

Connecticut Explored Curriculum Lesson Plan

Topic: A “Most Trying and Serious Calamity”: Perception of the 1918 Influenza Outbreak in New Haven

Article: “Ninety Days that Sickened Connecticut”, Ralph D. Arcari, Ph.D., *Hog River Journal*, Spring 2007, Vol. 5, No. 2. <http://connecticutexplored.org/issues/v05n02/influenza.htm>

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Description: Students will read the article “Ninety Days that Sickened Connecticut”, about the impact of the 1918 influenza epidemic on Connecticut residents. The students will then read a brief historical description of New Haven and public health at the time of the epidemic to contextualize more effectively the primary documents provided. Next, students will read a collection of nine brief primary documents, some from early in the epidemic, others from the end. Finally, students will be asked to choose one of the people from the primary documents and write two letters or diary entries from that person; one should reflect the thoughts from early in the epidemic, the other from late in the epidemic.

State Standards Addressed:

Content Standard 1: Historical thinking – formulate historical questions and hypotheses from multiple perspectives; gather, analyze and reconcile historical information from primary and secondary sources; describe the multiple intersecting causes of events; use primary source documents to analyze multiple perspectives.

Content Standard 2: Local, United States, and World History – explain relationships among the events and trends studied in local and national history.

Content Standard 4: Applying History – initiate questions and hypotheses about historic events; display empathy for people who have lived in the past.

Content Standard 9: Places and Regions – analyze ways different groups in society view places and regions differently.

Essential Questions: What is the impact on society of a widespread epidemic? How did Connecticut officials and residents deal with the 1918 influenza outbreak?

Objectives: The students will be able: to demonstrate understanding of the magnitude of the 1918 influenza epidemic on a local and individual level; to demonstrate how the same occurrence can be experienced very differently by different individuals and/or how time and circumstances change the perspective of those who experienced an event such as the influenza epidemic; to show understanding of the impact of local conditions within a national or international event; to integrate information from primary and secondary sources; and to appreciate both the similarities and differences in how primary and secondary documents shape how we perceive an historical event.

Historical Background: Students should be provided with the reading entitled “The 1918 Influenza in New Haven: A Background reading”. (See attached.)

Strategies: This lesson is most appropriate for the end of a unit on World War I. Some background on late 19th century and/or early 20th century urbanization and immigration will be helpful. Most U. S. History textbooks provide adequate preparation for students for this lesson. Teachers who desire to supplement the available information may find the following sources useful:

Glaab, Charles N. and A. Theodore Brown. *A History of Urban America*, 1983.

Influenza 1918. The American Experience series. Video. PBS, 1998.

Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives*, 1890.

For a more complete summary of New Haven history in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including immigration and the growth of the city:

Hill, Everett G. *Modern History of New Haven and Eastern New Haven County*, 1918. This source offers a contemporary view of immigrants and New Haven’s growth from the perspective of the editor of the *New Haven Register*.

Maynard, Preston and Marjorie B. Noyes. *Carriages and Clocks, Corsets and Locks: the Rise and Fall of an Industrial City—New Haven, Connecticut*, 2004.

Osterweis, Rollin G. *Three Centuries of New Haven, 1638-1938*, 1953.

The *Hog River Journal* article provides the broader context for the activity while the New Haven background reading provides a more local context that helps students to understand the nuances of the primary documents. Both of the secondary readings are critical for understanding the primary sources.

The *Hog River Journal* article and the New Haven background reading should be assigned as homework the night before this lesson. After students have had a chance to read the primary documents in class, the teacher should ask two questions and list the responses on the board:

1. In what ways do the primary documents support the points made in the article and/or the New Haven background reading? And in what ways does the information provided in the primary documents differ from the secondary readings?
2. What changes can be seen in how the epidemic was viewed by those who experienced it?

In the case of 45 minute class period, the writing assignment should be completed as homework during the second night. In the case of 90 minute class period, the writing assignment may be completed in class.

Optional: Students may be assigned to read the writing assignment aloud in pairs. Partners can also evaluate each other's written work using the attached assessment rubric.

