



# LESSON PLAN

## 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC AND WORLD WAR I

### *High School*

### OVERVIEW

In 1918, a deadly strain of influenza began spreading around the world at the same time as World War I. By the end of the pandemic in 1920, an estimated 500 million people had been infected, and 50 million had died (roughly twice the number of people killed in the war). In the United States, the government, military, and civilian healthcare professionals worked to treat the sick and to contain the spread of the disease.

In this lesson, students will examine primary and secondary sources related to the 1918 influenza pandemic to understand how the pandemic affected the American population and how the U.S. government responded to this public health crisis. Students will also discuss historical context and causation, focusing on the relationship between World War I and the 1918 influenza pandemic.

We recommend that this lesson be used at the end of a unit about World War I so that students are already familiar with basic information about the war.

**Estimated time:** 2 class periods; 10-minute introduction, at-home examination of sources, 60-90 minute in-class activity and discussion.

### STANDARDS

*Social studies standards vary by state. This lesson can be used to teach the following standards and similar wording may be found in your state standards.*

#### National Council for the Social Studies Standards

- NCSS.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.
- NCSS.D2.His.9.9-12: Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them.
- NCSS.D1.5.9-12: Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.
- NCSS.D2.His.8.9-12: Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.
- NCSS.D2.His.11.9-12: Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical



### Common Core Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9: Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students will use primary sources to form conclusions and connections about a historical event, the distinctions between primary and secondary sources, and how each type of source contributes to their understanding of history.
- Students will describe factors that influenced the 1918 flu pandemic and why historical context matters when discussing a historical event.

## RESOURCES NEEDED

- Copies of the student worksheet (1 per student)
- Student access to the primary and secondary sources document

## LESSON ACTIVITIES

### Introduction: 10 minutes

- *Notes for introducing the lesson:* To study history through different lenses, historians use primary sources: documents, images, artifacts, and other sources from the past that offer firsthand information on events and experiences as they were happening at the time. Historians then analyze the information they learned from primary sources, along with their own understanding of historical events, in order to create secondary sources: writings about the past, which offer analysis and interpretation. Today, you will use both primary and secondary sources to explore the history of the 1918 influenza pandemic.
  - If students do not have a good grasp on primary and secondary sources, have a brief discussion about each type of source – definition and uses.
- Provide each student a take-home primary source packet or provide them with access to a digital version.
  - Explain that the first two sources are secondary sources – articles written by historians that make an argument about history based on primary sources (evidence).
  - Sources 3-9 are primary sources – materials created during the historical event (the 1918 influenza pandemic) by people experiencing the historical event. Primary sources require interpretation.



**Working with Sources:** 30-45 minutes. *Since the secondary sources are long, we recommend that students read these at home.*

- Students should read the two secondary source articles and examine the primary source article, oral history, and photographs at home. Instruct students to identify the author’s argument for each secondary source and come to class familiar with the primary sources.
  - For the secondary sources, students should identify the parts that are primary sources (quoted text, images, etc.) and the parts where the author or historian offers his or her own analysis and interpretation. Encourage students to underline or highlight when the authors use/reference primary sources.
- Provide each student a copy of the worksheet so that students can note their observations while they read the primary and secondary sources.

**In-class Activity and Discussion:** 60-90 minutes

- **Pair & Share:** In pairs or small groups, students should compare their worksheet responses — both answers to the questions and evidence they used to support their answers — and answer the following questions. If needed, students can also complete the worksheet in class together.
  - Did you come to the same conclusion for each question?
    - If not, why did you have different answers? Are both answers accurate?
    - If you did, did you use the same evidence to support your answer?
  - Which questions did you answer using evidence from primary sources? Which from the secondary sources?
- **Worksheet Content Discussion:**
  - Review students’ worksheet responses as a class.
    - *Optional:* Project primary sources one-by-one on a screen and discuss what you can learn from each source.
  - Ask students to share their reflections from the pair & share.
- **Primary & Secondary Source Discussion:** What is the relationship between the primary sources and the secondary sources?
  - How do the primary sources corroborate, complicate, and/or contradict the interpretations offered in the secondary sources? In other words, do these primary sources offer evidence for the arguments made by Barry and Finkelstein? Why or why not? Example answers may include:
    - *Primary sources can corroborate interpretations offered in secondary sources by providing direct evidence or firsthand accounts that support the arguments or analyses made by historians.*
    - *Primary sources can complicate interpretations offered in secondary sources by providing conflicting accounts, alternative perspectives, or additional layers of complexity that challenge simplistic narratives.*



