

The Influenza Pandemic of 1918

A multidisciplinary lesson for middle school students

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Goal: Students will use primary sources to explain the chronology of the Flu Epidemic of 1918 and the public's response.

Essential Questions:

Why is this epidemic considered to be one of the deadliest plagues in human history?

How did this epidemic change American's daily life and attitudes about health care?

Lesson 1: Introduction

Lesson 2: Describe the flu epidemic

Lesson 3: Analysis of death certificates

Lesson 4: Writing a RAFT

Lesson 1: Introduction

1. Show photographs one at a time, in the following order:

A. [woman connected to a respiration device](#)

B. [three children gargling](#)

C. [miner gargling](#) in front of a "Gargle, Don't Catch Flu" sign

D. [Wearing the Gauze photo and poem](#)

2. Using each picture, elicit student responses to the following possible questions to start discussion:

Who is in the picture? What clues help us determine some background information about the people in the picture? (What do they do? Where do they live?)

When and where was this picture taken? What clues lead you to a certain time period and location?

What types of actions are taking place? Why are the people doing these specific activities?

After the discussion, introduce the topic and the global and local effects of the Influenza Epidemic.

Lesson 2: Describe the flu epidemic

1. Ask the students for information on what they already know about the flu virus. This portion of the discussion will result in coming up with a description, symptoms, and effects of the influenza virus.

2. Read aloud a description of the virus from The Great Influenza Epidemic of 1918.

3. In addition, or as an alternative, students may research and locate other relevant primary and secondary documents about the Flu Pandemic of 1918 with analysis and discussion of these documents in small and/or large groups. These questions could be:

Who wrote this document?

Is the document narrative, expository, or persuasive?

Who was the intended audience?

What is the perspective of the document?
How does this document compare to other documents?

Lesson 3: Analysis of death certificates

Using the Champaign County Death Certificates from September and October of 1918, students will create a database or chart on Excel or comparable software. Due to the number of certificates listing cause of death as influenza or pneumonia, the work will need to be divided in some way, such as groups or individual students working on specific dates, etc. The information to record will include the name, age, gender, occupation, date of death, and race or ethnicity of the deceased. Students could then analyze the impact of the flu on various communities and groups.

(For further research and analysis, students could research census data and/or other death certificates from the same or other periods.)

Mapping it out: Using the data from the death certificates, students will plot out where the victims lived on city and county maps. Maps may be placed on bulletin boards and individuals recorded using stickpins, possibly in different colors representing different dates. Other variations of recording the information on maps could be adapted based on classroom resources and space. This activity will give the students a visual representation that could lead to further analysis exploring the patterns and proximity of cases.

Lesson 4: Writing a RAFT

Using the RAFT technique, students will complete a writing activity. This will first be modeled by the teacher with the entire class. As a group, select a role, audience, format, and topic from the following list of options:

| Role | Audience | Format | Topic |
|------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Doctor | Patients | Instructions | Flu Prevention |
| Mother | Children | Letter | Care of the Ill |
| Soldier | Family | Obituary | Public Policy |
| Public Health Official | General Public | Investigative Report | Hospital Policy |
| Newspaper Reporter | Elected Officials | Journal Entry | Public Education |

You may choose to allow the students to brainstorm more options to add to the list. After selecting and writing the RAFT as a group, students may select from the topic choices to complete a prewriting graphic organizer and a RAFT of their own.

[Resources](#)