.

In the final days of the war, the Canadians pushed on through Valenciennes to the Belgian city of Mons, which had been in German hands since early in the war. Late on November 10, Canadians moved into Mons.

At the same time, an armistice — truce — was being negotiated, and at 11 a.m. on November 11, the armistice became official and the fighting ended.

Historical Perspective: Why would people who lived through World War I call it “the war to end all wars”? Has time changed our perspective?

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Voices

The battle for the Canal du Nord was arguably the single greatest achievement of the Canadian Corps. An all but impregnable position had been taken, thanks to an imaginative plan, almost flawless execution, massive fire support, and the matchless courage of the Canadian soldiers.

— J.L. Granatstein, historian, in Hell’s Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Great War, 1914–1918, 2004

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Figure 6-21 Land Exchanged During World War I

Note the amount of territory that changed hands over the four years of war. Consider this in relation to the number of lives lost. Was it all worth it?
Canada at the Paris Peace Conference

In 1919, representatives of the countries that won the war met in Paris, France, to negotiate the treaties that would officially end the war. Although Britain still controlled Canada’s foreign policy, Prime Minister Robert Borden argued that Canadians’ wartime record had earned Canada the right to sit independently at the peace table. And when the time came to sign the treaties, Canada did so separately from Britain.

Still, Prime Minister David Lloyd George of Britain, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau of France, and President Woodrow Wilson of the United States were the driving forces behind many of the treaty decisions that would have far-reaching consequences in the decades to come.

The Treaty of Versailles between the Allies and the Central Powers imposed harsh financial, military, and territorial penalties on Germany. The treaty forced Germany

- to give up some European territory and its overseas colonies, such as present-day Namibia in Africa and Jiaozhou Territory in China.
- to limit the size of its military and stop manufacturing large armaments
- to pay for the cost of the war and to compensate those countries that had been severely damaged
- to accept responsibility “for causing all the loss and damage” of the war

**Ethical Dimension:** Why would the Allies insist on placing all blame for the war on Germany? Given the situation in Europe before the war, was this fair?

**Consequences Around The World**

Before World War I, many Arabs in the Ottoman Empire wanted an independent homeland. Although the Ottoman Empire, which was ruled by Turks, was an ally of Germany during the war, many Arabs in the empire helped the Allies — and were promised a homeland in return.

But during the war, Britain promised to help Jews establish a “national home” in Palestine, and France and Britain secretly agreed to divide control of the Middle East — and its oil wealth — between themselves.

At the end of the war, France took control of Syria and Lebanon, while Britain took control of Cyprus, Palestine, and Iraq. Iraq was a new country that the Allies carved out of the former Ottoman Empire.

Many Arabs felt betrayed by these actions, and their sense of betrayal sparked a lasting legacy of bitterness against the Western powers.

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**Recall... Reflect... Respond**

1. Identify the three World War I events that you think are most historically significant for Canada and Canadians. Explain how these events affected
   - Canada’s reputation in the world
   - Canadians’ sense of identity
   - Canada’s increasing independence

2. Canada’s independent seat at the Paris Peace Conference came at a very high price. Did this seat make the sacrifices of Canadians during the war worthwhile? Write a paragraph that sets out your reasoned response to this question.
How did Canadians at home respond to the war?

During the war, about 7.5 per cent of Canada's 7.9 million people were in uniform. But millions of Canadians at home also supported the war effort. They contributed money, physical resources, and moral support.

Financing the War Effort

To fight the war, the Canadian government needed money to train, transport, feed, equip, and pay soldiers, and to build ships, armoured vehicles, airplanes, and weapons. At its height, the war effort was costing the government about $1 million a day.

To raise money, the government sold Victory Bonds. People who bought these bonds were lending money to the government. In return, they would get their money back, along with interest. Buying bonds was voluntary, so the government launched advertising campaigns that appealed to Canadians' patriotism. The first bond drive, which was expected to raise $50 million, raised more than $100 million. What does this tell you about Canadians' initial view of the war?

The government also instituted business taxes in 1916 and introduced a tax on income in 1917. The income tax was supposed to be a temporary measure that would end when the war was over. But it is still in place.