Authentic Assessment Activity: After reading the *Hog River Journal* article, the background reading, and the primary documents, students will choose one of the people from the primary documents (for example, Frank W. Wright, a parent of Harry K. Galliver; a newspaper editor/reporter; a nurse; or Amelia Buonocore). The student will then write two diary entries or letters, one from early in the epidemic and one from later in the epidemic. The two written pieces should convey responses to the following questions by using information from the primary and secondary sources as well as the student's imagination:

1. What did the person experience?
2. How did the influenza affect the person and/or the people he/she was helping and/or observing?
3. How did the person's perceptions of the influenza change throughout the epidemic?
4. How was the person affected by local circumstances?

The assessment rubric is attached.

Additional Activity: Students or teachers may wish to research the effects of the 1918 influenza on their own locality. Because most of the secondary sources about the 1918 influenza approach the topic from a national perspective, primary sources remain the best (or only) tool for further research. Contemporary newspaper articles are probably the best source for information. Microfilm copies of newspapers are often available at local public libraries. Local health department records are another good source. Local historical societies may have materials, as well, including diaries, mortality reports, burial records, and health reports. Visits to local cemeteries may also reveal clusters of victims of particular ethnic backgrounds.

Materials: Students will need copies of each of the following three documents: "Ninety Days that Sickened Connecticut" from *Hog River Journal*, Spring 2007, Volume 5, No. 2; "The 1918 Influenza in New Haven: A Background Reading;" and "Primary Sources." It is recommended that students also be given a copy of the assessment rubric before they complete the assessment activity.

Field Trip Options: While there are no memorials or permanent exhibits devoted to the 1918 influenza in the state of Connecticut, the New Haven Museum and Historical Society offers a glimpse of New Haven's industrial past with goods from the Winchester Repeating Arms, for example. Opportunities for exploring the large immigrant communities in New Haven are also available, particularly in the research library. New Haven *Year Books* containing the Health Department reports are held in the library, as well. Workshops can be arranged for class visits. Using these resources, students could expand upon their original diary entries or letters using more primary and secondary sources.

The Woolsey Hall rotunda on the campus of Yale University is also eye opening when considering the 1918 influenza. Listed on the walls of the rotunda are the names of Yale alumni who died in the nation's wars, and there are a startling number of deaths in the summer and fall of 1918 that occurred stateside, most of them due to influenza.

Annotated Bibliography

Barry, John M. *The Great Influenza: The Story of the Deadliest Pandemic in History*. (New York: Viking Penguin, 2004).

Crosby, Alfred W. *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

Duffy, John. *The Sanitarians: A History of American Public Health*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

Osterweis, Rollin G. *Three Centuries of New Haven, 1638-1938*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

Riccio, Anthony V. *The Italian American Experience in New Haven: Images and Oral Histories*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

Assessment Rubric for Letters and Diary Entries

Student Name:

	Exceptional	Strong	Adequate	Needs Improvement
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -demonstrates change in character's perceptions in multiple ways -addresses all assigned questions thoroughly -demonstrates accurate understanding of events and developments -demonstrates strong empathy with character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -demonstrates some change in character's perceptions -addresses all assigned questions but somewhat superficially -demonstrates fairly clear understanding of events and developments -demonstrates some empathy with character 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -demonstrates a minimal change in character's perceptions -addresses most questions but somewhat superficially -demonstrates some understanding of events and developments -includes inaccuracies or inconsistent information -demonstrates minimal empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -demonstrates little or no change in character's perceptions -addresses few or none of the questions adequately -demonstrates significant misunderstanding of events and developments -includes multiple inaccuracies -demonstrates little empathy
Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writing is clear and concise -sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar are correct 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writing is usually clear -a few mistakes in sentence structure, punctuation, and /or grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writing is sometimes awkward -sentences are often too wordy or incomplete -a number of mistakes in sentence in punctuation and/or grammar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -writing is often confusing -awkward wording -many mistakes in sentence structure, punctuation, and/or grammar
Use of Sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -smoothly integrates ample and appropriate evidence from both secondary and primary sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -refers to appropriate evidence from both secondary and primary sources -integration is usually smooth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -refers to some evidence from secondary or primary sources but does not integrate evidence from both effectively -integration is somewhat awkward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -refers to minimal or no evidence from either secondary or primary sources -awkward integration of evidence used

The 1918 Influenza in New Haven: A Background Reading

In 1918, New Haven residents were fully engaged in the Great War. Troops trained on the New Haven Green downtown, while atop East Rock, a prominent formation overlooking the city, a crew stood at alert with an anti-aircraft gun on the chance that German dirigibles were directed against the city's munitions industry. By the summer of 1918, the threat of attack had diminished due to the retreat of the Axis powers in Europe, but residents anxiously scanned the lists of dead and wounded on the front page of the newspapers as the numbers of American casualties climbed with the military offensives and a virulent strain of influenza that was sweeping across the battlefields. Many young men from New Haven were enlisted with the Yankee Division, which paid a particularly terrible toll in the final months of the War in terms of battlefield casualties and deaths to influenza.

