



Understanding academic interpretations of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914

What evidence has been used to construct academic interpretations of the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914?

Teacher Material
Activity Plan

Student Material
Worksheet

Acknowledgements

Learning activity written up by Helen Snelson, from a draft design and content by Bob Stradling, within the Europeana Creative project with support of the Historiana learning and historical content teams and EUROCLIO trainees.

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More information about the sources is included in the material for teachers.

Working with academic interpretations is very hard for school students. Academic works can appear so authoritative. They are usually based on a depth and breadth of research and a knowledge of the topic which is far beyond the average young person. Nevertheless, students should compare and contrast academic interpretations, examine how they are constructed and research their evidence base, in order to develop their own historical thinking

and to develop as critical citizens, able to make up their own minds about important societal issues. The study of historical interpretations should be the study of how and why history is constructed after the event. It is about the context in which history is written subsequently rather than a study of the accounts produced at the time. It should therefore be about shedding light on the way history is created and on the period or individual responsible for its creation. It is important to consider the place and time in which the piece of academic writing was produced, although sweeping generalisations such as: 'This was written in Britain so it would say that' are of course themselves ahistorical and do not deepen historical thinking. This activity requires students to keep focused upon the evidence base for their claims. Particular interpretations can carry more emotional weight than others, but in the history classroom we are concerned with 'which interpretation is supported by the most convincing evidence?' and not 'which interpretations fit the prejudices that already exist around us?'




utcheon, *The Chicago Tribune*; H. H. Windsor, *Cartoons*



Learning outcomes

14-16 years

Students will

 1hr + homework

- Show that they understand summaries of two contrasting academic interpretations as to why a European war started in 1914.
- Contrast these interpretations to identify the differences between them.
- Discuss with a partner and as a whole class the likely reasons for the differences between these interpretations.
- Summarise their learning in a written paragraph.