Historical Perspective: With a partner, imagine that it is 1917 and you are preparing a speech to make at a community town hall meeting. Develop several points you could use to argue in favour of—or against—introducing an income tax to help raise money for the war effort.

Propaganda

Propaganda is the systematic effort to shape people's beliefs to achieve specific goals. During the war, Prime Minister Robert Borden's government used propaganda to keep Canadian patriotism at a high pitch. Posters played a key role in this effort. Posters were used to encourage Canadians to buy war bonds, enlist, work harder, and even change their eating habits so food could be sent overseas.

Artists were hired to develop the most effective images for the posters, which focused on duty to the country, protecting loved ones, and defeating the enemy. Billboards, parades, and rallies were used to make sure that the message reached Canadians in all parts of the country.

Propaganda also has a negative side. Some posters promoted hatred of the people of enemy countries and shamed Canadians who did not seem to be doing their share.
The War Measures Act

In 1914, the Canadian government passed the War Measures Act to help it respond to the war. The act gave the government the power to pass laws without the approval of Parliament while Canada was at war. It could also overrule provincial laws, censor the news media, tell manufacturers and farmers what they must produce, imprison people without trial, and label some people enemies of Canada.

Enemy Aliens

In the years before World War I, the Canadian government had actively campaigned to attract immigrants from Europe. This meant that, by 1914, more than a million people from regions that were part of the German and Austro-Hungarian empires lived in Canada. Some were recent immigrants, but others were descended from immigrants who had arrived long before.

Some people feared that these immigrants could become spies who might sabotage the war effort. As a result, the government used the power of the War Measures Act to label more than 800,000 people enemy aliens — people who had come from an enemy country — and to restrict their rights.

Many so-called enemy aliens were forced to carry identification cards and report regularly to authorities. They were not allowed to publish or read anything in a language other than French or English, and they could not leave the country without permission.

More than 8500 people, mostly of Ukrainian and German heritage, were placed in internment camps and forced to build roads and railways, work in mines, and clear land. The internees at Castle Mountain Internment Camp in Alberta, for example, helped develop Banff National Park.

At the time, the 400,000 Canadians of German heritage were the third-largest ethnic group in Canada, after the English and French. But schools and universities were not allowed to teach the German language, German-language newspapers were banned, and some German Canadians were fired from their jobs. In Montréal and Winnipeg, rioters destroyed German-owned shops, and the town of Berlin, Ontario, renamed itself Kitchener, after Britain's war minister, who had died when his ship hit a German mine.

Historical Perspective: Despite their treatment, thousands of Canadians of Ukrainian and German heritage enlisted in the Canadian Forces. Think about Canadian identity and nationhood, and explain what might have motivated them to respond to their situation by signing up.
The War Zone Comes Home

Halifax was a busy port during World War I. On the morning of December 6, 1917, two ships, the Mont-Blanc and the Imo, collided in the harbour. The Mont-Blanc was loaded with about 2400 tonnes of explosives and began to burn.

Just before 9:05 a.m., the Mont-Blanc blew up. The massive explosion flattened much of the city and was heard more than 300 kilometres away. Two thousand people died and 9000 were injured. Thousands more were left homeless. The explosion brought the horrors of war to the home front.

Women’s Changing Roles

In 1914, many women worked outside the home, but their job choices were often limited. Ideas about appropriate work for women restricted many to low-paying jobs, such as teaching, domestic work, and low-skilled factory work.

But when men signed up, many more women stepped in and ran their family farms and businesses. And when the war effort needed workers to make the supplies, ships, tanks, bombs, guns, and ammunition the Canadian forces needed, women accepted these jobs.

Conditions were not easy for these women. At first, labour unions resisted because they wanted to protect jobs for men. Many women found themselves doing the same jobs as men for a fraction of the pay.

Most employers did little to help women employees. Sometimes, not even separate washrooms were provided. In addition, working conditions were sometimes dangerous. In munitions factories, for example, fumes from the materials could damage workers’ lungs and turn their skin bright yellow. Accidental explosions were also a risk.

