

World War I Armistice

Central Historical Question:
What were attitudes toward the armistice ending World War I?

Materials:

- World War I Armistice PowerPoint
- Copies of Documents A-D
- Copies of Guiding Questions

Plan of Instruction:

1. Introduction. Use World War I Armistice PowerPoint to provide context about the signing of the armistice. If students are unfamiliar with the events leading up to the end of World War I, you may want to provide students with additional information about those events.
 - a. Slide 2: During the summer of 1918, the German army suffered a series of decisive losses on the battlefield. By the fall of 1918, Germany's military situation seemed hopeless. The government hoped to launch one final offensive against the British Royal Navy. At the end of October, a group of sailors revolted against the plan, which the sailors believed was hopeless. Soon the revolt spread across the country as workers joined the sailors in protesting the government. As a result of the upheaval, Germany changed its system of government from a constitutional monarchy to a democratic republic on November 9, 1918.
 - b. Slide 3: On November 8, 1918, representatives of the German government met with Supreme Allied Commander Marshal Ferdinand Foch in a forest outside of Compiègne in northern France.
 - c. Slide 4: Foch presented the German delegation with a set of terms and told them that they had 72 hours to sign. There were 34 clauses in the armistice – which is an agreement to stop fighting before terms of peace are formally agreed upon. Key points included:
 - End of hostilities
 - Surrender of German weapons, including machine guns, airplanes, and ships
 - Return of Allied prisoners of war
 - Future reparations by Germany
 - Withdrawal of German forces
 - No end to naval blockade of Germany
 - No return of German prisoners

- d. Slide 5: There were virtually no negotiations. The German delegation received instructions from the German government that they should sign the armistice even if they could not negotiate better terms. The German representatives signed the armistice on November 11, 1918. It went into effect later the same day.
- e. Slide 6: Central Historical Question. *Today, we are going to examine four documents to answer this question: What were attitudes toward the armistice ending World War I?*

2. Inquiry.

- a. Hand out Document A and Document B. In small groups, ask students to read the documents and complete the corresponding guiding questions and sections of the graphic organizer.
- b. Share out responses. Students should note the following:
 - Pershing's account suggests that the German representatives found the terms of the armistice to be harsh and unfair to the German people.
 - According to Pershing, Weygand told the German representative that in France there was widespread hatred toward Germany. This suggests that the armistice might have been seen in France as a reasonable punishment for German actions during the war.
 - The excerpt from the armistice corroborates Pershing's account. The German representatives maintain that the armistice's conditions could cause great suffering for the people of Germany.
 - The excerpt from the armistice also suggests that the German representatives believed that the conditions could make it impossible for Germany to meet all of the armistice's terms.
- c. Hand out Document C and Document D. In small groups, ask students to read the documents and complete the corresponding guiding questions and sections of the graphic organizer.
- d. Share out responses. Students should note the following:
 - Document C indicates that many in Germany were very upset about the armistice. In particular, the newspaper account indicates that members of the German government were seeking to oppose the terms of the armistice.
 - The description of Solf's appeal to Wilson in Document C suggests that Germans' opposition to the armistice stemmed in large part from the documents' harsh terms.

- Document C suggests that members of the German government held out hope that subsequent negotiations would align with President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points and that the tough terms of the armistice would eventually be abandoned.
- Document C also indicates that the armistice was met quite differently in the United States. According to the newspaper account, people were celebrating in the streets of Washington, D.C. The final sentence of the document indicates that this reaction stemmed in large part from a sense of relief that the war was coming to an end.
- Document D indicates that many in England were also very excited to learn of the signing of the armistice.
- Document D also suggests that there was an awareness in England of the various challenges that still needed to be resolved.

3. Final discussion questions:

- a. According to these documents, what were attitudes toward the armistice?
- b. What are the limitations of these documents as evidence of attitudes toward the armistice?
- c. What perspectives are missing from this document set?
- d. What additional evidence would you want to better understand attitudes toward the armistice?
- e. How would this additional evidence help you better understand attitudes toward the armistice?

Documents

Doc A

Diary of General John Pershing, November 12, 1918. Retrieved from <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/17893/view/1/26/>

Doc B

Armistice with Germany, November 11, 1918. Retrieved from: <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0009.pdf>

Doc C

The Washington Herald, November 12, 1918, p.1:
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045433/1918-11-12/ed-1/seq-1/>

Doc D

Norwich Bulletin, November 12, 1918, p. 1:
<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014086/1918-11-12/ed-1/seq-1>