- *Yes, these primary sources offer good evidence for what was said in the secondary sources, and highlight the direness of the situation.*
- What kind of information was best conveyed through the primary source? How about through the secondary source? Example answers may include:
  - *Primary sources do well at conveying emotion and offer a much more personal view of the historical event. Secondary sources offer more analysis and interpretation of an event and typically provide a broader overview.*
- What were some limitations of the primary source? What about the secondary source? Example answers may include:
  - *Limitations of primary sources include bias from the creator, incompleteness or selective coverage, misperceptions, or misremembrance of events, and are often not as common as secondary sources. For example, the primary source by the nurse Josie Mabel Brown provided valuable insight into what it was like for nurses at the time, but only shows the experience of one nurse.*
  - *Secondary sources can also be limited by bias of the historian and may also be lacking in information. For example, while there is educated speculation on where the 1918 Influenza Pandemic began, it is not entirely confirmed. (U.S. Army Camp Funston or the residents of Haskell County, Kansas?)*
- Which source did you prefer working with? Why?
- **Historical Context Discussion:** How were World War I and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic connected?
  - How did World War I affect the spread of the 1918 flu? Consider factors such as the government's efforts to reduce panic about the flu, the higher degree of international and national travel, the availability of nurses, and the experience of war itself (trenches, crowded camps and troops ships, soldiers' interactions with local populations, etc.). Example answers may include:
    - *The movement of large numbers of troops around the world during World War I created ideal conditions for the spread of the flu.*
    - *The demands of wartime healthcare strained medical resources and personnel, making it challenging to respond effectively to the influenza pandemic. Hospitals were overwhelmed with sick and injured soldiers, leading to shortages of beds, medical supplies, and healthcare workers.*
  - How did the 1918 flu affect World War I? Example answers may include:
    - *Military camps and trenches provided ideal conditions for the rapid spread of the virus among soldiers. Large numbers of military personnel on both sides of the conflict fell ill, affecting combat effectiveness and military operations.*
    - *The 1918 flu likely accounted for about half of all U.S. military fatalities during the war.*
  - What was the role of the U.S. military during the 1918 flu pandemic? Example answers may include:



- *It is speculated that the pandemic began at a military camp in Kansas, Camp Funston. The transportation of soldiers contributed to a continuation of the spread of the disease. Due to the war, many physicians were enrolled to serve the army and were not available to help civilian populations.*
- *Military authorities implemented public health measures aimed at preventing the spread of the flu among military personnel and civilian populations. These measures included quarantine, isolation of infected individuals, use of face masks, and restrictions on public gatherings.*
- In what other ways might the 1918 flu have influenced and/or changed world events?  
Example answers may include:
  - *It is possible that the influenza pandemic played a role in hastening the end of World War I. The combined effects of battlefield losses, economic strain, and the toll of the pandemic on civilian and military populations increased pressure on governments to seek a resolution to the conflict.*
- What broader lessons can we take away about how we understand and interpret history?  
Example answers may include:
  - *Understanding and interpreting history involves dealing with complex narratives, diverse perspectives, and the interplay of multiple factors shaping past events.*

## ***PLANNING A VISIT TO ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY?***

- When the influenza pandemic began in 1918, tens of thousands of American women were already serving as nurses in World War I. These women formed the front lines of the military's battle against the influenza pandemic, just as nurses did in civilian communities. Use the ANC Explorer app to visit the graves of these women who risked their lives at home and abroad to nurse soldiers and civilians infected with influenza. Learn more about each of these women in the Military Medicine Walking Tour and on Arlington's website:  
<https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Blog/Post/10832/Commemorating-the-Nurses-of-the-1918-Influenza-Pandemic>

### Gravesites:

- **Kathryn Mae Joyce** (Section 21, Grave 47)
- **Elizabeth H. Weimann** (Section 21, Grave 4)
- **Cornelia Elizabeth Thornton** (Section 21, Grave 2)
- **Lenah Higbee** (Section 3, Grave 1797-WS)
- **Jane Delano** (Section 21, Grave 6)
- Complete the Military Medicine Walking Tour to learn even more about the history of military medicine.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_



## 1918 INFLUENZA PANDEMIC AND WORLD WAR I — **TEACHER KEY**

Using the primary and secondary sources, answer the questions below. For each question, cite your evidence from the primary or secondary source in your answer. For written or oral sources, your evidence may be a quote. For visual sources, like photographs, indicate what part of the photograph led you to make the observation — the people's clothing, their location, what they are doing, etc. Be as specific as possible.

### 12. Who was most affected by the virus? Who was most at risk?

**Possible Answer #1:** *People in the less developed world*

**Possible Answer #2:** *Soldiers*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *"In the less developed world, mortality was worse." (Barry, Source #1)*

**Possible Answer #2:** *The next day a dozen more men from his company were diagnosed with meningitis. But as more men fell ill, physicians changed the diagnosis to influenza. Suddenly, an Army report noted, "the influenza...occurred as an explosion." At the outbreak's peak, 1,543 soldiers reported ill with influenza in a single day. (Barry, Source #1)*

### 13. How did the virus spread?

**Possible Answer #1:** *Through contact with infected soldiers*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *"Infected soldiers likely carried influenza from Funston to other Army camps in the United States — 24 of 36 large camps had outbreaks — sickening thousands. Then, those soldiers likely carried the disease overseas. Meanwhile, the disease spread into U.S. civilian communities." (Barry, Source #1)*

### 14. How did the virus change daily life?

**Possible Answer #1:** *There were new precautions that people had to take to stay safe — more fresh air, reduce contact with others, keep dry*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *"Keep the home aired out*

*Have plenty of fresh air when you sleep*

*In case of storm keep dry and do not expose yourselves.*

*Do not mingle with others more than is necessary" (Bureau of Indian Affairs, Source #11)*

### 15. What was the government's response to the virus?

**Possible Answer #1:** *The government tried to keep information from the public, even by lying*

Evidence: **Possible Answer #1:** *"What proved even more deadly was the government policy toward the truth. When the United States entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information. The committee was inspired by an adviser who wrote, "Truth and falsehood are arbitrary terms....The force of an idea lies in its inspirational value. It matters very little if it is true or false." (Barry, Source #1)*

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### 16. What was the American public's response to the virus?