Women’s new jobs were often considered temporary. When the men returned from Europe, they would take back their jobs. But many women would no longer be satisfied to play only their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and domestic workers.

Ethical Dimension: Was it fair that women — productive workers during the war — were removed from their jobs because men had returned from the battlefield? Explain your viewpoint.

Women and the Right to Vote

In 1914, voting was not considered a right for everyone. Some Canadian women, for example, could vote in municipal elections, but they were not allowed to vote in provincial or federal elections.

Women had been fighting to change this since the early 1870s. In the early 20th century, this cause was taken up by women such as Nellie McClung and Emily Murphy.

In 1916, the Manitoba government gave some women the right to vote in provincial elections, and, by 1917, women in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia could also vote in provincial elections. But it would take a wartime conscription crisis in 1917 to get them the federal vote.
The Munitions Scandal

Sam Hughes, Canada’s minister of militia and defence, responded to the war by making sure that his friends, many of whom were wealthy businesspeople, got richer. Hughes was associated with the Shell Committee, whose members used their influence to land, and profit from, $170 million in government contracts to make artillery shells.

By 1915, word of this profiteering — making excessive profits — had leaked out. The scandal became worse when the committee delivered only $5.5 million worth of shells, and even those deliveries were late. The scandal ended Hughes’ political career.

Conscription

When World War I began, the government had no problem persuading Canadians to enlist in the armed forces. But by 1916, people had learned about conditions at the front from newspaper accounts and from wounded veterans who had returned home. Many families had lost loved ones, and the casualty lists published in Canadian newspapers were making the human costs of the war clear. In addition, many Canadians had landed high-paying jobs in the war industries.

In response, fewer people wanted to sign up. Enlistment campaigns started falling short of their targets, so soldiers lost in battle could not be replaced. At the same time, Britain was pressing Canada for reinforcements.

To make up the shortfall, the government of Prime Minister Robert Borden passed the Military Service Act in July 1917. The act introduced conscription — forced military service. Many Canadians, especially those with family members serving overseas, supported the act. But others, including Liberal leader and former Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, were outraged at the idea of forcing people to fight.

Violent riots erupted, especially in Quebec, where Francophones were nearly unanimous in opposing the act. The conscription issue created distrust between Anglophone and Francophone Canadians.

Although the conscription issue divided the country, it made little difference to the war effort. By the end of the war, only about 24,000 of those who fought overseas were conscripts.

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**Figure 6-27** Sam Hughes had already been criticized for supplying Canadian soldiers with shoddy equipment, including leaky boots and the Ross rifle, which jammed in the heat of battle. Would you blame soldiers for tossing the Canadian-made weapon in favour of the British Lee Enfield?
Conscription and the Vote
Prime Minister Robert Borden knew that the conscription law had stirred
up a hornet’s nest. So with a general election looming in late 1917, he
introduced measures to improve his government’s chances of winning
re-election.
To begin, Borden brought in the Military Voters Act, which gave
all members of the military, male and female, the vote. In addition, it
allowed the government to assign the vote of soldiers who did not specify
a riding to any constituency the government wished.
Borden thought that women with relatives fighting in the war were likely to support him and the policy of
conscription. So the Wartime Elections Act gave the
vote to close women relatives — wives, widows, mothers,
sisters, and daughters — of men serving in the armed
forces. This act also took away many people’s right to
vote. Those barred from voting included all enemy aliens,
as well as conscientious objectors — people who did not
believe in war.
In addition, Borden promised to extend the franchise
to even more women. And when he realized that many
Anglophone farmers opposed conscription because they
believed they could not leave their farms, he granted
farmers’ sons an exemption from conscription, which he
then revoked after the election.
Borden’s election campaign was designed to appeal to women’s
patriotism and to fear. One leaflet, for example, suggested, “Before you
cast your vote, think what the Kaiser [the German emperor] would like it
to be.” Posters and editorial cartoons portrayed the possibility of Germans
invading Canada and attacking women and children in their homes.
Borden and his supporters easily won the election, and conscription
went into effect. But the debate had been divisive and left a legacy of
bitterness between Francophones and Anglophones. Borden did keep his
election promise to women, and in 1918, women who were older than 21,
who were not alien-born or Aboriginal, and who met provincial proper-
ownership requirements had the right to vote in federal elections.

