

The Art and Science of Diplomacy: A World War I Activity

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In *A Study of History*, Arnold Toynbee asserts that all civilizations rise and fall according to how they respond to challenges.¹ The political, economic and military balance of power between nations shifts over time, and the fate of countries depends on the ability of their leaders to understand the changes that are taking place in the international order and chart the best course to deal with the problems and obstacles they face. Typically, as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger points out in his book *Diplomacy*, nations will judge their leaders on how they manage during times of change, and on their ability to preserve the peace.²

Skillful diplomacy is an essential component of international leadership. Diplomacy “is the method by which nation-states, through authorized agents, maintain mutual relations, communicate with each other, and carry out political, economic and legal transactions.”³ Diplomats convey information, ideas, and the wants and needs of their countries to other countries. They need to be flexible, to deal with the unexpected, to know the policies and needs of the nations they deal with, and to have the resolve to stand by the actions their countries have taken.

Perhaps the main tool in the repertoire of a diplomat is negotiation. Diplomats need to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses of their own country and the country they are negotiating with. Negotiation is a give-and-take process in which the important question facing the diplomat is: how do I achieve my wants and needs while balancing the wants and needs of others?

Because of the importance of diplo-

macy, it is a valuable subject for the social studies classroom. In a crowded curriculum, however, the art of international diplomacy can easily get less attention than it deserves. One way of teaching it is to focus on the diplomacy associated with a major event that is part of the typical history curriculum. The activity presented here seeks to accomplish this by introducing students to diplomacy as part of the study of World War I, which marked the creation of modern warfare with the effective and efficient use of technology, the use of vast economic resources, and the mass mobilization of men and material. In the five weeks after the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary on June 28, 1914, diplomacy and communication broke down all over Europe. Ultimatums and threats became the norm. Europe became embroiled in the inferno known as World War I. Students can achieve a greater understanding of history—and attempt to “change” it—through this diplomatic simulation, in which they play the roles of the leaders of key European powers as they move toward the precipice in 1914.

Simulating an International Crisis

For the role-playing activity, students must formulate a diplomatic strategy and attempt to prevent World War I. When students begin to construct their diplomatic strategy they should take into account the need to do the following: (1) identify and analyze their countries’ wants and needs; (2) identify and analyze the wants and needs of the other countries; (3) assess possible threats to their country’s national survival; (4) identify and pursue possible

economic, social, and political alliances; and (5) identify possible economic, social, and political alliances against them.

Most critical in formulating a diplomatic strategy is first to assess the wants and needs of the students’ own country. For example, in July 1914, what were the priorities of France’s diplomatic strategy: to maintain the status quo? Conquer other countries? Flourish economically? Or, make peace? It is of paramount importance for students to have a rudimentary outline of what goals the country wanted to achieve.

Second, when constructing a strategy, student diplomats need to be aware of the wants and needs of potential allies and adversaries. As Sun Tzu stated, “know yourself and know your enemy.” Students need to perform a situational analysis to determine whether they consider other sovereign nations to be aggressive, passive, or undecided. For example, in July 1914, how would Great Britain categorize Russian, German, Austro-Hungarian, Serbian, and French intentions? By ascertaining these sets of factors, students can begin to anticipate possible courses of action and analyze the stratagems of other countries.

Third, student diplomats need to know the possible threats against the survival of their country: does another power pose a military, economic, or political threat against their nation? Once the enemy or enemies have been determined, what course of action or strategy must be developed for the nation to protect itself? For example, after the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, whom did

Serbia view as its greatest enemy and who was its greatest hope for protection? And how was this assassination, a form of terrorism, viewed by the other European powers? Fourth, student diplomats need to identify possible alliances: What countries share common political, economic, and social outlooks? Who, in effect, are my allies? Conversely, who are my potential foes?

