



Print of a watercolor by Jean Berne-Bellecour. A British Indian soldier kneeling on the ground with rifle poised to fire. Online Collections Database, 1977.20.25.6, [www.theworldwar.org/research/database](http://www.theworldwar.org/research/database). National WWI Museum and Memorial. Online.

## India in the Great War: Fighting for Britain, Dreaming of Freedom

Recommended Grade Levels: 7-12

Course/Content Area(s): World history; Argumentative Writing

Authored by: Jane Keen, National WWI Museum and Memorial Teacher Advisor

|                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>LESSON OVERVIEW:</b>     | <p><i>India in the Great War: Fighting for Britain, Dreaming of Freedom</i> explores India’s critical yet often overlooked role in World War I and the lasting impact of that involvement on the nation’s struggle for independence. Through primary source analysis, discussion, and creative writing, students investigate how more than 1.3 million Indian soldiers served in Britain’s war effort—facing racism, loss, and unfulfilled promises of freedom. The lesson encourages students to question what “loyalty” and “freedom” meant for colonized peoples during the early twentieth century.</p> <p>Over two to three class periods, students first engage with historical context through a recruitment poster analysis and a reader’s theater script titled <i>We Fought for Freedom: India’s Forgotten Soldiers of World War I</i>. They then examine authentic primary sources from the National WWI Museum and Memorial to better understand the lived experiences of Indian soldiers and citizens. Building on this foundation, students analyze excerpts from Mahatma Gandhi’s speeches to identify persuasive techniques and moral appeals.</p> <p>The culminating task asks students to step into Gandhi’s role in 1919 and craft a persuasive speech arguing why India deserves independence after its contributions and sacrifices in the Great War. This writing activity requires students to use evidence from primary sources and reflect Gandhi’s tone and purpose. The lesson concludes with speech presentations, a class discussion on postwar promises and betrayals, and a reflective writing piece connecting historical themes to modern parallels.</p> <p>By combining historical inquiry with perspective-based writing, the lesson deepens students’ understanding of imperialism, nationalism, and the moral consequences of war while strengthening their analytical and persuasive communication skills.</p> |
| <b>OBJECTIVES:</b>          | <p><i>Students will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Describe India’s contributions and sacrifices during World War I.</li> <li>• Analyze primary sources to understand the experiences of Indian soldiers and citizens during and after the war.</li> <li>• Explain the connection between India’s WWI involvement and the later independence movement.</li> <li>• Write a persuasive speech from the perspective of Mahatma Gandhi, arguing for India’s right to independence.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>STANDARDS ALIGNMENT:</b> | <b>National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) National Curriculum Standards:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

|                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | <p><b>NCSS Standard II:</b> Time, Continuity, and Change – Understand historical context and patterns of change.</p> <p><b>NCSS Standard VI:</b> Power, Authority, and Governance – Examine the origins and purposes of political systems.</p> <p><b>Common Core English Language Arts Standards:</b></p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1:</b> Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p><b>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6-8.1:</b> Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</p>                                                                                                           |
| <b>TIME NEEDED:</b>       | 2-3 45-60 minute class periods                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>INTERDISCIPLINARY:</b> | World History, Global Studies, ELA, Writing, Public Speaking                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PRIOR KNOWLEDGE:</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The concept of colonialism and an understanding that India was a British colony during WWI</li> <li>• Who was Mahatma Gandhi?</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>MATERIALS NEEDED:</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">India Recruitment poster for WWI</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">We Fought For Freedom: India's Forgotten Soldiers Reader's Theater</a>- copy for each student</li> <li>• Primary sources related to Indian soldiers and colonial troops such as <a href="#">letters/diary entries</a>, <a href="#">pictures</a>, and recruitment materials</li> <li>• <a href="#">Primary Source Analysis Sheet</a>- Copy for each student for each primary source</li> <li>• Excerpts from Gandhi's writings (e.g., Hind Swaraj, Quit India, or postwar speeches)</li> <li>• Speech outline worksheet or graphic organizer</li> </ul> |

# LESSON

## INTRODUCTION/HOOK:

1. Display [a recruitment poster for Indian soldiers in WWI](#).
2. Tell students that during WWI, India was under British rule.
3. Ask students:
  - a. Why might Indians have chosen to fight for Britain?
  - b. What might they have hoped to gain in return?
  - c. Point out that this poster was mass produced and the writing, which translates to “This soldier is defending India. He is protecting his home and family. The best way to help your family is to join the army”, was written in the local language. There were (and are) a lot of languages spoken in different areas of India.