Recall… Reflect… Respond
1. Many Canadian women won the right to vote in federal
elections because of the political tactics Prime Minister
Robert Borden used to ensure his re-election. An old
saying — the end justifies the means — suggests that
questionable methods are justified if the outcome is
positive. Did the positive outcome for women in 1917
justify Borden’s tactics? Explain your response.
2. Think about the responses to war of Canadians at home
and identify the two you believe had the greatest long-
term impact for Canadian society, politics, or identity.

Give reasons for your choices. Share your decisions
and reasons with a partner.
3. Some people believe that Canadians who did not enlist
in the armed forces benefited greatly from World War I.
Develop three pieces of evidence you could use to
argue in favour of, or against, this position. Share your
ideas with a classmate. After your discussion, identify
the arguments that most effectively support your
position.
How did Canada recover from the war?

At the end of World War I, Canada faced a number of challenges — physical, economic, and political.

Influenza: 1918–1919

At the time, little was known about the disease or how to treat it. Scientists now believe it started in birds and jumped to pigs and then to humans. Once humans carried the flu to Europe, the disease spread quickly in the mud and filth of the trenches.

Wounded soldiers returning to Canada in 1918 carried the virus home with them. By the time Canadian forces in Europe had embarked on the last 100 days of the war, the flu was spreading across Canada.

The parades and crowds celebrating the end of the war in late 1918 helped spread the disease. The same thing happened in many other countries, and the flu became a global pandemic — an epidemic that affects many people in many countries. Some historians believe that as many as 50 million people, including more than 50,000 Canadians, died.

Conditions in Canada

The economies of countries that had fought in World War I were in chaos, partly because of unemployment caused by the closing of munitions factories and partly because of huge debts that had accumulated during the war. By 1934, for example, Britain still owed the United States $4.4 billion for the war. The global economic decline after the war was deep and widespread.

In Canada, unemployment increased in 1919. Tens of thousands of soldiers had returned from Europe and were looking for work at the same time as munitions factories, chemical and steel plants, and mining operations were closing.

Both food and fuel were in short supply and became more expensive. The price of ground beef, for example, had been 10 cents a pound in 1914. In 1918, it was 39 cents a pound, an increase of nearly 300 per cent. Higher prices and lower wages meant that people had trouble maintaining their standard of living.

In 1920, Stephen Leacock, a popular Canadian humorist and a political economist, warned that Canada faced strikes, economic unrest, and cycles of rising wages and prices.

During the war years, employers had needed workers, and many employers had been willing to negotiate when workers threatened to strike. But when the economy tanked after the war, companies had a hard time surviving, so they were unwilling to improve working conditions or wages.

Up for Discussion

If wars have such terrible long-term effects, why do countries such as Canada commemorate battles?

Voices

I want to make it absolutely clear that people are dying in our midst because they are not provided with proper care. They are not dying because we don’t know about them. We know where they are, but we have nobody to send. Knitting socks for soldiers is very useful work, but we are now asking the women of Ottawa to get in the trenches themselves.

— Harold Fisher, mayor of Ottawa, at a news conference, 1918

Figure 7–11 Returning soldiers were angry when they could not find jobs. On Thanksgiving Day in 1920, this group of World War I veterans marched through downtown Toronto to protest the shortage of jobs. Put yourself in their shoes. Why do they feel a sense of injustice?
Returning Veterans

Many of the soldiers returning from World War I were changed by the horrors they had experienced. Some found it hard to settle down to civilian life. In March 1919, veteran George Pearson wrote in *Maclean's* magazine that returning soldiers experienced a "terrible restlessness which possesses us like an evil spirit; the indefinite expression of a vague discontent, the restlessness of dying men, little children, and old soldiers."

Others suffered from shell shock, called post-traumatic stress disorder today. And some 4500 veterans had been prisoners of war.