The activity showcases aspects of the diplomatic process and the interrelationship between the academic disciplines of history, political science, economics, geography, sociology, and psychology. It would work optimally in grades nine through twelve (and could be modified for lower grades as well). Depending on the time constraints of the teacher, the activity could be conducted over a two- to five-day period. The activity could also be used throughout an academic year as part of the review of material or as an ongoing project. The activity focuses on six of the participants in the conflict which led to World War I. Diplomats are assigned responsibility for resolving conflicts arising from the assassination of the Archduke in Sarajevo. Students will have the chance as leaders and diplomats to “stop” World War I. Conversely, the students may become consumed by nationalism and pride and fall into the abyss as the leaders of Europe did in 1914.

In a class of 30, the students will be divided equally into six countries on the brink of war in August 1914 – Great Britain, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Russia, and Serbia. Selection can be done either randomly or by the teacher’s assignment of students to groups/countries. Each group/country will be represented by one leader, two diplomats, and two special foreign and domestic advisors. For a class of 24, I recommend reducing the number of advisors to one, and for classes of 18, reducing the number of diplomats to one as well.

Each group/country will be required to create a history leading up to August 1914 that uses the fact sheet provided (see the table on pp 216-217). Students should also be encouraged to conduct a web search or review relevant materials related to World War I.⁴ The fact sheet includes information pertaining to the following social studies subjects:

- Political system (type of system and head of state)
- Economic system (degree of industrial development and natural resources)
- Geography (physical size and location of country)
- Demographics (size of population and numbers serving in the military)
- International relations (alliances)

Each group/country will be required to locate on the web or compose and sing an original national anthem of their respective country and construct its flag. These tasks encourage students to have a vested interest in the activity as well as promote a sense of pride or “nationalism” for their respective country.

After reviewing their materials, students in each country must construct a diplomatic strategy and send diplomats out to other countries. The teacher will allow the students to negotiate treaties, create alliances, declare war, or maintain peace. While the students determine how their “world” will operate, the teacher has an active role as well—as the “all knowing,

omnipotent ruler of the universe,” judging whether students are keeping within realistic bounds and, when appropriate, redirecting them at critical junctures or confronting them with new challenges or hypothetical events arising from their decisions.

Effective dynamics within and between the six groups are imperative for the success of the activity. Communication is key—open dialogue must constantly take place and students must actively participate. The roles of the key players—the leader, diplomats, and advisors—should be clearly communicated by the teacher to the students before the activity starts.

In selecting a leader for each country, the teacher has two distinct options: to select a student who exhibits leadership qualities in class or to select a student who traditionally does not assume a leadership role. The former will reinforce qualities a student already possesses, while the latter will improve a student’s self-esteem. The leader’s role is paramount. He or she will make final decisions on all actions of the country.

Some General Aims of the Activity

Grade Level: Suitable with modification for grades 9-12

Goals

1. Students will be able to construct a diplomatic strategy and effectively negotiate with other countries in their “world.”
2. Students will be able to analyze and evaluate historical, political, geographic, economic, sociological, and psychological forces that can affect the survival of the country they represent.
3. Students will learn to address events that are beyond their control and modify their strategies accordingly.

Rationale

The purpose of this activity is to introduce students to interdisciplinary decision-making through the use of a “War and Peace” simulation. Through participating in this activity students will be able to construct a diplomatic strategy and analyze and evaluate problems from multiple perspectives.

Objectives

1. Students will be able to define “republic,” “monarchy,” and “constitutional monarchy.”
2. Students will be able to list and explain at least two benefits of the ability to produce steel.
3. Students will be able to list and explain at least two benefits of a country’s geographical location for its international relations.
4. Students will be able to discuss symbolism as it applies to their country’s flag design.
5. Students will be able to give at least two reasons for national anthems.
6. Students will know the following terms as applied to maps: landforms, natural resources, access to the sea, and infrastructure.
7. Students will be able to define a treaty and explain at least two reasons for creating one.
8. Students will be able to define “alliance” and explain at least two reasons for establishing one.
9. Students will be able to list and explain at least two reasons why history affects current decision-making in countries.

