Why Philadelphia?

Local choices and worldwide forces in the 1918 influenza pandemic

6-12.HT2.1 "Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place and broader historical contexts."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two local conditions, circle two wider forces, and draw an arrow connecting a wider force to a local condition it helped shape.

Influenza in Philadelphia

1. On September 28, 1918, thousands of people filled Philadelphia's streets for a Liberty Loan parade. The event raised money for the United States' effort in World War I. Influenza was already spreading in the city, including among sailors at a nearby naval yard. Some doctors urged officials to cancel the parade, but it went ahead. People stood close together to watch bands and marching groups. In the following weeks, hospitals were overwhelmed, and thousands of residents died. The parade was not the only cause of the outbreak, but this crowded gathering likely gave the virus another chance to spread.

2. Philadelphia's local conditions made the crisis harder to control. Many people lived or worked near others, so staying apart was difficult. The city also had too few medical workers as cases rose. Some nurses and doctors were serving in the war, while others became ill themselves. City officials eventually closed schools, churches, and theaters, but these steps came after infections had already climbed. Families struggled to find care, and volunteers helped in makeshift hospitals. The same virus might have spread in a quieter town, yet Philadelphia's large population, crowded streets, and strained hospitals shaped the scale of its emergency.

3. The disaster also belonged to a much wider story. The 1918 influenza pandemic reached communities across the world, not just Philadelphia. Wartime travel moved large numbers of people, while campaigns to support the war encouraged public gatherings. Governments faced pressure to keep factories and transport running even as illness spread. These forces did not make every city's experience identical. Philadelphia's decision to hold a parade, its crowded neighborhoods, and the timing of its closures helped produce a particularly severe local crisis. To explain what happened, historians must connect these choices and conditions to the pandemic and the war.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the timing of the parade affect Philadelphia's outbreak, and why was the parade not its only cause?

2. Why might Philadelphia's population and living conditions have made its crisis different from one in a quieter town?

3. How did World War I both encourage a public gathering and weaken Philadelphia's medical response?

4. Why did the timing of Philadelphia's closures matter, even though influenza was spreading worldwide?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a U.S. town in 1918 with no parade, a busy train station, and homes spread far apart. In four sentences, predict how its outbreak might differ from Philadelphia's, using both local conditions and a wider wartime force, and state one uncertainty.

ANSWER KEY

Why Philadelphia?

GRADES 6-12 · 6-12.HT2.1

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two local conditions, circle two wider forces, and draw an arrow connecting a wider force to a local condition it helped shape. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the timing of the parade affect Philadelphia's outbreak, and why was the parade not its only cause?	**The parade brought people close together while influenza was already spreading, likely giving the virus another chance to spread. It was not the only cause because infections were present before the parade.**
2	Why might Philadelphia's population and living conditions have made its crisis different from one in a quieter town?	**Philadelphia's large population and crowded homes or workplaces made staying apart difficult and helped shape a larger emergency.**
3	How did World War I both encourage a public gathering and weaken Philadelphia's medical response?	**The war gave the city a reason to hold the Liberty Loan parade, while some nurses and doctors were away serving in the war.**
4	Why did the timing of Philadelphia's closures matter, even though influenza was spreading worldwide?	**The worldwide pandemic put Philadelphia at risk, but officials closed gathering places only after local infections had already climbed.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

With no parade and homes spread far apart, the town might have fewer crowded contacts than Philadelphia. Yet its busy train station could bring travelers carrying influenza because wartime movement continued. Illness could still spread even if the town's outbreak were smaller than Philadelphia's. We cannot know how many people would fall ill without knowing when officials acted and how many travelers arrived.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that connect a local condition to the pandemic or World War I. For the hypothetical town, accept a different prediction if it accounts for both local conditions and wartime movement without claiming certainty.