Few services were available for these soldiers. The prevailing attitude was that they should return to their civilian responsibilities. Hugh Graham — Lord Atholstan — the multimillionaire publisher of the *Montréal Daily Star*, echoed this opinion when he said, "The returned soldier must not be allowed to consider himself an unlimited creditor of the State, to be supported in idleness."

At first, soldiers with disabilities had some government support, but as time passed and the economy worsened, the government cancelled veterans' training and skills programs. By the end of 1921, most veterans with disabilities were unemployed. Many former soldiers were bitterly disappointed by the government's — and the public's — response to their situation.

Some veterans hoped that by banding together they might be able to press the federal government to create programs that would benefit them and their families. So they formed groups such as the Great War Veterans' Association. The GWVA tried, but failed, to win improved compensation for all veterans, including those with disabilities and the families of those who had been killed. In a number of cities, veterans began to organize protests but often ended up in jail. First Nations veterans also organized protests, and their story is told in the next chapter.

Labour Unrest

In the early 1900s, labour union activity increased in Canada. This activity reflected growth in the worldwide labour movement. Canadian workers began to demand eight-hour workdays, recognition of their unions, and improved wages. At the time, few laws protected workers from exploitation, and work conditions could be dreadful. Between 1914 and 1918, membership in labour unions grew.

The experience of Canadian soldiers in Europe had taught many that working collectively brought results, an insight that meshed with the growing union movement in Canada. Strikes organized by labour unions in several major centres of the United States found broad-based support in Canada.

Evidence: Examine the statistics in Figure 7-12. What factors could have contributed to an increase in union membership and wages? What factors could have contributed to a decline in membership and wages? Based on this evidence, make a statement about labour movements that you think is true. Explain your answer.
One Big Union

After World War I, the idea of unions joining together became popular, especially in Western Canada. In March 1919, union leaders met in Calgary and decided to form a branch of the One Big Union. OBU members believed that an alliance would increase their bargaining power with government and employers. Members would support one another if one group decided to strike.

The beliefs of many OBU members were similar to those of the communist revolutionaries in Russia and of the international communist movement. In Canada, many people, including the government and police, were suspicious of communists and harassed them continually.

Pamphlets produced by the OBU called for a restructuring of society because it was based on an unfair class system. The pamphlets said that workers suffered “hunger and want” while employers had “all the good things of life.” Workers were urged to unite to fight those who denied them equality and fairness.

To achieve their goals, OBU members supported general strikes. A general strike is not directed against a single employer; rather, it is directed against governments and employers as a group. At the Calgary meeting, delegates proposed a country-wide general strike on June 1 if the government did not respond to their demands.

Historical Perspective: Communism was young and untested in 1919. Many people thought that it was the answer to all the world’s problems because it claimed to put the needs of the people before the needs of the rich. Why would its ideals appeal to Canadians in 1919? Is it easier to judge how effective communism is today? Why or why not?

The Winnipeg General Strike

On May 1, 1919, members of Winnipeg’s building trade unions went on strike when their employers refused to negotiate a wage increase. The strikers were joined the next day by city metal workers. When the strikes were not settled by 11 a.m. on May 15, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council called for a city-wide general strike to support the striking workers. An hour later, 20,000 members of 94 unions were off the job.

Within days, the number of strikers had risen to 30,000. The strike closed factories and stores, and stopped city streetcars. The original strikers were joined by postal workers, firefighters, and police officers.

A central committee co-ordinated the labour protests and negotiated with employers. Essential services, such as delivery of food and dairy products, were allowed. Delivery wagons carried signs that read “Permitted by Authority of Strike Committee.”

Voices

Winnipeg is a warning to the rest of Canada. The object of the One Big Union is plain. It is the aim of the Reds [communists] who dominate that organization to use mass-power, in defiance of agreements, for the overturning of organized society.

— The Times, Toronto, May 21, 1919

Figure 7-13 Although thousands of World War I veterans joined the Winnipeg General Strike, others like these — who marched on June 4, 1919 — believed that the strikers were trying to destroy the values they had fought for. Why might such a widespread strike cause people to fear or attack the strikers?
Opposition to the Strike

The Citizens' Committee of 1000 formed to oppose the strikers. The committee, which was made up of business owners, politicians, and bankers, portrayed the strike as an effort by foreigners to overthrow the democratically elected Canadian government.

