



“Pandemic 1918” Study Guide Questions

“Pandemic 1918!” is an article about the experiences of King County residents during the influenza pandemic of 1918-1919. The virus, nicknamed the Spanish Flu, arrived just as the First World War was ending. It is thought to have infected over 500 million people worldwide.

This activity is designed for readers in 7th grade and above. Questions can be used for discussion or as writing prompts. You can find the original article from [December 2014 on Renton History Museum’s Newsletters Page](#).

1. Today’s scientists and historians are not sure where the Spanish Flu originated, but it is unlikely that it actually began in Spain. Why was the epidemic called the Spanish Flu?

2. How did health officials in the state of Washington prepare for the arrival of the Spanish Flu?

3. Jessie Tulloch observed firsthand how Seattle adapted to the flu. How did everyday life in Seattle change?

4. On November 11, 1918, the Allied Powers and Germany signed a treaty that officially brought World War I to a close. This day was called Armistice Day, and in modern times it is celebrated as Veteran’s Day in the United States. Why was the first Armistice Day a concern for public health officials?



5. According to health officials at the time, the best place for treating the Spanish Flu was at home. Patients were treated in their homes with the aid of family members and traveling nurses and doctors. However, some of the infected individuals had to go to Renton Hospital for treatment. Who were the people most likely to end up staying at the hospital, and why?

6. How did deaths from the influenza epidemic affect local families? Mention at least one specific example.

7. How were the coal and education industries affected when another wave of influenza hit in December 1918?

8. The epidemic affected Renton over the course of four months in 1918-1919, going into decline in January 1919. How many people were infected over that four-month period, and how many died?

SHORT ESSAY QUESTION: Who were the two doctors practicing in Renton at the time of the Spanish influenza outbreak? What were their jobs like?

CREATIVE ESSAY QUESTION: If you were a public official in 1918-1919 and your job was to help prevent the spread of the Spanish Flu, what policies would you create, and why?



1. Today's scientists and historians are not sure where the Spanish Flu originated from, but it is unlikely that it actually began in Spain. Why was the epidemic called the Spanish Flu?

Spain's neutrality in World War I meant that their newspapers were not censored. Therefore, news publications from Spain were the first to openly talk about the virus, which led to the false impression that it originated there.

2. How did health officials in the state of Washington prepare for the arrival of the Spanish Flu?

Health officials in Washington observed the precautions that states on the East Coast were taking. In October 1918, the WA State Board of Health required all cases of Spanish Flu to be reported. Seattle Health Commissioner J. S. McBride began a public information campaign to help stop the spread of the disease and encouraged those affected to stay at home to be cared for by their families. Family members were taught how to care for their loved ones while keeping themselves safe with masks, aprons, gowns, and hygienic practices.

3. Jessie Tulloch observed firsthand how Seattle adapted to the flu. How did everyday life in Seattle change?

Large public gatherings were discouraged and civic and fraternal groups were temporarily suspended. Large public weddings were banned, and couples held small ceremonies with immediate family only. Streetcar windows were nailed open. Everyone was required to wear masks.

4. On November 11, 1918, the Allied Powers and Germany signed an armistice that officially brought World War I to a close. This day was called Armistice Day, and in modern times it is celebrated as Veteran's Day in the United States. Why was the first Armistice Day a concern for public health officials?

Public health officials were concerned that nationwide celebrations of Armistice Day might result in a second outbreak of the disease.

5. According to health officials at the time, the best place for treating the Spanish Flu was at home. Patients were treated in their homes with the aid of family members and traveling nurses and doctors. However, some of the infected individuals had to go to Renton Hospital for treatment. Who were the people most likely to end up staying at the hospital and why?

The people who most often had to be hospitalized were single miners and loggers. They had no one at home to care for them, and were hospitalized instead.



6. How did deaths from the influenza epidemic affect local families? Mention at least one specific example.

Influenza deaths left children without parents and adults without spouses. Some specific examples include:

Ed Zilli, a miner and farmer, who left behind a wife, Armida, and a newborn daughter, Marina.

James A. Tonkin, son of the mayor at the time, passed away at the young age of 34.

Gus Gustafson, a carpenter, died while his wife was still pregnant with their son Grant, who passed away less than a year later.

Edward McCaffrey lost his father when he was two months old. His mother had to move in with her parents.

Cecelia Major lost her father, John A. Carey Sr., when she was 6 years old. He was in the process of applying for a job with the railroad and contracted influenza after attending Armistice Day celebrations.

Fred Elleg and his sister Louisa Ioppini both passed away. Their brother-in-law Joseph Covey, his wife Lena, and their children all became sick with the flu, as did Fred's widow, Charlotte. Charlotte and the Coveys recovered, and Lena gave birth to Joseph F. Covey in February.

7. How were the coal and education industries affected when another wave of influenza hit in December of 1918?

Gus Bishop and Pete Dullahant, who were teamsters (men who drove carts delivering coal), were infected. As a result, local newspapers warned that coal orders would not be able to be filled as quickly. Schools were already closed down when cases of influenza increased over the winter, and as teachers became ill, the closures continued into January.

