

The ‘outbreak’ of World War One: some international comparisons

After you have read the article by Christopher Clark, read the article ‘Weeks of decision’, by Stig Forster, from a German popular history magazine.

(Insert Link)

1. Both articles describe the events surrounding the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the event which is widely thought to have been one of the causes of World War One. However, after the description of the assassination, they go on to talk about different aspects of the outbreak of war. In a sense, they are providing answers to different questions about the outbreak of war.

- a. What is the question to which Christopher Clark is providing the answer? (Focus on the last 3 paragraphs of the Clark article)
- b. What is the question to which Stig Forster is providing the answer? (Focus on the last 3 paragraphs of the Forster article)
- c. The two historians have different views about the extent to which the assassination at Sarajevo was ‘just an excuse’ to go to war.
 - i) What is Clark’s view about this? (See the second column of page 23 of the article)
 - ii) What is Forster’s view about this? (See the top half of the second page of the Forster article).

2. Reading the two articles (and if you have time, the articles from Sweden, Spain and Poland? Is there any evidence that the historians from the different countries who write in popular history magazines are ‘biased’ in their views about responsibility for causing the war? (In other words, do German historians tend to blame countries other than Germany for the war, and for British historians to blame Germany).

3. Germany, England and Poland were more directly involved in the war than Spain and Sweden. Does this make any difference to the questions that they ask about the war? (As well as thinking about the magazine articles, you may find it helpful to look at the sections in the ‘Overview’ pages about the way that school textbooks treat this topic in the different countries).

4. Forster’s article focuses on the question of which countries and individuals were most responsible for the outbreak of war. What other questions might one ask about the outbreak of war? Is the decision about which questions are asked (whether in textbooks or popular history magazines) influenced by national perspectives? Task Caption / Question (Arial / 14pt / bold)

5. How come that nearly 100 years after the start of World War One (and after hundreds of historians have examined the evidence about this event), there does not appear to be a ‘true’ or ‘correct’ answer to the question of which country did most to cause the war, which is generally accepted by all historians. Does this mean that one historian’s opinion is no more authoritative than another’s? (In other words, ‘It’s just a matter of opinion’).