Nowhere was wartime activity in New Haven more pronounced than at the Winchester Repeating Arms factory. Since the eruption of European hostilities, Winchester had greatly increased production, expanded its facilities, and more than tripled its work force. Thousands of laborers, many of them Italian, unskilled, and recently immigrated, poured into New Haven to meet the labor needs of Winchester and other local munitions factories. New Haven's population surged, especially in the already crowded and poorer wards where many of the city's immigrants had settled in previous years. In 1917, a health report conducted by an internationally-known public health specialist concluded that there were far more people living in New Haven than anyone knew. The report noted with alarm that disease and mortality rates were significantly higher in the more densely populated wards where families crammed into unsanitary tenement houses and workers thronged poorly ventilated factory floors.

However, other than observing the dangers of the wartime conditions, there was little that public health officials could do to prevent a potential health disaster. Medical science had already determined that germs carried disease, but many people still did not accept or understand the implications of the germ theory. As a result, public health officials who tried to alleviate the unsanitary conditions in cities and reduce the spread of germs were often seen as meddlers and their tactics a waste of taxpayers' money. Indeed, New Haven's public health officer, Frank W. Wright, was given scant resources and little authority to enforce public health codes. He also lacked support from the government when the influenza epidemic struck; the United States Public Health Service offered only minimal guidance.

In general, modern medicine at the time was woefully ill equipped to fight the epidemic. No one had identified the pathogen responsible for the outbreak, and thus no vaccine or cure was available. Furthermore, antibiotics were not yet in use. In New Haven, like many cities, a number of local doctors and nurses were overseas serving the armed forces, leaving the expanded wartime population dependent on fewer medical personnel.

To make matters worse, New Haven's crowded immigrant wards were hit by influenza particularly hard. As reported in a 1920 article (C.-E. A. Winslow and J. F. Rogers, "Statistics of the 1918 Epidemic of Influenza in Connecticut," *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, Vol. XXVI (1920), 198-99.), immigrant groups, especially the Italians, suffered disproportionately in New Haven, largely due to crowded living conditions. Not only did the epidemic spread more rapidly in the close confines of the tenements, but many of the recent immigrants also could not afford the services of a doctor or hospital. Moreover, they often could not communicate with health providers, nor did they necessarily understand or trust the basis of public health policies and practices. Perhaps most important was the rampant discrimination against immigrants,

especially Italians, and the cultural barriers separating them from health officials at a time when most doctors were middle- or upper-class, Protestant, and Anglo-Saxon. These circumstances suggest that the suffering and numbers of dead were greater than was recognized by officials at the time. Indeed, a mass grave at St. Lawrence Cemetery in New Haven, where an undetermined number of influenza victims were buried, hints at the magnitude of the calamity in the City's immigrant community since many of the dead were Italian and many were interred anonymously.

The worst of the influenza epidemic seemed to be over in New Haven by early November, which coincided with the celebrations for the Armistice on November 11, 1918. Nevertheless, influenza continued to stalk residents through the end of the year, leaving more widows, orphans, and grief in its wake. After the epidemic, the City's Health Officer reported that 793 residents had died from September through December. At least another hundred were reported to have died of pneumonia spawned by influenza – but these figures are almost certainly too low. In the end, it was impossible to number the dead or to measure the suffering.

Primary Sources

Source 1: This excerpt from the *City Year Book of the City of New Haven for 1917* is taken from the “Report of the Health Officer”. While the 1918 influenza epidemic had not yet appeared, New Haven’s Health Officer, Frank W. Wright, worried about the medical dangers brought about by wartime conditions in New Haven.