## DIRECTIONS:

### Day 1: Building Background

#### Mini-Lecture / Reading (15–20 min):

Introduce India’s involvement in WWI. Read and discuss the [Reader’s Theater ‘We Fought for Freedom: India’s Forgotten Soldiers of World War I’](#)

- Over 1.3 million Indians served. 54,000–74,000 died; 67,000 wounded; 10,000 missing. Soldiers faced racism, poor conditions, and little recognition.
- Britain promised reforms and freedom—but failed to deliver.
- Discuss how this experience changed Indians’ views of colonialism and influenced Gandhi’s push for independence.

#### Primary Source Analysis (15–20 min):

Students work in groups to examine 2–3 primary sources (letters, photos, diaries, recruitment materials). Use the provided analysis sheet or reduce the time by engaging students with these three questions:

- What does this source reveal about Indian soldiers’ experiences?
- What emotions or attitudes do you notice?
- How might these experiences have shaped Gandhi’s argument for independence?

### Day 2: From Soldiers to Independence

#### Class Discussion (10 min):

- Review what students learned.
- How did India’s participation in WWI influence national identity?

- Why might Indian soldiers and citizens feel betrayed?

### **Model Example (10 min):**

Read a short excerpt from one of Gandhi's real speeches. Identify persuasive techniques—emotion, moral appeals, repetition, and evidence. Here is an excerpt from his [Quit India speeches](#):

"Here is a mantra, a short one, that I give you. You may imprint it on your hearts and let every breath of yours give expression to it. The mantra is : 'Do or Die'. We shall either free India or die in the attempt; we shall not live to see the perpetuation of our slavery. Every true Congressman or woman will join the struggle with an inflexible determination not to remain alive to see the country in bondage and slavery. Let that be your pledge. Keep jails out of your consideration. If the Government keep me free, I will not put on the Government the strain of maintaining a large number of prisoners at a time, when it is in trouble. Let every man and woman live every moment of his or her life hereafter in the consciousness that he or she eats or lives for achieving freedom and will die, if need be, to attain that goal. Take a pledge, with God and your own conscience as witness, that you will no longer rest till freedom is achieved and will be prepared to lay down your lives in the attempt to achieve it. He who loses his life will gain it; he who will seek to save it shall lose it. Freedom is not for the coward or the faint-hearted."

### **Writing Task (25–30 min):**

**Prompt:** Write a persuasive speech as if you are Mahatma Gandhi in 1919, addressing the British government and the Indian people. Use evidence from the primary sources, reader's theater, and your notes to argue why India deserves independence after its sacrifices in World War I.

#### **Speech Requirements:**

- Clear claim and introduction
- At least two supporting arguments (moral, political, or emotional)
- Evidence from at least two primary sources
- Persuasive conclusion

### **Day 3: Presentations and Reflection**

#### **Speech Presentations (25–30 min):**

- Students deliver their speeches (or excerpts) to the class in small groups.

#### **Debrief (10–15 min):**

- What arguments were most convincing?
- How did Gandhi's approach to independence differ from other leaders?

**POST-ASSESSMENT:**

Formative: Source analysis worksheets, participation in discussion

Summative: Persuasive speech (rubric assessing historical accuracy, use of evidence, persuasive writing, and speaking skills)

**MODIFICATIONS/ACCOMMODATIONS****For Students with Reading or Processing Challenges:**

- Provide audio versions of the reader's theater and Gandhi's speech excerpts.
- Offer simplified summaries or vocabulary supports for challenging historical terms (e.g., "colony," "imperialism," "independence").
- Highlight or pre-teach key sections of primary sources to reduce cognitive load.
- Allow students to use text-to-speech or screen readers for digital documents.

**For English Language Learners (ELLs):**

- Pair ELL students with supportive peers for the primary source analysis.
- Provide sentence starters for discussion and writing (e.g., "India deserves independence because...").
- Display visuals such as maps, propaganda posters, and soldier photographs to support context.
- Allow bilingual dictionaries or translation tools during reading and writing.
- Offer an option to present the speech with visual aids or shorter written responses if language output is difficult.

**For Students with Writing Difficulties or IEPs:**

- Use a speech outline graphic organizer to scaffold writing.
- Allow speech recording or video presentation instead of written format.
- Permit typed or dictated responses using speech-to-text tools.
- Shorten the written speech requirement (one strong paragraph or two key arguments).

**Extensions:**

- Compare India's experience to other colonies that fought in WWI (e.g., Africa, the Caribbean, Australia).
- Create a timeline showing how WWI led to India's independence movement (1914–1947).
- Integrate art: students design a propaganda poster from the Indian perspective after WWI.