

Historica Canada Education Portal

First World War Education Guide

The First World War, often called “the Great War,” was a global conflict that divided many of the world’s nations into two opposing camps, called the Allies (originally the Triple Entente) and the Central Powers. From 1914 through the end of hostilities in 1918, more countries joined the conflict out of necessity or opportunism, including Japan, the United States and the Ottoman Empire.

The war had disastrous consequences for many Canadian individuals, families and communities: approximately 60,000 Canadian lives were lost overseas and 170,000 were wounded. These staggering losses, in addition to a substantial industrial and agricultural contribution to the war effort, led Canada’s leaders to strive for greater decision-making powers in the postwar period. Accordingly, the First World War led the country towards greater independence from Britain.

At home, wartime experiences varied greatly. Millions of Canadians supported the soldiers overseas, raising money for their families, supporting the war effort through purchasing war bonds, working in munitions factories and farming the fields to provide food for the armies. Some employers and their employees prospered due to increased manufacturing and nearly full employment during the war. At the same time, relatives of soldiers lived in fear of receiving news that a loved one had been killed. The study of Canada’s experiences during the First World War involves multiple histories and perspectives that can be remembered, explored and understood in their diversity.