Table 1
Six European Protagonists

GREAT BRITAIN	
Political System:	Constitutional Monarchy. The prime minister, the leader of the main party in the elected parliament, is the most powerful government official.
Economic System:	Capitalist. Industrial development (degree of sophistication—steel production). Imports raw materials and exports finished goods.
Geography:	Island. Has access to the sea. Limited natural resource base. Well developed infrastructure.
Demographics:	Population in 1914: 45 million. Standing army and reserves: 714,000.
International relations:	Far flung colonial empire. Possesses the largest navy in the world. One of the world's richest nations economically. An ally of France and Russia, Great Britain is bound by a treaty to protect Belgium's independence.
GERMANY	
Political System:	Monarchy with an elected parliament. The kaiser (emperor) is the head of state, and decides foreign policy in conjunction with the chancellor (top political official), senior ministers and advisors.
Economic System:	Capitalist. Industrial development (degree of sophistication — steel production). Imports raw materials and exports finished goods.
Geography:	Medium size landmass. Surrounded by other countries. Limited natural resource base. Access to the sea. Well developed infrastructure.
Demographics:	Population in 1914: 65 million. Standing army and reserves: 4.5 million.
International relations:	Historically, dictated a harsh peace to the French in the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1871. Great Britain is an economic rival. Bound by a treaty with Austria-Hungary to support it in a war with Russia. Has secret military plan (the Schlieffen plan) to win a war against France and Russia by invading France through Belgian territory and securing an early victory, and then defeating Russia.
FRANCE	
Political System:	Democratic Republic. The head of state is a president elected by the National Assembly.
Economic System:	Capitalist. Industrial development (degree of sophistication – steel production), with strong persistence of traditional agriculture. Imports raw materials and exports finished goods.
Geography:	At western European coast with access to the sea. Limited natural resource base. Well developed infrastructure.
Demographics:	Population in 1914: 45 million. Standing army and reserves: 3,781,000.
International relations:	Has a colonial empire in Africa and Asia. Humiliated by the Germans in the Franco-Prussian War, 1870-1871, when it lost the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine. France is bound by an 1894 military alliance with Russia to come to each other's aid if either is attacked by Germany. It is also an international diplomatic ally of Great Britain, though no treaty formally binds the two countries to fight on each other's side in a European war.

The diplomats have the task of approaching the leaders and diplomats of the other countries. They are expected to express the wishes of their governments and attempt to negotiate the prevention of World War I as well as other issues. The diplomats are the only individuals from their respective countries allowed to negotiate with the heads of other states. This puts them in a unique position in that they must consider the wants and needs both of their own countries and the others with which they must deal. The diplomats negotiate, present findings, and make recommendations to the leader and to the special advisors on the advisory board.

The advisory board analyzes and evaluates the findings and recommendations of the diplomats and devises an effective strategy needed to interact with the other European countries. It is important to note that the special advisory board has a less active role than the leader and the diplomats.

Some general guidelines for a teacher leading this activity would be as follows: (1) listen attentively while the students devise their diplomatic strategies; (2) have a clear goal regarding the purpose of the role playing activity; and (3) adapt the teaching goals to the countries' constantly changing diplomatic strategies.

The teacher needs to be actively involved in the activity. He or she must listen closely to the student groups as they develop their diplomatic strategies, and evaluate their likely effects. He or she needs to foresee where the activity is likely to lead in terms of alliances or war decisions, and whether a group is able to form a clear foreign policy.

The teacher must also have a clear goal in mind. For example, will the activity illustrate how political, military, and economic alliances are formed and dissolved? Will the activity illustrate how nations decide to pursue war or peace? Will the activity illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of different types of economies? The teacher must reconcile his or her priorities with the student strategies and weld the two together. Finally, once the students interact with each other their strategies will be in a constant state of flux.

The teacher needs continually to reconcile the students' ever-changing diplomatic strategies with his or her goals.

Here is a sample vignette for the activity. Germany has the following information in the fact sheet. Economically, it can produce steel, indicative of a developed industrial base. A major economic weakness, however, is its limited natural resource base. Geographically, Germany is surrounded by adversaries such as France and Russia. Politically, Germany is led by Kaiser Wilhelm II. Historically, Germany has been in conflict with France in the Franco-Prussian War. It is also an economic rival of Great Britain.

