

CLASSWORK: Answer the document questions in the spaces provided. Based on the documents, write your response to the debate question in the space provided on the reverse side.

DEBATE: WAS WORLD WAR ONE AVOIDABLE?

Overview:

In his book *The First World War*, John Keegan describes World War I as a “European tragedy” that was unnecessary “because the train of events that led to its outbreak might have been broken at any point... had prudence or common goodwill found a voice.” However, other historians argue that the outbreak of World War I was inevitable due to the political conditions and attitudes that existed at the time.

Yes. World War I Was Avoidable.

Document 1

War was far from inevitable after Franz Ferdinand was assassinated. In the years before 1914, the assassination of leading political and royal figures was not unusual. The days following Franz Ferdinand's assassination saw a debate between the hawks and the doves in the Austro-Hungarian leadership with some figures not initially supportive of war. It was only once the hawks, such as Conrad von Hötzendorf, chief of staff of the Austro-Hungarian army, won the debate that war was necessary to crush Serbia, using the assassination as an excuse, that war became inevitable – and then only a local Austro-Hungarian-Serbian war. - *Dr. Heather Jones*

Q1: Why does Jones believe WWI could have been avoided, and that it's wrong to call it 'inevitable'?

Document 2

To say that the First World War was inevitable is to ignore the importance of the key decision-makers who had the power to say Yes or No to policies and actions. It is true that there were considerable tensions in Europe, between Britain and Germany who were vying for naval and economic power or between Austria-Hungary and Russia who both had ambitions in the Balkans. It is also true that nationalism was on the rise and that it helped to drive nations apart and, in the case of Austria-Hungary, threatened its very existence. And there were, unfortunately, many in Europe who thought that a general war was inevitable and perhaps even desirable. We should remember though that there was also a very large peace movement in Europe. I think war could have been avoided after the assassination of the Archduke but that became less and less likely as the days went on. – *Prof. Margaret MacMillan*

Q2: Why does MacMillan feel WWI could have been avoided, and that it's wrong to call it 'inevitable'?

No. World War I Was Inevitable (Unavoidable).

Document 3

In hindsight the events that led to World War I seem like foolish misunderstandings yet, while there were some moderating voices on the continent, most were not ready to listen to reason. The Great Powers, within their two alliances, were facing each other across a gulf of growing mutual distrust. The balance of power had degenerated into hostile coalitions whose inflexibility was matched by reckless disregard for consequence. The mood in Europe was of war. Everyone talked about the inevitability of it and soldiers sang about it. Many felt that war was a fine heroic thing, an experience where gentlemen proved their worth. Each country in the war was caught up in national pride. Countries could see no way of turning back and believed they had more to gain from war than peace. When misunderstandings occurred in this climate, one can see how the onset of World War I was inevitable. - *Walter S. Zapotoczny*

Q3: According to Zapotoczny, why was World War inevitable (unavoidable)?

Document 4

War, in the shape of a local conflict between Austria-Hungary and Serbia, was inevitable because Austria-Hungary decided to use the pretext of the assassination to crush Serbia. This decision was taken, and given explicit backing by Germany, in the full knowledge this was likely to bring about a general European war. Many in the German elite welcomed an expansionist war of aggression. While a general war was not inevitable, the Austrian and German decisions made it highly likely. These two states bear the burden of war guilt. - *Prof. Gary Sheffield*

Q4: According to Sheffield, why was World War I inevitable? Who does he blame for the war?

OPINION: Write your response to the debate question in a paragraph at least 5 sentences long.