8. The epidemic affected Renton over the course of four months in 1918-1919, going into decline in January 1919. How many people were infected over that four-month period, and how many died?

70 Renton residents, or 2% of the population, were infected. 22 of those infected died, a seeming 31% mortality rate, although it is likely that many more were infected than we can discover from historic documents.



SHORT ESSAY QUESTION: Who were the two doctors practicing in Renton at the time of the Spanish influenza outbreak? What were their jobs like, and how were they affected by the virus?

SAMPLE ANSWER: Adolph Bronson and Charles Dixon were the practicing physicians in Renton when the influenza epidemic of 1918 hit the city. Both tended to influenza patients in hospitals as well as in the patients' homes. The *Bulletin* pronounced Dr. Dixon "the busiest man in Renton." He acquired one hundred doses of serum to prevent the flu at a time when it was difficult to obtain. Dr. Bronson contracted the virus twice, and left for California to recover. This left Renton with only one doctor. From Dr. Bronson's call book and hospital admission records, we can see that October and November were months when Renton was hit particularly hard with cases of Spanish Flu.

CREATIVE ESSAY QUESTION: If you were a public official in 1918-1919 and your job was to help prevent the spread of the Spanish Flu, what policies would you create, and why?

SAMPLE ANSWER: This question provides an opportunity for learners to begin with policies referred to in the "Pandemic 1918!" article and then compare and contrast with current pandemic policies that draw on a greater scientific understanding of viruses, pandemics, vaccines, and how viruses spread. How does public opinion limit what governments can do? How do public officials make sense of conflicting information?



Supplemental Resources

General Information about the 1918 Pandemic

“The Origin of the Name ‘Spanish Flu’” examines how the virus got its name, from the Latin origins of the word “influenza” to the *Times* of London article that dubbed the 1918 outbreak the “Spanish flu.” The latter half of this article is about how the spread of most kinds of influenza in modern times can be slowed with the help of vaccines. (<https://www.sciencefriday.com/articles/the-origin-of-the-spanish-flu/>)

“How U.S. Cities Tried to Halt the Spread of the 1918 Spanish Flu” Find out how Philadelphia, St. Louis, and San Francisco responded to the Spanish Flu. (<https://www.history.com/news/spanish-flu-pandemic-response-cities>)

Critical Thinking Questions: How did people receive information about the 1918 epidemic, and how did this affect their perception of the virus? How did people try to protect themselves from influenza in 1918, and how do we respond to influenza today? What similarities or differences do you notice?

The 1918 Pandemic and World War I

More Deadly than War is a book aimed at students in grades 5 through 8 that tackles the topic of the Spanish Flu epidemic and its link to World War I by incorporating facts, images, and personal accounts. For example, one anecdote tells the story of how a teenaged Walt Disney contracted the virus while at a Red Cross training camp. The book and e-book include helpful infographics. It is available for free as an e-book and audio book through the King County Library System with your library card. (<https://kcls.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1839189082>)

The Great War Epilogue 3: The Spanish Flu is part of an extensive YouTube series that covers the events of World War I. This episode puts the number of infections and deaths from the 1918 pandemic in context by comparing it to the number of deaths caused by other widespread diseases and the war itself. It explains how and why the disease affected many healthy young adults. It also discusses the possible origins of the virus and its effects on the war. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XRtXckhuquo>)

Critical Thinking Questions: How did the First World War affect the spread of the influenza epidemic of 1918, and in what ways do you think the epidemic affected the war? Why is it difficult for scientists and historians to determine where the virus originated?

Primary Sources from Around the U.S.A.

The Geary County Historical Society in Kansas has records from Fort Riley, where the first case of Spanish Flu was recorded. This web page is home to an ongoing project where guests are invited to volunteer to transcribe Geary County’s 1918 death records into Google Sheets. PDF scans of original



records from 1917-1918 are available for download. This website also includes an informational article and some FAQs. (<http://www.gchsweb.org/p/spanish-flu.html?m=1>)

The American Influenza Epidemic of 1918-1919: A Digital Encyclopedia is an extensive archive of historic documents and photos relating to the 1918 pandemic from 50 cities across the U.S.A. You can find items listed by people, places, organizations, and subjects. It is maintained by the University of Michigan Library. (<https://www.influenzaarchive.org/>)

1918 Pandemic Influenza Survivors Share Their Stories is a collection of oral history videos and transcripts about the 1918 pandemic made available by Alabama Public Health. (<http://www.alabamapublichealth.gov/pandemicflu/1918-influenza-survivor-stories.html>)

Critical Thinking Questions: What can we determine about the pandemic of 1918 from looking at county records, photographs, newspaper articles, and interviews with survivors? Why is each type of primary source important? How did daily life change for people whose communities were affected by the 1918 influenza outbreak?