Two Cities, One Outbreak

Weigh evidence from parallel histories of the 1918 influenza pandemic

AWH.P.2.2 "Develop skills which demonstrate an understanding of historical events and the people who shaped our history. Gather and evaluate the usefulness of various formats of evidence for specific inquiry, analyzing the broader historical context..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Number the dated events for each city in time order, using a separate sequence for each city. Underline two kinds of evidence and circle a phrase that warns against a simple conclusion.

A Parade and Two Responses

1. In September 1918, influenza spread through Philadelphia while the United States fought in World War I. City officials permitted a Liberty Loan parade on September 28, drawing a huge crowd to raise money for the war. Reports of illness were already increasing, yet officials did not cancel the event. On October 3, the city closed schools, theaters, and churches as hospitals struggled with patients. A parade poster would show what organizers wanted people to do, not how many infections followed. Hospital admission records could show a surge in illness, but they could not identify which patients caught influenza at the parade.

2. St. Louis faced influenza later that fall. After its first reported cases in early October, city health commissioner Max Starkloff ordered schools, theaters, and other gathering places closed on October 7. A newspaper notice of the order could establish when restrictions were announced, but not whether every resident obeyed. Death records can help compare the outbreaks: researchers have found that St. Louis had a lower peak death rate than Philadelphia. Yet the cities differed in population, housing, and the timing of influenza's arrival. Those differences make it risky to credit one rule alone for the gap.

3. Imagine an exhibit claiming, "One parade caused Philadelphia's entire disaster." The parade and the steep rise in illness occurred close together, but a calendar cannot show that every infection came from the parade. Wartime fundraising may have influenced officials who kept the event on the schedule; their public statements might defend that choice. To test the exhibit's claim, compare each city's sequence of reported cases, closures, and deaths. Then ask what each source actually measured and whose interests it served. Comparing these parallel histories can reveal patterns without treating the two cities as identical experiments.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Compare the timing of gathering-place closures in the two cities. How did each city's closure relate to an earlier event described in the passage?

2. If you were investigating illness after the Philadelphia parade, what could a parade poster tell you? Why would you also need hospital records?

3. How useful would a newspaper notice of the St. Louis order be for deciding whether the restrictions worked? Name one thing it could establish and one thing it could not.

4. Why does the difference in peak death rates not prove that one city's closure policy alone caused the difference?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a five-sentence replacement museum label for the claim “One parade caused Philadelphia's entire disaster.” Compare the cities' decisions with dates, evaluate two kinds of evidence and their limits, and explain why the comparison cannot prove a single cause.

ANSWER KEY

Two Cities, One Outbreak

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.P.2.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Number the dated events for each city in time order, using a separate sequence for each city. Underline two kinds of evidence and circle a phrase that warns against a simple conclusion. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Compare the timing of gathering-place closures in the two cities. How did each city's closure relate to an earlier event described in the passage?	**Philadelphia closed gathering places on October 3, after its September 28 parade. St. Louis closed them on October 7, shortly after its first reported cases in early October.**
2	If you were investigating illness after the Philadelphia parade, what could a parade poster tell you? Why would you also need hospital records?	**A poster could show what organizers urged people to do, but not whether illness increased. Hospital records could show a surge in admissions, though not where each patient was infected.**
3	How useful would a newspaper notice of the St. Louis order be for deciding whether the restrictions worked? Name one thing it could establish and one thing it could not.	**It could establish when restrictions were announced. It could not show whether residents obeyed, so it could not establish that the restrictions worked.**
4	Why does the difference in peak death rates not prove that one city's closure policy alone caused the difference?	**The cities also differed in population, housing, and when influenza arrived. Those factors could have affected the outbreaks.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Philadelphia held a Liberty Loan parade on September 28 and closed gathering places on October 3. St. Louis closed gathering places on October 7, shortly after its first reported cases. A parade poster could reveal organizers' goals, but it could not show how many people became ill. Hospital records could show rising admissions, but they could not identify where each patient was infected. St. Louis had a lower peak death rate, yet differences in housing, population, and the timing of influenza's arrival prevent this comparison from proving that one parade or one closure policy caused the entire gap.

Accept labels that accurately compare the dated decisions, explain the usefulness and limits of two evidence types, and identify a contextual factor that complicates a single-cause claim.