Students could draw some of the following conclusions. Germany can produce industrial goods to trade, but also produce munitions as well. Hence, it is economically powerful. However, it has limited natural resources and may worry about self-sufficiency if it has to fight a war while remaining entirely within its own borders. The teacher might raise the question whether Germany (at least the kaiser) has felt humiliated by Great Britain's economic, political, and colonial power, and might therefore be driven to seek the status of being the world's most powerful country.

The Five Day Model

The simulation should be conducted over a period of between two and five days, or could be treated as an ongoing class project. The following suggestions outline how the simulation could be organized over a period of five days, with 45 minutes of class time per day.

Day 1

First, students will be assigned to one of the six countries and given their country's respective fact sheet. Students will select or be assigned political roles. Students will then write a brief history of their country, recreate the flag, and compose or locate the national anthem. The teacher will circulate among the "countries" to clarify questions and offer answers.

Day 2

During the first 20 minutes of class, students will present their respective country's history,

Table 1 (continued)

AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

Political System: Monarchy. The head of state is both the emperor of Austria and king of Hungary. Austria and Hungary have separate governments and parliaments (relatively democratically elected in the case of Austria and undemocratic in Hungary). The monarch decides policy in conjunction with top ministers and advisors of both Austria and Hungary.

Economic System: Capitalist. A mainly agricultural country with some industrial development. Imports raw materials and exports finished goods.

Geography: Medium size land mass. Limited natural resources base. Mountainous areas.

Demographics: Population in 1914: 51 million. Standing army and reserves: 2 million.

International relations Austria-Hungary, whose ruling German and Hungarian minorities total less than half of the population, faces major ethnic problems as Slavic groups, such as Czechs and Serbs, become more nationalistic. It views Serbia, which has greatly expanded its own territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire, as eager to break up Austria-Hungary by fomenting a secessionist rebellion and acquiring territory in Austria-Hungary inhabited by Serbs. Austria-Hungary is allied with Germany, which is committed to supporting it in any war with Russia.

RUSSIA

Political System: Absolute monarchy. Czar is the head of state.

Economic System: Capitalist. Largely underdeveloped agrarian-based economy with textile industry and recent advances in steel production. Large reserves of natural resources, specifically, timber, coal, gold, and silver. A huge gap exists between the wealth of the rich and the poor.

Geography: Large land mass area. Much of the land is fertile. Access to the sea at various points. Poorly developed infrastructure.

Demographics: Population in 1914: 159 million. Standing army and reserves: 4.5 million.

Miscellaneous: Czar Nicholas II is related through marriage to most of the monarchs of Europe. The military is considered to be of poor quality after its defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, which damaged the country's international prestige. Russia seeks to recover prestige by being an effective "big brother" to other Slavic nations such as Serbia. It has an agreement with France that each country will come to the aid of the other if it is attacked by Germany.

SERBIA

Political System: Monarchy. King appoints government, which is responsible to an elected parliament.

Economic System: Capitalist. Agricultural, with some industry, mostly small.

Geography: Small land mass and mountainous.

Demographics: Population in 1914: 4.5 million. Standing army and reserves: 459,500.

Miscellaneous: Serbia nearly doubled the size of its territory at the expense of the Ottoman Empire in recent Balkan wars. Serbia views Russia as a friend and protector of Slav peoples like the Serbs, and Serbian popular opinion sees Austria-Hungary as an adversary and supports Serb groups seeking to secede from Austria-Hungary. Gavrilo Princip, a Serb from Bosnia (still under Austro-Hungarian control) who assassinated the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, was a member of the nationalist group Black Hand, which received support from high levels of the Serbian intelligence service.

Source: Apart from general reference works, a particularly helpful source is Colin Nicolson, *The Longman Companion to the First World War* (London and New York: Longman, 2001).

Countdown to World War I

June 28, 1914. Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary is assassinated in Sarajevo by members of a Serbian nationalist group, the Black Hand.

July 23. Believing that Serbia is backing groups like the Black Hand, Austria-Hungary issues a ten-point ultimatum to Serbia (which it does not believe that Serbia will accept) whose demands range from suppressing publications hostile to the Austro-Hungarian monarchy to dismissing government officials and allowing Austria-Hungary to participate in judicial proceedings in Serbia against terrorists. Serbia accepts almost all of the demands, but refuses to allow Austro-Hungarian officials to participate in Serbia's internal judicial proceedings.

