



A French soldier standing in front of a French Autocannon 75 or self-propelled Artillery. The vehicle has solid tire, large spoke wheels with camouflage painted in a leaf pattern.

Online Collections Database, 2019.47.4595 www.theworldwar.org/research/database. National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

Moving a Modern War: Transportation and Technology in World War I

Recommended Grade Levels: 9-12

Course/Content Area(s): World History, U.S. History, Military History

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LESSON OVERVIEW:	World War I was the first global conflict fought on an industrial scale, and transportation was a critical component to how the war was waged and sustained. This lesson explores how transportation, including railroads, motor vehicles, and aviation, reshaped military strategy and logistics. Through primary source analysis, students will examine how the evolution of transportation shaped World War I.
OBJECTIVES:	<i>Students will:</i> ● Identify major transportation technologies used during World War I ● Identify how transportation evolved throughout the war and its impact on military strategy, logistics, and civilian involvement ● Examine primary sources to make conclusions about transportation in World War I ● Evaluate how transportation contributed to the concept of total war ● Make evidence-based historical claims
STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:	National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework Standards: D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts. D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.
TIME NEEDED:	1 50-60 minute class period
INTERDISCIPLINARY:	STEM: Engineering, mechanics, and technological innovation
PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:	This lesson works best if students have prior knowledge of the following: ● Causes and early phases of World War I ● Trench warfare and the Western Front ● Industrialization ● The concept of total war and home front mobilization
MATERIALS NEEDED:	● Method to project lesson ● Student primary source analysis worksheet ● Primary Source and Artifact set (printed or digital) ● Transportation in WWI slides ● Technology access for students ● Exit ticket reflection question

LESSON

PRE-ASSESSMENT/INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

1. Display photos, prompting students to consider the following questions before you begin (slides 2-6)
 - a. Is transportation just as important as weapons in wartime? Why/why not?
 - b. Which form of transportation do you think mattered most in World War I and why?
2. Students may want to answer in their notebooks to organize their thoughts.
3. After providing students with a few minutes to consider and respond to the questions, have students turn and talk to discuss their responses and hypotheses.
4. ***Optional:** Keep tally of student predictions for the second question related to forms of transportation. Tell students they'll return to their predictions later in the class.

DIRECTIONS:

I. Primary Source & Artifact Analysis (20 minutes)

- A. Depending on teacher preference, the primary source analysis portion of the lesson can be done as a whole class, with small groups, or in partners.
- B. Students will need access to the Primary Source and Artifact set to complete this portion of the lesson.
- C. After students complete the lesson hook, explain that they're going to analyze 10 primary sources related to transportation during World War I. They may not have a lot of prior knowledge and that is completely okay. The goal of this primary source analysis is for students to extend their thinking on how transportation-related advancements changed the war WWI was fought and spurred on WWI becoming a "total war."
- D. Review the primary source analysis questions with students on the student primary source analysis worksheet and clarify as needed.
- E. If students are working in partners or small groups, circulate around the room to answer any questions and informally assess student understanding.
- F. As students begin to finish around the 20-minute mark, ask for some students to share out their new understandings of transportation in WWI. Students might comment on the many modes of transportation (motorcycles, railroad cars, airplanes, ships, ambulances, trucks, etc.) or how many existing forms of transportation became weaponized/militarized such as tanks. Use this debriefing conversation as a segue into the lecture and discussion.

II. Lecture and Discussion: Start at slide #9

- A. The lecture will introduce students to the various means of transportation used in World War I using the guiding questions: "How did transportation evolve during WWI?" and "How did the evolution of transportation impact how WWI was fought?"
- B. Draw students' attention to the guiding questions and inform them that they should be able to answer both questions by the end of the lecture.

C. Use the slides provided to discuss transportation and its impact on warfare with students. There are speaker notes to help guide the lecture, but modifications can be made to best meet the needs of your students.
POST-ASSESSMENT: Exit Ticket
Exit Ticket (5 minutes, slide 21) - During the last few minutes of class, display the exit ticket question and have students respond in their notebooks or on index cards if you would like to collect them. - The exit ticket question is: How did transportation advancements both help and hinder military strategy during World War I?
MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS
- For Multilingual Learners: add visual cues to primary source and artifact analysis sheet and provide translations for keywords - Guided lecture notes sheet for students requiring additional support - Printed lecture notes for students, if needed.

Further Resources:

DVA (Department of Veterans' Affairs) (2025), Technology and equipment developed during World War I, DVA Anzac Portal, accessed 12 December 2025, <https://anzacportal.dva.gov.au/wars-and-missions/ww1/military-organisation/technology-and-equipment>

Ian M. Brown: Transportation and Logistics, in: 1914-1918-online. International Encyclopedia of the First World War, ed. by Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer D. Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson, issued by Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2018-02-06. DOI: [10.15463/ie1418.10454/1.1](https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:hbz:5:1-64864-p0101-9)

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Vergun, David. "Forgotten: Tiny Trains Carried WWI Vets to Victory." *Army.mil*. Accessed December 14, 2025. https://www.army.mil/article/47644/forgotten_tiny_trains_carried_wwi_vets_to_victory.