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**Content Reading Guide: World War I Part 1**

There were many causes that led to World War I. First, **imperialism**, controlling other areas for the benefit of the mother country, was a major cause of World War I. Raw resources were sent from the imperial territories to the mother country. One country in particular, Germany, became heavily industrialized through imperialism. Imperial nations depended on their territories for raw resources. Therefore, conflict broke out among the nations of Europe as they each tried to control various areas around the world.

Second, **militarism,** the goal of many nations to have the most powerful military in Europe helped set the stage for World War I. By 1890, Germany possessed the mightiest military on the mainland of Europe. In 1897, Wilhelm II expanded Germany to become a naval power, which worried Britain. An “arms race” focused on naval power came about. Britain, France, the USA, Italy, and Japan began to heavily develop their respective naval powers.

Third, **nationalism,** radical devotion to one’s country was a cause of World War I. This was a pride in one’s country that went beyond healthy patriotism because one not only believed his or her country was great, but looked down on other countries as well. Competition and rivalry came about and each country felt they were superior to the others. Various ethnic groups wanted autonomy and began to clash with those opposed to their desire for independence.

Fourth, **Alliance Systems,** nations joining “teams” before there was even any war, led to World War I. According to the alliance systems, if any member of your team gets “attacked” you would show up to fight with that country against their aggressor. By 1907, the Triple Entente formed, also called **the Allies**. This “team” included France, Britain, and Russia. Another “team” formed as well, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy. Eventually, they became **the Central Powers**, which included Germany, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire, a Muslim Empire.

The Balkan Peninsula, east of Italy, became a disputed area. Russia and Austria wanted to control the Serbs and the area to have a warm port in the Mediterranean Sea. Russia and Austria were also on separate “teams” in their alliance systems. A fight between these two nations could force both “teams” to face off. Germany wanted a railway to the Ottoman Empire in modern day Turkey and the Middle East, so they too had an interest in the area. This is why the Ottoman Empire joined Germany in World War I.

There was one specific action that became the spark that ignited the first of World War I. In 1914, **Archduke Franz Ferdinand**, heir to the Austrian throne, was assassinated by **Gavrilo Princip**, a Serb nationalist. Princip wanted independence for **Serbia**, not control from a foreign power. Austria declared war against Serbia. Russia showed up to “defend” the Serbs, in reality they wanted control of the area. The alliance systems forced other nations to take sides and forced the most powerful nations of Europe to engage in war with each other. The world was now at war.