**Who Started It?**

**Directions:** Read the descriptions of each country. Which country started World War I? Based on what you learned/know and the descriptions below, sort from 1-5 the country you think is most likely (1) the culprit in starting the war to least likely (5).

**Austria-Hungary**

Their heir was assassinated by Serbian nationalists. Besides that, the government and military felt that it was a good opportunity to punish Serbia to set an example for other 10 ethnic groups in the empire. By setting an example, it would prevent other ethnic groups from wanting to become independent. They were also afraid that a Pan-Slavic movement (backed by Russia) might ignite. Austria-Hungary only felt confident to go to war with Serbia and Russia if Germany supported them.

**Great Britain**

At the time, Great Britain had the largest empire in the world. Its allies were France and Russia. For years, Great Britain and Germany had a very intense arms race, building stronger and bigger weapons and ships. If Germany and their allies won the war and dominated the European continent, British ports in the English Channel would be threatened — and possibly the rest of the British Empire and trade. Also, Great Britain said it would remain neutral if France would remain neutral. However, it is clear France would never agree to be neutral while its ally is attacked.

**Germany**

Germany believed that Serbia needed to be eliminated for political reasons. Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany assured Austria-Hungary that he would back them up if they invade Serbia, even if Russia joined. However, if Germany fought in a war, it had the most to lose. Germany has the fastest growing economy in Europe and war would disrupt it. In previous wars, Germany managed to expand its territory gained from France (Alsace-Lorraine region) and Austria. A war can make Germany lose all of that. Germany also has an ongoing arms race with Great Britain, with a desire to become a global power.

**France**

France promised to back Russia’s support of Serbia, even if it meant war with Germany. This promise gave the Russians the confidence to stand firm behind Serbia. Also, France was still bitter over losing the Alsace-Lorraine region in Europe to Germany during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). They hope to regain the region from Germany. Lastly, France believed in order to preserve its status as a great power they needed to preserve the Triple Entente (with Russia and Britain), which means defeating Germany and its allies. If Russia loses to Germany, it would make France extremely vulnerable to German aggression, which shares a border with them.

**Russia**

Russia had no formal treaty with Serbia or any economic stake in the Balkans. Russia believed that a strong, independent Serbia was necessary to counterbalance the Austrian-Hungarian forces in the region. An independent Serbia was important for Russian sea trade using the Straits of Constantinople — an area of important strategic value. Russia also felt an obligation to protect Serbia because it has the largest population of Slavic people. Russia mobilized its army at the start of the war, which pressured Germany to mobilize their own army.