The committee recruited volunteers to replace striking workers, fired all Winnipeg police officers who refused to pledge not to join the strike, and hired 1800 special police officers. The city also called in the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) — now the RCMP — to help keep order.

Committee leaders warned that the strike was the start of a revolution like the one that had taken place in Russia. The federal government, which was afraid the strike would spread to other cities, supported the citizens' committee and ordered government employees to report to work or lose their jobs. Immigration laws were changed so that any striker who was an immigrant could be deported immediately.

On June 17, some strike leaders were arrested. Four days later, RNWMP officers on horseback charged into a protest that was becoming violent. By the time the confrontation ended, up to 100 people were injured and one worker was dead. A second died later of his injuries.

The army then moved in to occupy the streets of the city. Threatened with losing their jobs, the strikers returned to work on June 25, six weeks after the strike began. Some strikers were fired, and before they were allowed to go back to work, others were forced to sign agreements not to join a union.

Ethical Dimension: Given the context, was the government reaction and use of force justified?

Some Consequences of the Strike

The strike did not bring about the changes that the workers had hoped for. One strike leader was deported, and others were jailed. And over the next few years, union membership dropped as unemployment rose.

Still, the strike did have some lasting effects. A royal commission found that the strikers had engaged in peaceful protest and that the strike was not a conspiracy to overthrow the government.

The law soon required employers to recognize the right of workers to bargain collectively. The strike began a new era of political involvement for workers, and several strike leaders went on to political careers. John Queen, for example, later became mayor of Winnipeg, and in 1921, J.S. Woodsworth was elected to the House of Commons. Woodsworth became a founding member of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, which later became the New Democratic Party.
Prohibition

In the early 20th century, alcohol was blamed for many social problems, such as crime, public drunkenness, family violence, and poverty. As a result, the temperance movement, which called on people to abstain from drinking alcohol, gained ground in North America.

Temperance societies believed that if people stopped spending money on alcohol, many families would be able to improve their lives. The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union campaigned for a total prohibition on alcohol. Nellie McClung and Louise McKinney of the Famous Five were members of the movement.

Before and during World War I, the temperance movement led to the banning of alcohol in several provinces, including Alberta and Ontario. Bars were closed and selling alcohol became illegal. In 1918, under the War Measures Act, the federal government enacted Prohibition — laws against making and selling intoxicating liquor. The ban lasted until a year after the war ended.

Not all Canadians were happy with Prohibition, and a brisk illegal trade in alcohol developed. People who wanted to drink had to buy illegal liquor from criminals for high prices or go without. Governments lost the income generated by alcohol taxes. By 1921, provincial governments began to repeal prohibition laws and replace them with government-controlled liquor sales.

The U.S. government had also introduced Prohibition, and the U.S. laws remained in effect well after Prohibition had ended in Canada. This created a profitable business opportunity for Canadian liquor companies, which looked the other way when their products were smuggled into the United States.

Every year, “rum runners” transported about 45 million litres of liquor into the United States, often through remote land crossings or across lakes and rivers in boats. Small-scale smugglers often hid liquor containers in their clothing, in baby carriages, or in other places. Larger-scale smugglers used fast boats or cars to bypass border checkpoints. Some Canadian rum runners, such as Rocco Perri and Emilio Picariello, developed reputations as larger-than-life “entrepreneurs.”

Recall... Reflect... Respond

1. Create a two-circle Venn diagram to describe conditions in Canada in the years immediately after World War I.
   - In the left circle, describe conditions for war veterans.
   - In the right circle, describe conditions for most Canadians.
   - In the centre, overlapping area, describe conditions encountered by both groups.

On the basis of what your Venn diagram shows, write a short message that you would have sent to your member of Parliament if you had lived at the time.

2. Explain the goals of a movement in which Canadians worked together to achieve something.

3. Describe one major area of conflict among Canadians in the years following World War I. What caused this conflict? What harm did this conflict lead to? What positive results came out of it?