Background

Early on the morning of 11 November 1918, two delegations boarded a railway carriage in the forest at Compiègne outside Paris. One side was led by the commander of Allied forces on the Western Front, the French General Ferdinand Foch, the other by German politician Matthias Erzberger. In front of them was the Armistice document. Once signed, it would end more than four years of fighting in what had become known as ‘the Great War’. Representing the victors, Foch had little sympathy for the men facing him across the table and when the Germans protested the Allies’ terms, he offered nothing more than a curt ‘Très bien!’ (Very good).

Three weeks before, Germany’s allies in the Middle East, the Ottoman Empire, had agreed to an armistice ending the fighting there, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire had also signed an armistice to end the war in southern Europe. Germany was left alone. On 4 November the Allied Supreme War Council offered a peace proposal based on a framework for peace known as ‘The Fourteen Points’, first put forward by United States President Woodrow Wilson in January 1918. Wilson’s points included a return of French territory seized by Germany in 1871, and required German troops to evacuate all conquered lands. Though Wilson sought to bring about a lasting peace – ‘a peace without victory’ – there was a desire amongst the European allies who had suffered the greatest material loss, particularly France, to inflict a great humiliation on Germany and to prevent a return to war. The German delegates had no choice but to agree to the Allies’ terms. In the field, their army was in retreat; at home, Germany’s Chancellor had resigned and the Emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, had fled to Holland. An Allied naval blockade had left people starving, the High Seas Fleet was in open mutiny and there were public demonstrations on the streets of Berlin.

The Armistice required Germany’s armies to withdraw to Germany within two weeks, and to surrender thousands of guns and aircraft. Allied troops would occupy the country west of the Rhine River as well as bridgeheads on the opposite bank. To limit Germany’s industrial capacity, the Armistice also called for thousands of locomotives, railway coaches and trucks to be handed over. The German High Seas Fleet had to surrender its dreadnoughts, U-boats and light cruisers, and German ships were interned in Allied waters. To maintain pressure on the German people, the naval blockade would continue until a formal peace treaty was signed.

That took place six months later at Versailles, but on 11 November 1918 the world welcomed the Great War’s end. The Armistice came into effect at 11:00 that morning and for the first time since August 1914, the sound of gunfire ceased along the Western Front. Today 11 November is known as Remembrance Day to honour the dead of all wars, but it will be forever associated with the end of the war that shaped the twentieth century.
Teaching Activities

Use the poster, background information, historical sources and websites listed on the last page of this booklet to answer the following questions:

1. Look at the 2018 Remembrance Day poster:
   A. Describe what you see. What clues tell you what sort of service women and men they are?
   B. Who are these four figures?
   C. Look closely. What do you notice about how the images are made?
   D. Which of these figures has been awarded the Military Medal for bravery?

2. Each of the four figures on the poster served at Gallipoli. Gallipoli is in which modern day country?

3. What does the word ‘centenary’ mean?

4. What does the word ‘armistice’ mean?

5. Read the background information.
   A. What significant event happened at 11.00 am on the 11th of November 1918?
   B. The Allies offered Germany a peace proposal. What framework was this proposal based on?
   C. Why did Germany have no choice but to agree to the Allies’ terms?

6. The Armistice agreement was signed in a train carriage at Compiègne.
   A. What stopped with immediate effect when the Armistice was signed?
   B. What was the name of the official peace treaty which came into effect some months later?

7. Fill in the blanks, and then answer the question:
   A. A minute’s _______ is observed every year at 11.00 am on the __th of November. What is its significance?
   B. Red poppies are one symbol of commemoration. They were the first flowers to regrow in the devastated battlefields of northern France and Belgium. What does the red poppy symbolise?
   C. Identify three other symbols of commemoration.

8. When did ‘Armistice Day’ become ‘Remembrance Day’? Why was this changed?

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Source A:

‘The echoes die, the smoke-clouds thin and pass,
The cannons are, like statues, dumb and cold:
Silent the crosses wait, and in the grass
The spent shells gleam like gold.
All spent he lay and dreamed till the moment came:
Now, waking with a cry, he looks, all wonder
To see the empty sky hurl down no flame:
To hear no crack of thunder.’

Henry Weston Pryce, ‘Silence Falls’, 1918: Final Victory and Armistice, AWM, 11 November 1918

Source B:

‘Well, we got wind in the morning that the Armistice was either signed or about to be signed ... And the word finally came through and of course there was great excitement ... I was only sorry I hadn’t arrived there Armistice night because the chaps that got off the train, the girls just formed a ring around them ... and they wouldn’t let them out of the ring till they’d kissed every one of them.’

Corporal Edward David Smout, ‘Voices From The Great War’, interviewed by Peter Rubinstein, AWM SO3424, 1997

Source C:

‘There will be many whom this news of victory will not save from personal grief. The sounds of rejoicing cannot but bring some reminder of their loss ... Peace has been won by so much suffering and so many tears ...’

Sydney Morning Herald, 12 November 1918
9. Identify whether Sources A–F are primary or secondary sources.

10. The ‘Great War’ had finally come to an end after four years of bloody conflict. While those in Australia were celebrating, the soldiers in Europe were in disbelief. They were still surrounded by devastation and, for most, it would be months before they would finally sail back to Australia. Look at Sources A–F to answer either question A or B.

A. Imagine you are an Australian soldier finally sailing home after four years of war. Write a short diary entry of your thoughts and feelings.

B. Imagine you are a family member of a soldier who is on the Western Front. You have just heard that the war is over, and people are outside celebrating in the streets. Write a short diary entry of your thoughts and feelings.

11. Take a look at the picture of a cablegram to the right, announcing the Armistice. Answer the questions below using the web link provided on the last page of this booklet and go to page 9 of the resource.

A. Who has the cablegram been sent to?
B. Why do you think the message is described as ‘Most urgent’?
C. How might modern technology, such as email, phones or social media change the way war is reported and news is communicated?

‘Director of the Australian War Memorial Brendan Nelson said it was important to reflect on the lives lost in conflict, particularly those lost during The Great War. Dr Nelson said the number of Australians killed in World War I and the impact it had on the nation was beyond comprehension …’

‘Remembrance Day: Australians commemorate 96 years since end of World War I’, ABC News, 11 November 2014

12. Consider the statement above.

A. Why is the impact of the First World War on Australia described as being ‘beyond comprehension’?
B. Why is it important that we remember and recognise on Remembrance Day those who fought in other conflicts, especially those who are alive today?
C. Do you think Australia will still commemorate Remembrance Day in 100 years’ time? Provide a reason for your answer.
References


Websites