July 28. Austria-Hungary declares war on Serbia.

July 30. Russia mobilizes its military reserves.

July 31. Germany issues ultimatum to Russia to demobilize within 12 hours.

August 1. Germany declares war on Russia when Russia refuses to demobilize.
France issues general mobilization order.

August 3. Germany declares war on France.

August 4. Germany invades Belgium to attack France. Great Britain declares war on Germany because of a commitment to protect Belgian independence.

national anthem, and flag. The students will be asked to explain the significance of their country's flag as well as their nation's goals. During the remaining twenty-five minutes of class, students will be provided with sheets detailing the facts of the other countries; each group will be required to analyze and evaluate the other countries' strengths and weaknesses; students will then begin to formulate a diplomatic strategy. In a journal homework assignment, students will be asked to answer the following questions. First, "what are at least two of my country's relative strengths compared to other countries?" Second, "What are at least two of my country's relative weaknesses compared to other countries?"

Day 3

Students will be presented with the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand in Sarajevo and asked to prepare their countries' responses. Over the 45-minute period, the countries will send and receive diplomats and will make at least two public statements. Students' journal homework will be to answer the following questions. First, "Initially, who were your allies and why?" Second, "How did we reevaluate our strategy in light of uncontrollable events?" Third, "Can we prevent the start of World War I?"

For the initial diplomatic interchange on how to deal with the aftermath of the assassination, the teacher should allow at least 10 minutes, during which time he or

she will circulate around the classroom and observe how negotiations are being conducted. After 10 minutes, the teacher will ask all the diplomats to return to their "home country." Each country will be required to formulate a concise public statement to be announced to the world press. This will consist of two to three sentences stating its current policy. When all six countries have made their statements, the teacher will intervene to prompt further discussion and negotiations on obstacles and issues that will cause the students to reflect further and revise their diplomatic strategy and question their alliances and the future of their nations. Each country will then be required to formulate a second public statement.

Day 4

Students could continue the activities of the previous day, or move directly to those of Day 5, or do both.

Day 5

Students will present an overview of the preceding class period's course of events and justify their actions in light of the factors that confronted them. During the first 25 minutes, the teacher will bring the activity to a conclusion. Students will then debrief the remainder of the class. The teacher will decide on a final assessment. Options include a final journal, short paper on the assignment, or a short quiz on the salient points of the activity.

Conclusion

The activity allows students to understand the roles of diplomats as they confront international crises. In reviewing the events that led to World War I, it also gives them a better understanding of the balance of power of Europe at the time, as well as the miscalculations by European leaders that led to the war. Although the world now is a very different place, some elements of the countdown to World War I remain topical. The war was triggered by an act of terrorism, which had the effect of detonating a huge conflict between the great powers that involved issues and interests that had nothing to do with terrorism and its suppression. One of the precipitating factors was a German policy of pre-emption, which required Germany to launch a war against both France and Russia, and win quickly against France, if a war between Germany and Russia seemed imminent. (Germany presumed that France would enter the war on the Russian side.) This policy was based on an assumption that turned out to be wrong: that Germany could not sustain a prolonged war on two fronts against France and Russia.⁵ All in all, the activity offers students both insights into history, and a sense of the role of diplomacy in world affairs, which raises issues that are as relevant today as they were then. 📖

Notes

1. Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History: Abridgement of Volumes I-VI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947).
2. Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).
3. James P. Muldoon, Jr., Joan Aviel, Richard Reitano and Earl Sullivan, *Multilateral Diplomacy and the United Nations Today* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 1.
4. Useful sources include Barbara W. Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), Martin Gilbert, *The Routledge Atlas of the First World War*, second edition (London: Routledge, 2003), and John Keegan, *An Illustrated History of the First World War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).
5. After the plan to win a quick military victory over France failed, Germany was, in fact, able to sustain a war against both countries at the same time. It got the better of the fight on the Russian front, and achieved a stalemate on the other front. It was eventually defeated only by a factor unforeseen in 1914, the intervention of the U.S. in 1917.

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