**Possible Answer #1:** *Business owners put preventative protocols in place (like masks) to continue operating as usual*

**Possible Answer #2:** *Teachers conducted classes outside*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *The barber is wearing a mask while servicing a client (Source #3, National Archives)*

**Possible Answer #2:** *The students and professor are in an open area so the air can circulate in an attempt to ward off the spread of the Spanish influenza (National Archives, Source #4)*

### 17. How were U.S. military nurses affected by the virus?

**Possible Answer #1:** *Nurses were high risk for becoming sick while caring for patients*

**Possible Answer #2:** *Nurses were constantly busy and did what they could for having so many patients*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *"The nature of nursing work put these women at great risk to contract this highly contagious disease. Base hospitals overseas created specific infirmaries for ill nurses. By October 1918, the influenza pandemic formed a major health crisis among the American nurses and medical staff overseas. While an exact figure for the number of American nurses who died during the war remains elusive, historians generally estimate it to be somewhere above 200." (Finkelstein, Source #2)*

**Possible Answer #2:** *"We didn't have time to treat them. We didn't take temperatures; we didn't even have time to take blood pressure. We would give them a little hot whiskey toddy; that's about all we had time to do. They would have terrific nosebleeds with it...Oh, it was a horrid thing. We had to wear operating masks and gowns all the time. We worked 8 hours on a ward sometimes. If nobody had a nurse on another ward, we would go back to our quarters for an hour and then work another 8 hours. It was 16 hours a day until the epidemic was over." (Brown, Source #10)*

### 18. How did World War I change how the virus spread and who it infected?

**Possible Answer #1:** *The pandemic heavily impacted the military and its death toll as many soldiers were infected*

**Possible Answer #2:** *The U.S. suppressed knowledge of the disease to keep morale up, resulting in more death and fewer preventative efforts.*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *"Making the situation worse, the mostly young service members formed one of the most at-risk populations for this disease: people between the ages of 20 and 40 were particularly susceptible to death in this pandemic. More than 55,000 U.S. service members are thought to have died as a result of influenza. Compared with the estimated figure of over 53,000 American battle deaths during World War I, the flu likely accounted for about half of all U.S. military fatalities during the war." (Finkelstein, Source #2)*

**Possible Answer #2:** *"What proved even more deadly was the government policy toward the truth. When the United States entered the war, President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information. The committee was inspired by an adviser who wrote, "Truth and falsehood are arbitrary terms...The force of an idea lies in its inspirational value. It matters very little if it is true or false." Government posters and advertisements urged people to report to the Justice Department anyone "who spreads pessimistic stories...cries for peace, or belittles our effort to win the war."*

*Against this background, while influenza bled into American life, public health officials, determined to keep morale up, began to lie." (Barry, Source #1)*

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**19. How were other parts of the world affected by the virus as compared to the United States?**

**Possible Answer #1:** *In countries that were less developed, the mortality rate was higher*

Evidence: **Possible Answer #1:** *“Even though the death toll was historic, most people who were infected by the pandemic virus survived. In the developed world, the overall mortality was about 2 percent. In the less developed world, mortality was worse. In Mexico, estimates of the dead range from 2.3 to 4 percent of the entire population. Much of Russia and Iran saw 7 percent of the population die. In the Fiji Islands 14 percent of the population died—in 16 days. In small native villages in Alaska and Gambia, everyone died, probably because all got sick simultaneously and no one could provide care, could not even give people water, and perhaps because, with so much death around them, those who might have survived did not fight.” (Barry, Source #1)*

**20. What is the most surprising fact that you learned about the 1918 flu pandemic from these sources?**

*Open for interpretation*

**21. What argument(s) does Barry make about the 1918 flu pandemic?**

**Possible Answer #1:** *The outbreak began when the infected men from Haskell County went to the Army base, infecting a mass amount of people which then spread from there*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *“Infected soldiers likely carried influenza from Funston to other Army camps in the United States — 24 of 36 large camps had outbreaks — sickening thousands. Then, those soldiers likely carried the disease overseas. Meanwhile, the disease spread into U.S. civilian communities. The pandemic lasted just 15 months but was the deadliest disease outbreak in human history.” (Barry, Source #1)*

**22. What argument(s) does Finkelstein make about the 1918 flu pandemic?**

**Possible Answer #1:** *The influenza pandemic impacted the American military*

Evidence:

**Possible Answer #1:** *“Regardless of where it began, influenza took a toll on the American military, which had been involved in the world war since 1917.” (Finklestein, Source #2)*