“During the year I have several times published articles in the Monthly Bulletin, issued by this department, that called attention to certain economic conditions caused by the exigencies of the war, that have and will continue to be a menace to health. The importance of such conditions as they affect the future does not seem to be appreciated, the annoyances of the present being apparently uppermost in the minds of the people. Your health officer deeply feels the responsibilities and danger from possible inappropriate conduct of the situation... I do, however, feel that the conditions that all are striving to alleviate are more far-reaching than the present discomforts and dangers. It is reasonable to believe that the diseases and deaths caused by economic conditions will vastly exceed those slain and maimed in battle. We, as exponents of preventative medicine, should be alert to the probabilities and demand action to prevent hazards of the remote future as well as of the present time.”

Source 2: This excerpt is from *A Modern History of New Haven and Eastern New Haven County*, published in 1918 and written by Everett G. Hill, the editor of the *New Haven Register*, a daily newspaper. A strong nativist sentiment and particularly virulent feelings against the Italian immigrants in New Haven comes through.

“The census of 1880 for the first time revealed in New Haven a warning of the Italian invasion which has in the years since disturbed a good many citizens too much. . . .

But the real Italian invasion began in the following decade. The year 1890 found 1,876 of them in New Haven who had not been born there. . . .”

Source 3: This excerpt is from an obituary entitled “Dies As He Nears Port in France” on the front page of the *New Haven Register*, a daily newspaper. It appeared on September 9, 1918, at about the same time that the first American civilians were dying of influenza in Boston.

“Harry K. Galliver, son of Mr. and Mrs. John Galliver, of 106 Sherland Avenue, a member of the United States Naval Reserves and the transport service, died aboard the transport Eagle on July 28 after a ten days illness, and just two days before his ship reached a French port. News of the death reached here today, upon the arrival of the body at Newport News navy yard and the remains will be sent here for interment. . . . Galliver was 23 years of age and was a painter for the Thompson shop. He was born and brought up in New Haven and attended Strong School.”

Source 4: The following excerpts are from front-page articles appearing in the *New Haven Register* on September 23 and 24, 1918.

“No Influenza Here’—Wright,” September 23, 1918

“New Haven is still free of the dreaded Spanish influenza according to Dr. Wright, of the Board of Health. Dr. Wight has just returned from Boston where he has been in conference with health officials of that city and he states that the only distinction between Spanish influenza and ordinary influenza is the degree of severity which is seen in Spanish influenza.”

“City Invaded by Influenza, Says Wright,” September 24, 1918

“In the face of much doubt and many denials from various physicians, it has been definitely determined that Spanish influenza has made its appearance in New Haven, and its presence here has been officially recognized by the health authorities, according to a statement issued today by Health Officer Wright. Fifteen cases were reported yesterday. Several more additional cases have come to light today....

His statement is as follows:

‘Influenza has unquestionably invaded New Haven, there being fifteen cases reported yesterday. We of course have no official knowledge of the severity of the attacks, but understand from conversation with physicians that some are seriously ill. We would advise people to avoid exposure, to keep from getting wet, especially the extremities. Avoid crowded and poorly ventilated places. Be careful not to take the breath of any one.’”

Source 5: The following excerpts are from articles appearing in the *New Haven Journal-Courier*, a daily newspaper. Although many cases, probably even the majority, were never reported, the increasing number of reported cases reflects the rapid intensification of the epidemic.

“Influenza Nears Epidemic Stage,” September 30, 1918

“Thirty-five patients from influenza were admitted within the past 24 hours to the New Haven hospital, taxing the capacity of the isolation ward of the institution, and drawing upon every available intern, graduate physician, and surgeon in the hospital to care for them. . . .

The hospital authorities say that in another day their capacity will be taxed to the limit. . . .

The two hospital ambulances were kept in constant action yesterday delivering patients at the institutions. . . .”

“Influenza Reaps Big Human Toll,” October 11, 1918

“Although the disease seems to have abated somewhat in proportion the number of deaths has increased very materially and undertakers all over the city were worked beyond their capacity yesterday and the day before. Many bodies are being sent home from cantonments, victims of the epidemic. One undertaker in the city had six funerals in one day, and another had 10 funerals in two days. Every one is working overtime.”

“Influenza Takes Big Death Toll,” October 14, 1918

“The epidemic of influenza in this city appears to abate in no respect and the deaths pile up in alarming numbers. There are now at the New Haven hospital 174 cases. . . . Physicians and nurses admit that they are utterly helpless in the face of the epidemic, which is now recorded as the most serious which has ever hit this city.

