

<p style="text-align: center;">Unit 5 Ahchoo! vs Achtung! The Flu Epidemic & World War I</p>

GRADES 4-6

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

It began with one infected soldier and ended up with more people dead around the world than had died in any war since the recording of history! The pandemic affected everyone.

With one-quarter of the US and one-fifth of the world infected with the influenza, it was impossible to escape from the illness. Even President Woodrow Wilson suffered from the flu in early 1919 while negotiating the crucial treaty of Versailles to end the World War (Tice). Those who were lucky enough to avoid infection had to deal with the public health ordinances to restrain the spread of the disease. (<http://history1900s.about.com/od/influenzaepidemic/>)

Gauze masks, distributed by public health departments, were to be worn in public. Access was limited to cities and on trains to certified visitors/passengers only. There were ordinances that carried steep fines for violations. Stores were not allowed to hold sales and funerals were limited to 15 minutes. There were so many deaths that there was a shortage of coffins, morticians and gravediggers. Conditions in 1918 seemed eerily similar to The Black Death of the Middle Ages.

The onset of the Flu epidemic was probably aided by the war. WWI was one of the first wars to utilize mass troop movements, especially in ships. While the origin of the flu virus was unknown, some of the allies thought the epidemic was biological warfare by the Germans. Many thought it was a result of the trench warfare, the use of mustard gases and the overall smoke and fumes produced by the weapons of war.

For some time, the news of the Flu received more press coverage and attention in the press than did the war. Soldiers were more worried about loved ones' safety at home than their own safety on the front lines.

PROCESS

This lesson is specifically designed for creative writing in a language arts setting. The lesson may, however, be adapted for use in social studies. Dramatization of the end product is also a part of the process, and adds a dimension of reality to the students' understanding of life at home and at the front for parents and their sons or daughters.

OUTCOMES

This lesson enables students to develop creative writing skills, employ interpretive skills through oral presentation, and to develop a better, more personal understanding of life during WWI (or any war) at home and at the front.

Sergeant Leon C. Farmer
22nd Company, 1st Division, Second Army, 8th Aero Squadron

Leon Farmer was a skilled welder and mechanic. His ability to reconstruct broken and crashed bi-wing airplanes was essential to the war effort because of the newly developing field of aviation warfare. The 8th Aero Squadron (Observation), of the U.S. Signal Corps, was one of the first American Squadrons to be organized and sent to Europe. Aviation was not the only risky venture. Soldiers now traveled and lived in extremely close quarters, and they were exposed to countless childhood types of diseases, such as mumps, measles, and whooping cough, etc. But now, there was a new fear – the threat of the Spanish flu, which could strike friend or foe without warning.

Read Farmer's letter on page 66, II.

Language Arts – Creative Writing

- Preview with the students the flu epidemic of 1918. Teacher lecture may be employed or brief lecture complimented by class Internet search on the topic using the above links.
- *Writing a Newspaper Article:* Ask students to take on the character of a report in 1918 and write a newspaper article for the hometown newspaper reporting on the Flu Epidemic of 1918.
- *Writing a Letter to a Soldier:* Ask the students to discuss what they might write about were they Mr. or Mrs. Farmer writing to their son. Would they talk of the weather? How would they describe the flu epidemic? How would they describe the Thanksgiving meal that the Farmer enjoyed while Leon was at war? What else would they include in a letter to Leon.
- Have the students compose a letter to Leon responding as if they were Leon's mother or father.

Language Arts – Dramatizing Creative Writing

Characters: Leon Farmer; Mr. or Mrs. Farmer

Time Period: November, 1918

Scene: Any town, USA and Somewhere in France

Students will work in pairs* to create a scene in which Leon (in France) writes his letter home and Leon's Mom or Dad writes a letter in response. Students will read each letter aloud as they act out either writing the letter or reading the letter as if their character has just received it in the mail. Embellishments may be added to the scene, e.g. scenes to set up writing or reading the letter. Help the students decide what has just happened to prompt Leon and/or his mother or father to write a letter. (Note, If there is an odd number in the class, the scene may be presented as a soliloquy or solo performance of one of two letters.)

Teachers may elect to have students self-select partners or teachers may pre-assign partners. [Girls may have to assume the role of Leon in this exercise.] Teachers may wish to model the dramatic writing and reading of Farmer's letter or a portion of Warren Williams' letter on page 67 (1st paragraph will be sufficient).

Each pair should select one of the parents' letters to use in the scene. They should add as much emphasis and vocal expression as is appropriate to the writing and reading of both letters. Then, the pair should rehearse a scene involving Leon and one of his parents. The character of Leon may write his letter or read his parent's letter.

Scenes may be performed in front of the class.

Selected Bibliography:

Banks, Arthur. *A Military Atlas of the First World War: A map history of the War of 1914-1918 on land, at sea, and in the air*. Heinemann Educational Books, 1998).

Barry, John M. *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague In History*. (Penguin Group, 2004).

Farwell, Byron. *Over There: The United States in the Great War, 1917-1918*. (W.W. Norton, 1999).

Haythornwaite, Philip J. *The World War One Source Book*. (London, Cassell Imprint, 1998).

Hook, Alex. *World War I Day by Day*. (Grange Books, 2004).

MHQ The Quarterly Journal of Military History. "Pershing's Aerial Observers: Pershing's Eyes in the Sky", Winter 2001. For information on the 12th Aero Squadron.

National Archives and Records Administration. *Prologue* (Quarterly of the NARA, Fall 1998, Vol. 30, No. 3). See "Photographing the Great War", page 220-227 and "They Answered the Call", pages 228-234.

Pope, Stephen & Elizabeth-Ann Wheal, ed. *The Macmillan Dictionary of The First World War*. (Macmillan, 1995).

Stokesbury, James L. *A Short History of World War I*. (reprinted Perennial, 2002).

Strachen, Hew. *The First World War*. (Viking, 2003).

Selected Web Sites:

PBS: www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/influenza/
<http://history1900s.about.com/od/influenzaepidemic/>