Those confined in the hospital are only a very small percentage of the number of victims and none can tell when the peak of the disease will be reached here. Whole families are paralyzed by sickness. In many the father, mother and children are prostrated, with no professional nurses available to care for them. In many of the Catholic churches yesterday at all the masses appeals were made for volunteer nurses by the priests, and women after the masses took the names of those willing to serve, no matter how short a length of time. While apparently the number of registered cases seem to remain about the same, or increase very little, the death rate mounts steadily. One undertaker said last night if the epidemic keeps on two weeks’ longer it will be impossible to get caskets to bury the dead.”

Source 6: The following excerpt is from two interviews in *The Italian American Experience in New Haven: Images and Oral Histories* by Anthony V. Riccio, published in 2006. Riccio writes that the New Haven Italians, like Italian immigrants across the United States, experienced some of the greatest suffering and losses of any group. Of the New Haven Italians he writes, “In a corner of Saint Lawrence Cemetery, land was set aside for the many victims who died so suddenly that they had to be buried quickly in mass graves.”

From an interview with Joe and Lena Riccio

“My friend’s mother died of influenza and she was buried in a common grave at the cemetery. It took them a long time to find her. There was a big field that was all one common grave. That whole area was filled with influenza people that died. They just dug a ditch and kept putting them in one after another. Where were they going to put them. They were dying so fast. They have little markers now; people went over and traced them.”

From an interview with Amelia Bouncier

“A lot of people were dying and the undertakers couldn’t take care of them. They used to put them down the basement because they couldn’t take care of them there were so many. And my sister Jennie got sick too that time, but she [got] better. But that lasted quite a while so when things got over then they started taking them out and burying them one by one.”

Source 7: The following excerpt is from an article appearing on the ninth page of the *New Haven Journal-Courier* less than two weeks before the Armistice. No further general reports about the epidemic appeared on the front page of the newspaper.

“Decrease in Epidemic,” November 1, 1918.

“Only 15 new influenza patients were admitted to New Haven hospital yesterday, indicating a marked tendency toward decrease of epidemic victims, although 188 are still

confined there. Only 21 deaths were reported yesterday. One hundred and five new cases were reported to the health department.

Children who had been kept out of school are beginning to return, and the schools are approaching their normal attendance. Theaters are beginning to show a little larger attendance, which fell off very considerably during the epidemic.”

Source 8: The following excerpt is from an announcement appearing in the *New Haven Journal-Courier*.

“Seven Made Orphans,” December 19, 1918

“At almost the same time as the body of Daniel G. Desmond, 10 Lyman Street, was being brought into the church yesterday for funeral services, his wife, Mrs. Alice Lyons Desmond, breathed her last in New Haven hospital, victim of the same dreaded influenza and seven small children, one an infant born last Saturday, became orphans. One of the children is now under treatment at the hospital for the same disease while Mrs. Desmond’s mother, Mrs. Mary Ellen Garvey, is critically ill at the Lyman street address with influenza. In all cases, the influenza attack was followed by pneumonia conditions.

Besides the infant daughter, Mrs. Desmond is survived by six sons, Robert, George, Harold, Francis, Edward, and Ralph.”

Source 9: This excerpt from the *City Year Book of the City of New Haven for 1918* is taken from the “Report of the Health Officer”. As Health Officer for New Haven, Frank W. Wright wrote this early in 1919 when the influenza epidemic was nearly over.

“The year 1918 will go into the annals of history on account of the toll of human life that Providence has seen fit to exact by violence and disease throughout the whole civilized world. Our own country and city have been called upon to pay their portion. Many of our young men have given their lives in the world’s war and the effect of this upon the lives, health, and happiness of many of our citizens has been far reaching and will endure for many years to come. Terrible as has been the war, the cost of life and distress brought to us as a community by it has been infinitesimal compared to the havoc caused by the late epidemic of influenza. . . . To dwell upon this subject as one is impressed by the results of the epidemic would be but a repetition of what has already been said by many and is useless, and we will pass it with the assertion that we have recently, by reason of influenza, gone through the most trying and serious calamity this country has ever experienced, either from sickness or war.”